

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD

### DISCUSSION:

**1. What happened immediately before this passage, in Chapter 9?**

The Jewish leaders expelled the miraculously healed blind man out of the synagogue.

**2. If someone were to refer to you as “sheepish” or “sheep like” would you view that as a compliment or an insult?**

This is not a compliment. Sheep are dumb, smelly and stupid. They need supervision. Sheep were domesticated ~10,000 BC, the first domesticated animal in the archaeological record. They are so far from their mountain sheep cousins that they are very unlikely to make it in the wild on their own. Hence, there are no bands of roaming feral sheep...

**3. This is a symbolic passage and sometimes people can push the meaning of the symbols too far. (Note: If you ever find yourself with a symbolic interpretation that contradicts the rest of scripture...backup and start over). However, some of the symbols here do seem straightforward:**

You may disagree with some of these, amend as needed.

**a. Who are “the sheep” / “the flock”?**

Christians / the church.

**b. Who are the “hired hands” that don’t care for the sheep?**

Selfish and cowardly leaders who run at the first sign of trouble.

**c. Who are the “other sheep?”**

The gentiles who Christ will bring into the church.

**d. Who are the “thieves and robbers?”**

Unfaithful religious leaders who are willing to harm the flock for selfish gain.

**4. What can we learn about Jesus from his description of himself in these verses?**

He is perfectly good and to be trusted; he has our best interests at heart; He protects us, He is self-sacrificial, He has a long term plan for his sheep.

**5. Why is it important for the sheep to know the voice of the shepherd? What can happen when the sheep do not recognize the shepherd? What applications are there for us today?**

So they respond to the right one. Often various flocks were kept in a common pen overnight (with a shepherd sleeping at the opening). IF they didn’t know the shepherd they could follow the wrong one. People, like sheep, sometimes get confused / lose their minds, and follow the wrong shepherd.

**6. What can you do to better recognize the voice of the shepherd?**

Have a deep and intimate relationship with Christ.

The best lie has some truth—do you fall for bad theology that “sounds bible-y?” Pop psychology offering your “best life now?” Christian-ish authors who spout a mix of truth and junk. Etc.

**7. How have you seen the thief “kill, steal and destroy” the life of people that you know?**

Yes, and it’s heartbreaking to watch people flail around in their spiritual blindness looking for something life giving, they often lose their \$\$, their health and their peace.

**8. What is the abundant life that Jesus wants to give (John 10:10)?**

The exact opposite of what the thief will ultimately provide. He is the Bread of Life and Living Water that will provide *true* eternal life, resurrection, restoration and every good thing.

**9. Who are the false shepherds that we need to be on the look out for today?**

We can have false leaders that serve because they seek money, power, an ego boost. You could turn this question into a rant...but I just want my class to stop and think about it for a minute.

**10. Is it an important point that all of Christ’s sheep are part of one flock?**

Yes. It’s a unified flock, with Gentile and Christian believers. We need to mimic the Great Shepherd and be concerned about the worldwide flock.

**11. T/F. A sign of being part of Christ’s flock is that I listen to his voice and follow where He leads.**

TRUE! If that is consistently *not* the case, are you really one of His sheep??

**12. Is there such a thing as a counterfeit sheep?**

Yes (“*Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’*” (Matthew 7:21–23, ESV))

As the attached commentary points out, there are also wayward sheep who lose their way temporarily.

"Some of the most dogmatic people today are the atheists and the cultists. They say they see, but they are blind. They reject the Lord Jesus Christ, and so their sin remains. Although they are not walking around with a white walking stick, they are blind."<sup>1</sup>

This chapter advances the revelation of Jesus' true identity, which was one of John's primary objectives in this Gospel. It also shows that as the light of this revelation became clearer, so did the darkness—because some people prefer the darkness to the light (3:19).

"This miracle is a sign that Jesus can open the eyes of the spiritually blind so that they can receive the complete sight which constitutes perfect faith. Faith means passing from darkness to light; and to bring men this faith, to give them the opportunity of responding when the divine Spirit draws them to Himself, is the primary purpose for which Jesus has been sent into the world."<sup>2</sup>

### 7. The Good Shepherd discourse 10:1-21

Evidently this teaching followed what John recorded in chapter 9 (v. 21), but exactly when between the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2, 14, 37) and the Feast of Dedication (v. 22) it happened, is unclear. The place where Jesus gave it appears to have been Jerusalem (v. 21). Probably this teaching followed the preceding one immediately. The thematic as well as the linguistic connections are strong. The blind beggar had just been put out of the fold of his synagogue (9:34), so Jesus spoke of His fold, which the beggar had now entered (cf. 9:35-38).

"The Pharisees supported themselves in their opposition to Christ with this principle, that they were the *pastors of the church*, and that Jesus was an intruder and an imposter, and therefore the people were bound in duty to stick to *them*, against *him*. In opposition to this, Christ here describes who

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 4:428.

<sup>2</sup>Tasker, pp. 122-23. See also Howard, pp. 73-75.

were the false shepherds, and who the true, leaving them to infer what they were."<sup>1</sup>

"A signal instance of the failure of hireling shepherds has been given; instead of properly caring for the blind man, the Pharisees have cast him out (9.34). Jesus, on the other hand, as the good shepherd, found him (9.35, *heuron auton*) and so brought him into the true fold."<sup>2</sup>

"In a sense, the chapter break here is unfortunate. This event really is a commentary on the conflict of John 9 (10:19-21)."<sup>3</sup>

### Jesus' presentation of the figure 10:1-6

This teaching is quite similar to what the Synoptic evangelists recorded Jesus giving in His parables,<sup>4</sup> but there is a significant difference. John called this teaching a figure of speech (Gr. *paroimian*) rather than a parable (Gr. *parabole*). Parables generally stress only one or a few points of comparison, but the sustained metaphors that follow develop many similarities. John did not include any Synoptic-style parables in his narrative.

Jesus evidently chose the figure of a "good shepherd" to contrast Himself with the bad shepherds who were misleading God's sheep. Many Old Testament passages castigated Israel's shepherds who failed in their duty (cf. Isa. 56:9-12; Jer. 23:1-4; 25:32-38; Ezek. 34; Zech. 11). God was Israel's Shepherd (cf. Ps. 23:1; 80:1; Isa. 40:10-11). The shepherd metaphor also was a good one to picture Jesus' voluntary self-sacrifice for His people.

"The shepherd was an autocrat over his flock, and passages are not lacking where the shepherd imagery is used to emphasize the thought of sovereignty. Jesus is thus set forth in this allegory as the true Ruler of his people in contrast to all false shepherds."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 1563.

<sup>2</sup>Barrett, p. 367.

<sup>3</sup>Bock, p. 473.

<sup>4</sup>J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 68, and Mitchell, p. 190, called this teaching a parable.

<sup>5</sup>Morris, pp. 443-44. Cf. Rev. 2:27.

10:1 Jesus again stressed the importance of this teaching with a strong introductory preface to it. He then proceeded to point out several things about first-century shepherding that illustrated His ministry. John's original readers would have understood these similarities easily since shepherding was widespread.

Jesus described a flock of "sheep" in a "fold" or pen that had solid walls and only one "door" (gate). Evidently the "fold" in view was a large enclosure some distance from any human dwelling place. Customarily, several families who owned sheep would feed their sheep in nearby pastures, and hire a watchman to guard the gate to such an exposed enclosure. The watchman would admit authorized individuals, but would exclude the unauthorized ones who might want to steal or kill some of the sheep.<sup>1</sup> The words "thief" (Gr. *kleptes*, stressing trickery; cf. Luke 11:52) and "robber" (Gr. *lestes*, stressing violence; cf. Matt. 21:13) are quite close in meaning.

God in the Old Testament frequently compared His relationship with Israel to that of a Shepherd and His sheep (e.g., Ps. 80:1; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:10-16; cf. Ps. 23:1). He also called Israel's unfaithful leaders "wicked shepherds" of His people (e.g., Isa. 56:9-12; Jer. 23:1-4; 25:32-38; Ezek. 34:4; Zech. 11). Additionally, God predicted that one day a descendant of David would shepherd the nation properly (Ezek. 34:23-25; 37:24-28). Thus these figures all had special meaning for the Jews to whom Jesus first addressed this teaching. The "sheepfold" stands for Judaism.

In verse 1, the thieves and robbers clearly refer to the religious leaders who were unfaithful to God, and were seeking to harm His sheep for personal gain (cf. 9:41). Their rejection of Jesus, as the Shepherd whom God had sent, branded them for what they were. Satan, the ultimate enemy, was working through them.

10:2 In contrast to these plunderers, an approved "shepherd" would enter the pen through its gate rather than over its wall. The

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<sup>1</sup>See Pink, 2:102-3.

"door" represented the lawful way of entrance into Judaism for the shepherd. (The Latin word for "shepherd" translates as "pastor.")

"Several flocks were often gathered into one fold for protection during the night. In the morning each shepherd passed into the fold to bring out his own flock; and he entered by the same door as they."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus was saying figuratively that He came to Israel as God's authorized representative, the Messiah. The religious leaders, on the other hand, did not have divine sanction for their dealings with Israel—that were essentially destructive as well as selfish.

10:3

The "doorkeeper" was the person hired to protect the sheep from their enemies. In the case of Jesus' ministry, this person corresponded to John the Baptist. Another view is that the doorkeeper refers to the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> However, all of the guardians of the flock throughout history may be in view: Moses, John the Baptist, God the Father, the Holy Spirit, et al.<sup>3</sup> Normally there were sheep from several different flocks, belonging to several different owners, that stayed together in these large pens.

The "pen" in the metaphor symbolized Israel or Judaism. Upon entering the pen, a shepherd would call his own sheep to come out from the others, and he would lead them out to pasture. Normally shepherds did this with a distinctive call or whistle. This shepherd, however, called each sheep by its own name, which evidently was not uncommon in Jesus' day (cf. 1:43; 11:43; Luke 19:5).<sup>4</sup> The scene thus pictures Jesus calling every individual, whom the Father had given Him, to follow Him out from the non-elect Jews (cf. Num. 27:15-18; John 14:9;

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<sup>1</sup>Westcott, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup>Gaebelein, 3:1:215.

<sup>3</sup>Westcott, p. 152.

<sup>4</sup>Blum, p. 309; Tenney, "John," p. 108.

20:16, 29; 21:16). Jesus' sheep listen to His voice and follow Him (cf. 5:24).

"The Pharisees *threw* the beggar out of the synagogue, but Jesus *led* him out of Judaism and into the flock of God!"<sup>1</sup>

10:4-5 Many shepherds drove their sheep before them, and some of them used sheep dogs to help them herd the sheep. However this shepherd, as many others did, went "ahead of" his sheep, and led them where he wanted to take them. This description reflects the style of Jesus' leadership. He led His disciples, who followed Him wherever He went in obedience to His lead and command (cf. Gal. 5:18).

His "sheep follow Him because they know His voice." They recognize Him for who He is, namely, their Shepherd. Conversely, they will not follow false shepherds, because their voice or teaching is strange to them. Jesus was describing what is typical behavior in such relationships, not that every individual sheep always behaves this way in every instance, as experience testifies.

"Alas and alas, if only our modern pastors had the sheep (old and young) so trained that they would run away from and not run after the strange voices that call them to false philosophy, false psychology, false ethics, false religion, false life."<sup>2</sup>

Some people appeal to these verses to prove that true Christians will inevitably follow Christ and will never apostatize. This seems wrong for at least three reasons. First, Jesus said that His sheep follow Him, not a stranger, because they know the Good Shepherd's voice (what He says, His teaching). Sheep normally do follow their shepherd because they know his voice, but there are exceptions among sheep and among Christians.

Second, if following false teachers were impossible for Christians, why are there so many warnings against doing

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 1:329.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson, *Word Pictures ...*, 5:175.

precisely that in the New Testament? Third, John identified this saying of Jesus as a figure of speech (or compressed thought, v. 6). Illustrations typically make a main point, so we should not expect this illustration to correspond to reality in every detail, much less to teach doctrine in all its parts.

The point of these verses is how God forms His flock. People come to Jesus because He calls them, and they follow Him because they belong to Him. Many of the Jews who heard Jesus' voice disregarded Him, because they considered Abraham or Moses or some famous rabbi to be their shepherd.

10:6 Many of the Jews who heard these words "did not understand" what Jesus was talking about. They did not respond to the Shepherd's voice. They could hardly have failed to understand the relationship between shepherds and sheep, which was so common in their culture. Nevertheless they did not grasp Jesus' analogy of Himself as Israel's true Shepherd.

The Greek word *paroimia* ("figure of speech") occurs elsewhere in John's Gospel (16:25, 29) but never in the Synoptics.

"It suggests the notion of a mysterious saying full of compressed thought, rather than that of a simple comparison."<sup>1</sup>

A similar word, *parabole* ("parable"), appears often in the Synoptics but never in the fourth Gospel. Both words, however, have quite a wide range of meanings encompassing many kinds of figurative language.

### Jesus' expansion of the figure 10:7-18

The difference between this teaching and Jesus' parables in the Synoptics now becomes clearer. Jesus proceeded to compare Himself to the pen gate, as well as to the shepherd. He also described Himself leading His sheep into the fold as well as out of it. Jesus was using the illustration to teach more than one lesson.

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<sup>1</sup>Westcott, p. 152.



10:7-8 Jesus introduced another of His "I am" claims. He professed to be "the door" or gate of the sheepfold (cf. 1:51; 14:6). In relation to the fold, Christ is "the Door," to which He gives admission; in relation to the flock, he is "the Good Shepherd," to which He gives care and guidance.<sup>1</sup> Some commentators have pointed out that some ancient Near Eastern shepherds slept in the gateways of their sheepfolds and so served as human gates.<sup>2</sup> This may seem to alleviate the incongruity of Jesus being both the Shepherd and the gate. However, the other differences in the two pictures of the fold, presented in verses 1-5 and 7-18, argue for separate though similar illustrations, rather than one harmonious illustration. This pericope does not simply explain the previous illustration, but it develops certain metaphors in that illustration.

"The 'door of the sheep' is to be distinguished from the 'door of the sheepfold' in v. 1. The latter was the Divinely-appointed way by which Christ had entered Judaism, in contrast from the false pastors of Israel whose conduct evidenced plainly that they had thrust themselves into office. The 'door of the sheep' was Christ Himself, by which the elect of Israel passed out of Judaism."<sup>3</sup>

Jesus contrasted Himself, as the gate, with the "thieves and robbers" who preceded Him. He provided protection and security for His sheep, whereas the others sought to exploit them. The thieves and robbers in this context refer to the religious leaders of Jesus' day (cf. v. 1). They are obviously not a reference to Israel's faithful former leaders, such as Abraham, Moses, and other true prophets.

10:9 Jesus described Himself as a passageway (cf. 14:6). His sheep could enter and leave the sheepfold through Him. Obviously the *sheepfold* here does not refer to Israel as it did previously (vv. 1-5). People could not "go in and out" of Judaism, at will, through Jesus. It probably represents the security that God

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., Beasley-Murray, p. 169; Barclay, 2:67.

<sup>3</sup>Pink, 2:109-10.

provides, and the pasture outside stands for what sustains their spiritual health and growth. Jesus provides for His people's security needs and for all of their daily needs 24 hours a day.

"The fullness of the Christian life is exhibited in its three elements—safety, liberty, support."<sup>1</sup>

"The 'door' in v. 1 was God's appointed way for the shepherd *into* Judaism. The 'door' in v. 7 was the Way *out of* Judaism, by Christ leading God's elect in separation unto Himself. Here in v. 9 the 'door' has to do with salvation, for elect Jew and Gentile alike."<sup>2</sup>

10:10 Impostors' aims are ultimately selfish and destructive, but Jesus came to give "life," not take it.

"The world still seeks its humanistic, political saviours—its Hitlers, its Stalins, its Maos, its Pol Pots—and only too late does it learn that they blatantly confiscate personal property (they come 'only to steal'), ruthlessly trample human life under foot (they come 'only ... to kill'), and contemptuously savage all that is valuable (they come 'only ... to destroy')."<sup>3</sup>

Jesus, on the other hand, not only came to bring spiritual life to people, but He came to bring the best quality of life to them. The eternal life that Jesus imparts is not just long, but it is also rich. He did not just come to gain sheep, but to enable His sheep to flourish and to enjoy contentment, and every other legitimately good thing possible, an "abundance of all that sustains life."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Westcott, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup>Pink, 2:112.

<sup>3</sup>Carson, *The Gospel ...*, p. 385.

<sup>4</sup>Dods, 1:790.

10:11 Verses 7-10 expand the idea of the gate from verses 1-5, and verses 11-18 develop the idea of the Shepherd from those verses.

"Two points are specially brought out in the character of 'the good shepherd,' His perfect self-sacrifice (11-13), and His perfect knowledge (14, 15), which extends beyond the range of man's vision (16)."<sup>1</sup>

Here is another "I am" claim. Jesus is the Good Shepherd in contrast to the bad shepherds just described (vv. 8, 10a). Rather than killing the sheep so He might live, as the bad shepherds did, Jesus was willing to sacrifice His life (Gr. *psyche*, the total self) so the sheep might live. It is this extreme commitment to the welfare of the sheep that qualified Jesus as the Good Shepherd. The other titles, "Great Shepherd" (Heb. 13:20-21) and "Chief Shepherd" (1 Pet. 5:4), stress different aspects of Jesus' character as a shepherd. Good shepherding involves protecting, providing, and sacrificing.

"Good" (Gr. *kalos*) connotes nobility, attractiveness, and worth, not merely gentleness. It contrasts Jesus with the unworthy and ignoble shepherds that He proceeded to describe (vv. 12-13). Another interpretation follows:

"Jesus does not here compare himself with other shepherds; he asserts far more than that he is relatively better than other shepherds, namely that he is a shepherd in a sense in which no other man can ever be a shepherd. ... Unfortunately, the English is unable to reproduce this weight of meaning in translation."<sup>2</sup>

Laying down His life is a uniquely Johannine expression that describes a voluntary sacrificial death (cf. vv. 17, 18; 13:37-38; 15:13; 1 John 3:16). Likewise the preposition *hyper* ("for") usually connotes sacrifice (cf. 13:37; 15:13; Luke

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<sup>1</sup>Westcott, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, p. 723.

22:19; Rom. 5:6-8; 1 Cor. 15:3). Most shepherds do not intend to die for their sheep but to live for them; they only die for their sheep accidentally. Yet Jesus came to die for His sheep *purposely*. Of course, Jesus also came to die for the whole world (6:51; 11:50-52).

"All through the Old Testament it is the sheep that die for the shepherd. But when we come to this picture, it is the other way around."<sup>1</sup>

10:12-13 Thieves and robbers are wicked, but "hired" hands are typically just selfish. They take care of sheep for what they can get out of it, not for the sake of the sheep themselves. While a good shepherd may be willing to sacrifice himself for the safety and welfare of his sheep, a hireling will save himself, and "flees" when danger arises (cf. Jer. 10:21-22; 12:10; Zech. 11:4-17). This is understandable since the shepherd, who owns his sheep, has a vested interest in them, whereas a "hired hand" does not. Israel's leaders acted like hirelings when they tried to preserve their own positions and willingly sacrificed Jesus. Christian leaders behave like hired hands when they put their own needs ahead of those they serve (cf. 1 Pet. 5:2-3). Attitude is the crucial difference between a true shepherd and a hireling.

"shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:2-3, ESV)

10:14-15 The mutual knowledge between the shepherd and the sheep (knowing each other) is very important. Therefore Jesus stressed His identity as the "Good Shepherd" again. The sheep must "know" their Shepherd, and they can know Him like the Son knows the Father. The Son must know the Father to follow His will, just like the sheep must know the Shepherd to follow Him faithfully. Jesus taught that the relationship the sheep enjoy with Himself is unique, as His relationship with His Father is unique. Yet each person maintains his own identity. Man does not become God, as the New Age movement, for example, teaches.

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<sup>1</sup>Mitchell, p. 194.

"Christ first took our nature that we might afterwards receive His."<sup>1</sup>

The repetition of the Shepherd's sacrificial death ("I lay down My life") in this verse also stresses that knowing the Shepherd involves appreciating the extent of His love.

"'Know' (*ginosko*) in this Gospel connotes more than the cognizance of mere facts; it implies a relationship of trust and intimacy."<sup>2</sup>

John also used the word this way in 1 John (4:7, 8, 16; 5:20) where he expounded the importance of, not just believing in, but abiding in Jesus Christ.

10:16 The "other sheep" in view refer to Gentiles outside the "fold" of Israel who would believe in Jesus (cf. vv. 3-4). This is one of a few intimations in the Gospels that a new body of people would replace Israel as the people of God in the present age (cf. 17:20; Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6). These sheep, with those from Israel, would compose "one fold (flock)," namely: the church (cf. 1 Cor. 10:32). This rules out the possibility of a Jewish church and a Gentile church. That new fold (flock) would have "one Shepherd," namely Jesus, who would become, to change the figure, the Head of the church. Jesus knew these other sheep (vv. 14-15) as well as He knew those who would believe on Him in Israel: "this fold" (cf. Ps. 100:3).

10:17 Having declared the intimate knowledge that the Father and the Son share, Jesus now explained why the Father loved Him as He did. Jesus did not mean that the Father's love resulted from the Son's performance. It would still have existed if Jesus had failed to obey Him completely. The Father loved the Son unconditionally from the beginning. However, the Son's full obedience to the Father's will resulted in the Father having a *special love* for the Son that obedience under testing elicited. Similarly, God loves all believers unconditionally, but when they

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<sup>1</sup>Westcott, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup>Tenney, "John," p. 109. See also Wiersbe, 1:330.

"You are my friends  
if you do what I  
command  
you." (John 15:14,  
ESV)

obey Him, they enjoy an intimacy with Him that only obedience brings out (cf. 15:14).

Jesus died sacrificially with His resurrection and glorification in view. He did not die thinking that He would remain dead. His death was one event in a larger chain of events, with the big picture always in view as Jesus anticipated the Cross.

10:18 Superficially, observers could have concluded that Jesus died because the Jews conspired against Him.<sup>1</sup> However, Jesus revealed that behind that instrumental cause was the efficient (effectual) cause of God's purpose (cf. Acts 4:27-28). God had given Jesus the "authority" to offer Himself as a sacrifice for humankind's sins, and the authority to rise from the dead. Nevertheless, the Son remained submissive to the Father in the triune hierarchy. Jesus willingly offered Himself; no human took His life from Him. However, He offered Himself in obedience to the Father's will.

"It was not the nails, but the strength of His love to the Father and to His elect, which held Him to the Cross."<sup>2</sup>

Anyone can lay his or her life down in death sacrificially, but only Jesus could "lay it down" and then "take it up (back) again" in resurrection. The New Testament writers attributed Jesus' resurrection to all three members of the Trinity: the Father (Rom. 6:4), the Son (John 2:19), and the Spirit (Rom. 8:11).

### The division among Jesus' hearers 10:19-21

Again Jesus' claims resulted in some of His hearers believing in Him and others disbelieving (cf. 7:12, 43; 9:16). Here the expression "the Jews" refers to the Jewish people generally, not specifically to the religious leaders, as it usually does in this Gospel. Evidently it was the apparent contradiction between Jesus' claim to be the coming Shepherd of Israel, and His claim that He would die for the sheep, that caused the cleavage.

<sup>1</sup>See Glenn R. Kreider, "'The Death of Christ was a Murder': Jonathan Edwards and Blame for Christ's Death," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174:696 (October-December 2017):424-44.

<sup>2</sup>Pink, 2:131.

*The encounter (vv. 22–24).* The “Feast of the Dedication” (Hanukkah, “the feast of lights”) takes place in December, near the time of the Christian Christmas celebration. The feast commemorates the rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus in 164 B.C., after it had been desecrated by the Romans. This historical fact may bear a relationship to the words of Jesus in [John 10:36](#), for He had been set apart (dedicated) by the Father and sent into the world. The Jewish leaders were celebrating a great event in history yet passing by a great opportunity right in their own temple!

The leaders surrounded Jesus in the temple so that He had to stop and listen to them. They had decided that it was time for a “showdown” and they did not want Him to evade the issue any longer. “How long are You going to hold us in suspense?” they kept saying to Him. “Tell us plainly—are You the Messiah?”

*The explanation (vv. 25–42).* Jesus reminded them of what He had already taught them. He emphasized the witness of His *words* (“I told you”) and His *works* (see [John 5:17ff](#), and [7:14ff](#) for similar replies).

But our Lord went much deeper in His explanation this time, for He revealed to the Jewish leaders *why* they did not understand His words or grasp the signifi-

cance of His works: they were not His sheep. From the human standpoint, we become His sheep by believing; but from the divine standpoint, we believe because we are His sheep. There is a mystery here that we cannot fathom or explain, but we can accept it and rejoice ([Rom. 11:33–36](#)). God has His sheep and He knows who they are. They will hear His voice and respond.

The lost sinner who hears God’s Word knows nothing about divine election. He hears only that Christ died for the sins of the world, and that he may receive the gift of eternal life by trusting the Saviour. When He trusts the Saviour, he becomes a member of God’s family and a sheep in the flock. Then he learns that he was “chosen ... in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world” ([Eph. 1:4](#)). He also learns that each saved sinner is the Father’s “love gift” to His Son (see [John 10:29](#); [17:2, 6, 9, 11–12, 24](#)).

In the Bible, divine election and human responsibility are perfectly balanced; and what God has joined together, we must not put asunder.

Jesus went on to explain that His sheep are secure in His hand and in the Father’s hand. “They shall never perish” is His promise ([John 3:16](#); [6:39](#); [17:12](#); [18:9](#)). The false *shepherds* bring destruction ([John 10:10](#), same Greek word); but the Good

**Shepherd** sees to it that His sheep shall never perish.

The security of God's sheep is assured here in several ways. First, by definition—we have “eternal life,” and that cannot be conditional and still be eternal. Second, this life is a gift, not something that we earn or merit. If we were not saved by our own good works, but by His grace, then we cannot be lost by our “bad works” ([Rom. 11:6](#)). But most important, Jesus gave us His promise that His sheep do not perish, and that His promise cannot be broken.

It is important to keep in mind that Jesus was talking about sheep—true believers—and not counterfeits. The dog and the pig will go back into sin ([2 Peter 2:20–22](#)); but the sheep, being a clean animal, will follow the **Shepherd** into the green pastures. The false professor will talk about his faith and even his works, but he will never make it into heaven ([Matt. 7:13–29](#)). Most of us know people who professed to be saved and then went back into sin, but their doing so only proved that they never really trusted Christ to begin with. Jesus did not promise security to anyone but His true sheep.

As you review our Lord's teaching about His ministry as the Good **Shepherd**, you note that He has a threefold relationship to His sheep. He has a *loving* relation-

ship because He died for the sheep, as well as a *living* relationship because He cares for the sheep. It is also a *lasting* relationship, for He keeps His sheep and not a one is lost.