

Vicarious Sacrifice: Jesus Uses the “I am” Clause to Describe Himself as the Good Shepherd: Unobjectionable, Blameless, Excellent; Also Called the “Great Shepherd,” Heb 13:20–21 cf. Eph 1:3–4 & “Chief Shepherd,” 1 Pet 5:4; He Will Lay Down His Life for the Sheep: Contract of Suretyship Defined

John 10:11 - “I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”

1. Throughout the rest of the parable, Jesus proclaims He is the Shepherd of the sheep and in doing so He again drives home the point that He is the Messiah.
2. He again starts with the clause “I am,” a term that in Hebrew identifies Him as Yehovah. God loves the entire human race. That love is expressed by the Lord’s willingness to “lay down His life for the sheep.”
3. Jesus’ unconditional love is expressed by the fact he “came that the sheep might have eternal life” and He consummated that objective on the cross.
4. The first word in the verse is the personal pronoun **ἐγώ (egō)**: “I.” This is a proleptical pronoun which anticipates the discovery, later in the verse, of its postcedent, namely the “good Shepherd.”
5. The verb is the present active indicative of **εἰμί (eimi)**. This is an absolute status-quo verb and is referred to as an instantaneous present: “I keep on being, there never was a time when I was not, there never will be a time when I am not.”
6. Previously, Jesus defined Himself as the “Door” two ways:
 - (1) He is the Door through which individuals may enter into the sheepfold at salvation, and
 - (2) He is the Door through which the sheep may follow Him for spiritual growth.
7. What Jesus says He is comes next. He identifies Himself as the “good Shepherd”: the adjective **καλός (kalós)**: “good,” and the noun **ποιμήν (poimén)**: Shepherd.”
8. *Kalós* has the basic meaning and a precise meaning related to this context:

καλός, meeting high standards or expectations of appearance, kind, or quality.”
 (p. 504) **[In context, it] pertains to being in accordance at a high level with the purpose of someone unobjectionable, blameless, excellent.”**¹ (p. 505)
9. The definitions refer to Jesus as the One subscribing to the ultimate standards of integrity thus fulfilling every expectation of the hoped-for Messiah. He is unobjectionable because He represents absolute truth, His is blameless because He is sinless, and He is excellent because He accomplishes His mission.
10. Scripture presents Jesus as Shepherd in three ways:
 - (1) In John 10:10–11, He is the “good Shepherd,” because he lays down His life for the sheep through His saving work on the cross.

¹ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 504–505.

- (2) In Hebrews 13:20–21, He is the “great Shepherd” which refers to His distribution of escrow blessing to mature believers:

Hebrews 13:20 - Now the God of reconciliation, Who brought up from death even Jesus, our Lord, the great Shepherd of the sheep, with the blood of the everlasting covenant [the covenant to the church based on the efficacious work of Christ on the cross: reality replaces ritual],

v. 21 - equip you in all intrinsic good [doctrine in the soul] to execute His will, doing in us what is well-pleasing in His sight [escrow blessings in time] through Jesus Christ [the Depository]; to Whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (EXT)

Ephesians 1:3 - Worthy of praise and glorification is the God even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the One who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing [escrow account; aorist active participle of εὐλογέω (eulogéō) whose action precedes the action of the main verb which is election in verse 4] in heavenly places [Depository] in Christ [Depository],

v. 4 - even as He [God] elects [ἐκλέγω (eklégō) main verb] us for Himself in Him [Jesus Christ] before [eternity past] the beginning of the world for the purpose that we keep on being set apart to God holy [ἅγιος (hágios) saints: positional sanctification] even unblemished-blameless in the presence of Him [God].

- (3) The “chief Shepherd” in 1 Peter 5:4 is the title for Jesus at the Evaluation Tribunal when He presents the crown of glory to pastor-teachers that ignore the allurements of popularity or the trappings of denominational idiosyncrasies.

The pastor-teacher that is prepared theologically, makes the instruction of doctrine priority one, and teaches it faithfully to that portion of God’s flock assigned to him, will receive the crown of glory from the Shepherd-in-Chief, Jesus Christ.

11. The ultimate characteristic possessed by the good Shepherd is His willingness to lay down His life for the sheep.
12. But the sheep for which He will lay down His life must be *His* sheep; those that respond to His demonstrations that He is Messiah, that He is the Door, that He is the “good Shepherd.”
13. Those who hear His voice and follow Him will be the eternal recipients of the salvation produced by His substitutionary spiritual death on the cross.
14. The Lord indicates His mission and His intent with the phrase “lays down His life for the sheep.”
15. The term “lays down” is the present active indicative of the verb **τίθημι (tithēmi)**: “to lay aside, to deposit.” Used figuratively for the substitutionary spiritual death of Jesus.”
16. The word “life” is not **ζωή (zōé)** as one might expect but rather **ψυχή (psuché)**: “soul.” Jesus is telling the Pharisees that the “good Shepherd” is willing to sacrifice His own spiritual life for all mankind.
17. A way to better understand the verb *tithēmi* is to compare it to a legal term called a Contract of Suretyship:

CONTRACT OF SURETYSHIP. Contract whereby one party engages to be answerable for debt of another. A lending of credit to aid a principal having insufficient credit of his own; the one expected to pay, having the primary obligation, being the "principal," and the one bound to pay, if the principal does not, being the "surety." A surety is an original promisor and debtor from the beginning, and is held ordinarily to every known default of his principal.²

² Henry Campbell Black, *Black's Law Dictionary*, rev. 4th ed. (St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1968), 1611.

