

John 10 • The Shepherd and His Sheep

Introduction

We live at a time when it is no longer possible to evaluate someone's faith by the denomination or affiliation they employ. Today's Nazarenes would not be recognized by their founders, as neither would practically any other Evangelical group. The difficult question becomes, "Who are His sheep? Who is actually in His fold?" And especially with so many false teachers and movements having become mainstream within the walls of the Church, it is worth understanding why some seem to recognize there is something wrong and eventually come out of such things while others haven't a clue and never leave, unless it is to go from one bad flock to the next. Who are the true sheep and how do they recognize the True Shepherd?

¹"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. ²But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. ³To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."

[Read v.1-5]

Observation: There are no chapter or verse markings in the original copies of John's Gospel. Chapter 10 is actually a continuation of the exchange initiated in Chapter 9 regarding the healing of the man born blind.

Q: To whom is Jesus speaking? What is it specifically addressing?

A: According to 9:40-41 just preceding this, it is to the Pharisees, whose claim that they are not spiritually blind was directly refuted by Jesus.

Q: In John 9 the man born blind was healed, but how was blindness reflected in the Pharisees?

A: They not only refused to accept the authenticity of the miracle, but persecuted the healed man by excommunicating him from the synagogue. (Jn. 9:34-35) They rejected outright that which the blind man, having received his sight, came to worship (Jn. 9:38), and then maintained that they were the spiritual eyes of Israel.

Q: What did a typical sheepfold of the time look like? How did it function?

A: It was surrounded by a simple stone wall approximately ten feet high with a single opening to serve as the door. The shepherd drove the flock into it at nightfall, leaving a doorkeeper to stand guard, and each morning the shepherd would call his sheep, who would recognize his voice and come out. The doorkeeper slept in the opening and functioned as "the door" so that nothing could enter or leave without passing over him.

Q: How does the true shepherd operate?

- "...he...enters by the door..." (v.2)
- "...calls his own sheep by name..." (v.3)
- "...the sheep hear his voice, and he...leads them out." (v.4)
- "...he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice". (v.4)

Q: How does the thief and a robber—a false shepherd—operate?

- "...he does not enter by the door..." (v.1)
- "...he...climbs up some other way..." (v.1)

Q: What is the reaction of the sheep to a false shepherd?

- "...they simply will not follow..." (v.5)
- "...they...will flee from him..." (v.5)
- "...they do not know the voice of strangers." (v.5)

Q: How does all of this relate to what took place previously in John 9 with the healing of the man born blind?

A: Allegorically, Jesus is explaining that the blind man is a sheep who recognizes Christ as the True Shepherd, and the man's rebuke of the Pharisees is a response to them as false shepherds.

Application: Not everyone is a "sheep" who recognizes and responds to Christ the True Shepherd. This is proven by whether or not they will come out from under a false shepherd.

⁶This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.

⁷So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

[Read v.6-10]

Q: What is the first aspect of the figure of speech which Jesus plainly explains?

A: "I am the door of the sheep". (v.7)

Q: What are the three doors mentioned in this chapter?

1. (v.1) "...the door into the fold of the sheep..." This is speaking specifically of the nation Israel. "We are His people and the sheep of His pasture". (Ps. 100:3b) Christ came to Israel through the way specified in Scripture, with John the Baptist being the doorkeeper who opened the door for Him. (Take a peek at the closing verses of this chapter referencing John.)
2. (v.7) "...the door of all the sheep." This is the door leading people out of their present fold, in this case Judaism and the Old Covenant. This is Christ's leading out from the Old to the New to experience new life in Him.
3. (v.9) "I am the door...he will be saved..." This is the sheep exercising free will to choose to go in or out.

Q: What might be the greater meaning of entering through Christ to experience "pasture"?

A: In Scripture, feeding represents consuming and putting God's Word into practice. This is how His sheep "may have life, and have it abundantly" in this present life, by feeding exclusively on His Word.

Q: But what is the objective of the false shepherds?

A: "...to steal and kill and destroy..." (v.10) They act precisely opposite to the True Shepherd.

Application: Christ is the single and sole point of entry.

¹¹"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. ¹²He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, ¹⁵even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

[Read v.11-15]

Q: What is the second aspect of this figure of speech which Jesus plainly explains?

A: "I am the good shepherd". (v.11)

Q: What is the main contrast presented here?

A: Christ "the good shepherd" vs. "a hired hand".

Q: What are the characteristics of "a hired hand"?

- "He...is...not a shepherd..." (v. 12)
- "He...is not the owner..." (v.12)
- "...sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees..." (v.12)
- "...he...is not concerned about the sheep." (v.13)

Q: What happens to the sheep who are under “a hired hand”?

A: “...the wolf snatches them and scatters them.” (v.12)

Q: What might be important about the specific term “snatches” as used here?

A: This is the Greek word “*harpazo*”, the same word not only used to describe the Rapture (2 Th. 4:17), but also in the Parable of the Sower to describe what Satan does to someone who hears the Word but does not understand it. (Mt. 13:19) It is the contrast of what Christ the True Shepherd does to those who hear and respond to His Word vs. Satan the ultimate false shepherd to those who reject His Word.

Q: What are the characteristics of “the good shepherd”?

- “...lays down his life for the sheep.” (v.11)
- “...I know My own and My own know Me...” (v.14)

²⁰Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead **the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant**, even Jesus our Lord, ²¹equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20–21)

⁴And **when the Chief Shepherd appears**, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:4)

Observation: It is highly recommended that for deeper study on this subject that one examine Psalm 22—Christ the Good Shepherd Gives His Life for the Sheep, Psalm 23—Christ the Chief Shepherd Cares for the Sheep, and Psalm 24—Christ the Chief Shepherd Comes for His Sheep.

Q: In the original context of making a distinction between Himself and the Pharisees—the True Shepherd vs. the False Shepherds, what might be important about the fact that “the Father knows Me and I know the Father”?

A: In John’s Epistle to come, he will stipulate, “*This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.*” (1 Jn. 2:22-23) This is not simply about making a choice, but in particular for the false shepherds, it is actively working in opposition to the True Shepherd.

Application: Christ is the only true source of protection.

[Read v.16-21]

Q: Who are the “other sheep, which are not of this fold” to whom Jesus is referring?

A: The Gentiles so that everyone will become one flock.

Q: How is this going to be accomplished? Why was this a powerful message to the Jews at that time?

A: “...they will hear My voice” (v.16)—that is, they will respond to His Word.

¹¹Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “*Uncircumcision*” by the so-called “*Circumcision*,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands— ¹²remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and

¹⁶“I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. ¹⁸No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

¹⁹A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. ²⁰Many of

them were saying, “He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?”

²¹Others were saying, “These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?”

without God in the world. ¹³**But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.** (Ephesians 2:11–13)

¹⁷AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; ¹⁸for **through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.** (Ephesians 2:17–18)

⁴By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; ⁶to be specific, that **the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,** (Ephesians 3:4–6)

⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all who is **over all and through all and in all.** (Ephesians 4:4–6)

²⁶For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸**There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:26–29)

Q: What is significant about v.18? What dual aspects of Christ’s First Coming are co-equally mentioned?

A: Both Christ’s death and resurrection.

Q: In the course of the argument of whether Jesus was demon-possessed, what is the point of contention? Are they arguing about whether or not Jesus performed the miracle?

A: They both agree when it comes to healing the man born blind, but they disagree on whether it gives weight to Christ’s accompanying message: “A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words”. (v.19) One group says, “Why do you listen to Him?” (v.20) while the other says, “These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed.” (v.21) They are not divided over the miracle but the message.

Q: How is this contrary to the objection which is usually raised concerning Christ?

A: Most often they ask for a sign that He is the Messiah—what can be literally translated “an attesting miracle”, and in doing so completely ignore the message. Here they have “an attesting miracle” and yet they still dispute the message. (Mt. 12:38; 16:1; Mk. 8:11-12; Lk. 11:16; Jn. 2:18; 6:30)

Q: What is the greater point of the message which they do not seem to grasp?

A: Under the Old Testament system it was the sheep who died for the shepherd, but the Good Shepherd has instead come to die for the sheep! This is what John the Baptist established from the outset which continued to be largely ignored:

³⁵Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” (John 1:35–36)

Application: Christ is the True Shepherd who dies for the sheep. Through His Word He calls them, and those who believe step through the Door, leaving their old fold to become part of the true, united flock of Christ, the Church.

²²At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; ²³it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

²⁵Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me. ²⁶But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. ²⁷My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one.”

[Read v.22-30]

Q: How has the discussion changed its focus in this passage from the previous one?

A: Previously Jesus was directly addressing the Pharisees as false shepherds; here He is directly addressing the people as false sheep.

Application: If someone does not respond to His Word and does not leave their chosen fold, they are not His sheep.

Q: What are the characteristics which qualify someone as being one of His sheep?

- “My sheep hear My voice...” (v.27) The true sheep are immersed in the Word, whereas the false sheep have little interest in God’s Word or have replaced it with something else.
- “...I know them...” (v.27), or as stated in v.14, “I know My own and My own know Me”. In other words, the true sheep do not follow false shepherds, as opposed to the false sheep who run from one bad thing to the next bad thing.
- “...they follow Me.” (v.27) Notice that “hearing” is proved by “following”—in other words, the true sheep follow up listening with actual obedience to His Word.
- “...I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish...” (v.28) They live for what is coming in eternity to come, not for the temporal passing of the present.
- “...no one will snatch them out of My hand...and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” (v.29) This is a double assurance for the true sheep.

Q: If no one can snatch us from either the Father’s or the Son’s hand, why does Scripture sometimes speak of those who permanently fall away from the faith? How are they “snatched” away?

A: While it is absolutely true that no one can snatch us from the Father’s hand, this does not prevent us from personally getting up and walking away by our own choice, something akin to what the Prodigal Son did. If we choose not to return, the result is just as much our choice to leave as it was to follow in the first place. But when we choose to remain in the Father’s hand, no one—not even Satan—can remove us against our will.

Observation: There is the story of Balak and Balaam (Num. 22) where Balak attempted to hire Balaam to curse Israel, but God would not allow it protected Israel. But later Balaam suggested a strategy to seduce Israel into false worship in order to turn God against them, which worked on those who chose to turn from God and pursue a false god. This is recounted by Peter (2 Pe. 2:15), Jude (Jude 1:11) and Christ to the church at Pergamum (Rev. 2:14) as a reminder of how spiritual seduction works.

Q: What is particularly powerful about Jesus’ concluding statement in v.30, “I and the Father are one”?

A: It is the direct answer to the people’s opening question in v.24, “If You are the Christ, tell us plainly”.

Q: Jesus healed many who were blind, so why did this particular healing produce such a different reaction from the rest?

A: Even according to the teachings of the religious authorities of the day, and as they were plainly handed down to the people, it was asserted that the healing of someone born blind could only be accomplished by the Messiah. The blind man testified to this when stating, “*Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind*”. (Jn. 9:32)

Application: *Even in the presence of an unprecedented miracle never before witnessed, it will not change the person who refuses to listen to the Word and put it into practice.*

³¹The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. ³²Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?”

³³The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.”

³⁴Jesus answered them, “Has it not been written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? ³⁵If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), ³⁶do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? ³⁷If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; ³⁸but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.”

³⁹Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp.

[Read v.31-39]

Q: What, exactly, is “blasphemy”?

A: It is the very worst kind of slander against God by which the offender intends to destroy the very reputation of God by their evil speech or report. It is not just showing a lack of reverence for God, but contempt. It was punishable by death in the Old Testament and a violation of the 3rd Commandment.

¹⁵“You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘If anyone curses his God, then he will bear his sin. ¹⁶Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death. (Leviticus 24:15–16)

⁷“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. (Exodus 20:7)

Q: What is actually ironic about the repeated accusation of Jesus being a blasphemer?

A: It was actually the lawlessness of the Jews themselves which was causing God’s name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles. As usual, the accusers are the ones who are actually guilty of the accusation they make.

²³You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? ²⁴For “THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU,” just as it is written. (Romans 2:23–24)

Q: Is this the first time Jesus’ life was threatened by this accusation?

A: It also happened when he healed the man at Bethesda on the Sabbath (Jn. 5:18) and when confronting the people about the true children of Abraham (Jn. 8:59).

Q: What is the contrast or distinction which Jesus is making in v.24-38?

A: It is the contrast between those “*to whom the word of God came*” (v.35)—that is, the sons of God through whom God spoke, and Jesus the Messiah “*whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world*” (v.36)—that is, **THE** Son of God through whom God is now both speaking and working.

Q: What is the goal of BOTH the message and the sign through Christ?

A: “*...so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father*”. (v.38)

Application: *Those actively opposed to the message will always attempt to kill the messenger.*

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Observation: Who was one of the few biblical examples who seemed to understand and accept the greater message behind the signs? The Roman centurion who witnessed the events accompanying the Crucifixion:

⁵⁴Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54)

⁴⁰And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing, and He was staying there. ⁴¹Many came to Him and were saying, "While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man was true." ⁴²Many believed in Him there.

[Read v.40-42]

Q: How might the location "beyond the Jordan" reveal a deeper spiritual meaning as to what is taking place?

A: In both the ministries of John the Baptist and Christ, it represents leaving the Old Testament fold of Israel and going out to join a new, repentant flock, much in the character of this overall teaching. They were going out to the place where Israel originally assembled to begin their new life, a metaphor for now beginning their new life in Christ. Both take place in the same geographical location.

Q: What is particularly significant about the fact that "John performed no sign"?

A: At Christ's First Coming, no one could accept Jesus without first accepting John, and with no signs being performed, this means they had to accept the message by faith.

²⁸"I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

²⁹When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. ³⁰But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John. (Luke 7:28-30)

Application: Those who accept the greater accompanying message will in turn accept the Messenger.

Overall Application

⁴¹So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴²I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." ⁴³When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." ⁴⁴The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." (John 11:41-44)

Like the sheepfold which only has one door and to which the sheep respond to the voice of the True Shepherd, there was but one stone which needed to be removed from Lazarus' tomb so he could respond to Jesus' voice. What is always needed is the right response to the Word of Christ. But when a sign is sought in lieu of the message, Jesus equates this with spiritual adultery, meaning that just as an unfaithful spouse is seeking another partner, so the sign seeker is pursuing something in place of Christ:

“An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.” And He left them and went away. (Matthew 16:4)

- *How well do we recognize that the reason so many never leave the fold of a false teacher is because they have never actually become one of Christ’s sheep in the first place and therefore do not know His voice?*
- *How well do we understand that those who refuse to listen to God’s Word, no matter how sincere or deep their emotions in other areas, cannot leave the old fold?*
- *Can we understand the greater importance of the message over the sign?*
- *Can we appreciate the greater importance of the Word in every ministry, both personally and within the Church at large, to address the deeper issues?*