



For thousands of years, people have been using the sheep vs. wolves analogy to categorize peoples' motivations and perceptions. Classically, you fall into one of the two camps; the oblivious sheep ("victims") or the hungry wolves ("predators"). In this article, I'm going to introduce a third category - the sheepdog.

The Sheep

Sheep are white, fluffy grazing animals that worry about eating the grass in front of them and that's about it. Grazing and eating grass makes them happy. The shepherd gets a few of the sheep to go one way, and the rest follow. If danger comes upon them, they aren't really equipped to handle it. They don't have any claws or teeth to fight back. Their only defense is to run.

Most people fall into this category. [We are hardwired to be very sheep-like.](#) Most Americans live a life where things are good. Our neighborhoods are safe, we can buy any manner of food to eat at the grocery, or we can find our favorite food at a restaurant within a few miles of us. We don't even have to cook if we don't want to.

For the vast majority of us, truly bad events occurring in our lives are a rarity. Sure, we get sick, or people we know have accidents. But real evil doesn't happen to most of us. Our hardest choices in life are what to eat, what to wear, what to watch or the route to work that makes us avoid the most traffic.

Because of how well we have it, we tend not to equip ourselves to handle threats. We see them as such a rarity that it feels like a waste of time and resources to do so. Even when danger is near, we tend to think everything will be just fine if we wait it out. Plus, we have people who get paid to take care of the danger around us, so we don't equip ourselves to handle much of it on our own.

When it comes to being part of a larger group (or flock), we are wired to follow our leaders. When you get a job, you follow the lead of your boss. When you join a community, you follow the lead of its president/board members. And, nowhere else is this more prevalent than in religious communities. Part of following a religion is following the rules of that belief system. Most Christians don't put a lot of time in knowing the rules, doctrines, of theology outside of the Ten Commandments. We trust that the people who have been put in front of us to lead our churches have been taught how to be good Christians, and they are going to teach us in turn. For the overwhelming majority of church leaders, this is true. They honestly seek to do God's will, and teach us.



The Wolves

Wolves are cunning predators. Most of their prey have only one form of defense against aggression, and that is to outrun the wolf. This is what makes sheep an easy target. They don't need to capture the whole heard; they just need to get the slowest one for that day's meal. And they will use cunning tactics to get it.

In our society, wolves come in many shapes and positions. Anytime someone uses a tactical advantage to exploit another person's weakness for their own personal gain - they are being a wolf. The wolves who use physical aggression are obvious. But, often times, they are more subtle. They take advantage of how people think, and their ignorance on certain matters, and use it for their own personal gain. Unfortunately, this plays out over and over again even in the church. Just look at cases like [Jim Jones and Jonestown](#) or [David Koresh and the Branch Davidians](#). These men used charisma, rhetoric, and manipulation of Bible verses to convince their followers that they were sent by God - even calling themselves the Messiah. Both cases led to numerous incidents of violence, intimidation, extortion, child molestation and, ultimately, the deaths of hundreds.

These two are obvious now because we see the end result of their "ministry". But, not all wolves are so obvious, nor seeking to take direct advantage of the sheep. Sometimes, they latch onto certain doctrines or ideas that often times attempt to reconcile certain cultural movements with Christianity. Some examples of this might be the [Prosperity Gospel](#) or [Universalism](#). The leaders of these movements may earnestly be seeking to bring more people to Christianity. But, no matter how hard you want a particular road to be the right road, not all roads can get you to where you need to go.

The Sheepdogs

Now, I want to introduce a third classification of people; the sheepdogs. In the dynamics of the flock, it is the sheepdog's responsibility to protect the flock while it grazes, and to help move it from place to place. When the heard is on the move, they keep sheep from wandering off and make sure they stay with the group. And, should predators come near, they will fiercely defend the flock.

Although sheepdogs are part of the flock, they are not sheep. In fact, they are more like the wolves than the sheep in characteristics. They have teeth. They have claws. But, their motivations are different. Rather than use their traits for aggression, they use them for protection of those who cannot defend themselves. Sheepdogs rarely kill predators; they only do enough to convince the predator it's not worth their time to attack the flock. In fact,



most of the time, when the wolves know there is a sheepdog in the flock, they look for another flock without one.

Because the sheepdog is a lot like a wolf, the sheep sometimes find the sheepdog bothersome; he or she has a tendency to rub the sheep the wrong way. The sheepdog often nips at their heels or gives them a growl to get the sheep to stay on track. But, the sheepdog does his job to protect the flock. It is not a popularity contest for him.

The sheepdog takes charge when an emergency arises. But, he doesn't bully his way to the front. The sheep trust the sheepdog because she has earned their trust through knowledge, character, and capacity to get things done. The sheepdog may start off with a growl if a threat is near, but he isn't afraid to bark in order to protect the flock, even if it scares the sheep a little.

The Christian Sheep

Most people will say they are sheepdogs. They know that "being a sheep" isn't necessarily a compliment. But, the truth is, the majority of us are actually more sheep-like with a tiny dash of sheepdog. A lot of this can be attributed to an element of human nature known as the [Bystander Effect](#). The more people gather in a group, the more they assume someone else will take care of a situation if help is needed.

Another reason not to speak up is our desire to fit in and not make waves. Humans are social animals and we have a tendency to conform. We might look to someone whom we think knows more about an issue than we do. And, if that person doesn't speak up, then why should we? Even if we know what is being said is wrong. So, we let the small thing slide. And then another and then another until a domino effect occurs that changes the whole culture. And then, people start leaving, or being taken down the wrong road. Both of which are bad for the flock.

The Virtue Of Discernment

One of the greatest virtues of Christianity is that it encourages you to learn and think about what it teaches in a number of ways; privately, in small groups of peers (laymen), in teacher-led classes, and, of course, during sermons led by a pastor/minister/whatever. Using multiple ways of learning encourages a built-in system of checks and balances. We need to understand Christian doctrine to make sure we are not led astray by the next best selling book, TV evangelist, or guest speaker who comes to our church. The concept of judging something well is known as discernment. Not all ideas are equally valid and true.



Christianity encourages us to learn what ideas are good and what are not, and be ready to give reasons why we think what we think.

Sheepdogs need to practice discernment to know when to sit quietly and when to bark. This is found all throughout Scripture. I've provided several passages at the bottom of this article to guide you in this topic.

Sheepdogs Know When To Bark and When To Watch

Sometimes being given a license to bark leads to unnecessary noise. Part of discernment is knowing *when* barking is appropriate and when it is not. In my experience, people tend to take issue with a lot of the procedural elements of church service, and almost never question things that are taught. *How* and *when* communion is done, *how* offering is done, the songs that are sung - these are all things that can be discussed. But, these issues are trivial compared to major doctrinal challenges. We don't need to start barking and growling just because our communion service may not use a goblet for the "wine". It's OK to disagree on some stuff. But, as Christian ambassadors, we need to [know how to keep our cool during a disagreement](#).

The vast majority of leaders are earnestly seeking to do God's will, so we need to keep that in mind. This isn't a call to question every single thing your pastor does or says. Moreso, this is a call to simply educate yourself and pay attention.

How You Can Become A Sheepdog

We all start out as more sheep than anything else. And, there is no secret to becoming a sheepdog. The most important way to move from sheep to sheepdog is to train yourself. No matter which area of your life you are trying to develop, that starts with knowledge followed by practical training. When it comes to protecting your family, that may mean studying self defense, and then sparring. If your plan is to camp outdoors in the event of a disaster, you need to first learn what supplies you need, and then practice using them before you really need to. In regards to being a spiritual sheepdog, that starts with Bible study, and understanding what Christianity teaches (its doctrines). Threats to doctrine don't come in physical form - they come in the form of words and ideas. So, to prepare, you have to understand the challenges that can come and know how to deal with them. And, they aren't always easy to spot because many of them are within the church itself. When an atheist says "there is no God", that one is easy to recognize. But, if someone starts proposing [universalism](#) (the theory that everyone will be ultimately saved and restored) or the [Prosperity Gospel](#) (the level your material wealth is a sign of the level of relationship you



have with God), those are a little more nuanced and require more knowledge and thought to refute.

You may feel like you need to be big dog to scare off predators. You may not feel like the biggest and the strongest. The truth is, lots more smaller sheepdogs will do a better job than one big one.

Interested in becoming a sheepdog? Here are some resources to get you started.

[Beginning Apologetics Reading List](#)

[Christian Apologetics Podcast List](#)

Scriptural References

- **Being A Sheepdog** - Jeremiah 3:15, John 10:14-18
- **Keeping Watch** - Acts 20:28-31, Matthew 7:15-23, Matthew 24:4-13, Acts 17:11, Acts 20:25-31, Romans 16:17-19, 1 John 4:1-6, Galatians 1:6-9
- **Characteristics of The Wolves** - Acts 20:30, 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 2 Timothy 4:3-4, Matthew 7:15-23, Matthew 24:5-11, Acts 20:29-30, Romans 16:17-18, 2 Peter 2:1-3, 1 John 4:1-6