

Notes on John 10

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Jesus as the Good Shepherd – John 10

Teaching about the Good Shepherd – 10:1-21

Jesus here gives a beautiful illustration of His relationship with His disciples. Like all Bible illustrations, it must be used to teach only what God intended it to teach. No illustration is parallel in every regard to that which is it used to illustrate. We must not force the example to teach what Jesus did not intend, but must seek to learn the lessons the Lord intended to convey.

Verses 1,2

1. What difference did Jesus describe between a shepherd and a thief (vv 1,2)? (Thought question: Why would thieves act differently from shepherds in this manner?)
2. In this illustration, what is represented by the sheep, the shepherd, and the thieves? (Thought question: Why would this be an effective illustration for these people?)

The true Shepherd contrasted to thieves

Jesus had been involved in an ongoing debate or conflict with the Jewish leaders about who He was. His miracles should have convinced them that His claims were true. But He had repeatedly stated that they were blind to the truth, because they did not really want to follow God (9:40:41). They pursued other motives.

In this section, John records a lengthy statement by Jesus comparing Himself to a Good Shepherd and the Jewish leaders to thieves or wolves who came to steal His sheep. Sheep were common livestock in Bible times and the occupation of shepherd was well known to all the hearers. In fact, the patriarchs of the Israelite ancestry, Abraham and his descendants, had been shepherds. Jesus and other Bible writers had often used the sheep/shepherd illustration to teach various truths about the relationship between God and His people. The best known of these is Psalms 23. But other examples are found in Psalms 77:20; 79:13; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3; Isaiah 40:11; 53:6; Luke 15:3-7; 12:32; Mark 14:27; John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:1-4; Acts 20:28-30.

The Jewish leaders considered themselves shepherds of the people of Israel, and in fact they should have led the people to serve God according to His will. But they were like the false shepherds of Ezekiel 34, who simply used the sheep for their own selfish purposes, rather than caring and providing for the sheep. Events in the previous chapter introduced this subject, because those who ought to have been “shepherds” in Israel had just cast out one of their sheep, but Jesus took him in. As Johnson says: “These professed shepherds had just cast out from their fold a poor lamb for the crime of refusing to believe that the person who had opened his eyes was a sinner.”

Jesus began His illustration by contrasting the true shepherd to thieves. The true shepherd would enter the sheepfold by the door, but one who would try to climb up and enter some other way must be a thief. Sheepfolds in those days, I am told, consisted of an area enclosed by a wall or fence to keep the sheep from wandering and to keep out predatory animals and thieves. But the fold had a door or opening through which the true shepherd(s) of the sheep could enter and lead the sheep in or out.

The shepherd did not need to use deceit, trickery, or any illegitimate means to get the sheep to follow him or to claim leadership of the sheep. He had a legitimate right to lead the sheep, so he could come in directly through the door, using honest, upright means to call the sheep to follow him. One would resort to dishonest, deceitful methods only because he had no legitimate claim to lead the sheep.

Jesus did not here make application of the illustration. Later, however, He did explain that He is the Good Shepherd (v11). He has a right to lead the sheep, so His efforts to call them to fol-

low Him are legitimate and within His rights. This is contrary to the claims of the Jewish leaders who were attempting to discredit Him, saying that He was a sinner not worthy to be followed but worthy of death (9:24).

Thieves are those who have no right to certain property, but attempt to take it for themselves illegitimately, thereby defrauding the proper owners. So, spiritually, the thieves in this illustration would represent anyone who used unlawful, improper means to gain control of the people of God.

In this context, Jesus surely was including these Jewish leaders as thieves. He had repeatedly claimed that they were not following God. They ought to have acted as shepherds and led the people to accept Jesus, since He was from God. But instead, they refused to believe in Him and threatened to cast out anyone who did confess Him. This surely forfeited any right they might have had to lead the people. Yet, they wanted the people to continue to follow them instead of Jesus. This was illegitimate, according to God's plan, and constituted them spiritual thieves.

The same principles, however, would apply to anyone who disobeys Jesus' true teachings and tries instead to get people to follow some other teaching. Such is illegitimate by God's plans (Matt. 15:1-14). The result would lead people to follow human ideas instead of the will of God. This constitutes all such people thieves.

Verses 3-5

3. What happens when the shepherd calls his sheep (vv 3,4)? (Think: What can we learn from this about the nature of sheep and their relationship to the shepherd?)
4. What happens when a stranger calls the sheep?

The true shepherd enters legitimately.

The true shepherd can do several things that pretenders cannot do. The sheep sleep at night oftentimes in the fold (pen). The door of the fold is guarded by a doorkeeper. When the true shepherd comes, the doorkeeper recognizes him and opens the door for him. He can then simply call the sheep, and they follow him because they know his voice. But they will not follow a stranger because they do not recognize his voice. Again, the shepherd can use legitimate means to get the sheep to follow him, because he has lawful right to lead them.

It may not be clear who the doorkeeper here represents. It could be John the Baptist and perhaps other prophets, who had prepared the way for Jesus, getting the "sheep" ready to accept Him. When Jesus came, John recognized Him and testified that He was the Son of God (John 1:29-34). Jesus could legitimately accept this testimony, because He was the Christ who had been prophesied. (Other people claim that the doorkeeper represents God, who prepared the way for Jesus and authorized His leadership. This preparation, however, was done largely through the Old Testament prophets.)

The sheep hear the shepherd's voice.

Note that the shepherd does not need to drive the sheep, but leads them. Nor does he need to compel each one to follow; he simply calls.

Johnson describes a typical scene, as shepherds separate their sheep. Many flocks may spend the night together mixed indiscriminately within a fold or city. In the morning, various shepherds stand outside the gate as all the sheep pass out in one large mixed group. Then each shepherd moves away in his chosen direction, calling to the sheep. The sheep hear the call of their own shepherd and follow him out to pasture, thereby separating the mixed group into the separate flocks belonging to the various shepherds.

To illustrate further, in another instance a shepherd exchanged clothing with one who was not the shepherd of the flock. Then both men began to call the sheep. The sheep ignored the one who was not their shepherd, even though he appeared by his clothing to be the shepherd. As Jesus said, they did not know his voice, so they refused to follow. Instead, they immediately fol-

lowed their true shepherd, even though he was disguised in other clothing. Yet, they followed, because they knew his voice.

Likewise, the call of Jesus separates His true followers from those who do not follow Him. When He began teaching, those who were truly willing to be the true people of God (i.e., those who were willing to do God's will — 7:17), recognized Jesus for who He is and willingly followed Him. They could distinguish Him from false teachers, because they knew His characteristics.

How did they recognize Him? By His miracles, fulfilled prophecy, and the truthfulness of His teaching compared to the Old Testament. They listened to His teaching and observed His works. There was evidence by which they could identify Him. They did not follow false teachers, because others did not have the proof or evidence that they were from God. All of this evidence today is found in the Word of God, the Bible. The "voice" of Jesus today is not a sound, but a message. So, we hear the Lord's voice by studying and responding to the gospel (2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:3; Psalm 119:105).

Nothing here teaches Calvinistic unconditional predestination, which says some people are chosen unconditionally to be Jesus' disciples, so when He calls they accept Him because they have no choice. But all have a choice. Salvation is conditional. Jesus calls by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14), which should be preached to all (Mark 16:15). Those who accept the call are the ones who honestly consider the evidence and choose to obey (Mark 16:16). Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; 1:16). This further describes how Jesus calls and how the sheep hear His voice (John 6:44,45).

People are unlike sheep, in that sheep belong to a shepherd regardless of the sheep's choosing. They are physically purchased or born into the flock. But people must choose whether or not to be in the Good Shepherd's flock. We make this choice by choosing or refusing to follow His call through the word.

It is interesting that Jesus said the shepherd calls the sheep "by name." There is a personal relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. This is literally true with sheep. As with other domesticated animals, the caregivers often name each one and take a personal interest in each. When the owner calls, he calls by name so the one that comes is the one he wants. Johnson also tells of a man who visited with a shepherd in Israel. He asked the shepherd to call a sheep by name. The shepherd did so, and immediately one sheep left the flock and came joyfully running to his shepherd. This illustrates that Jesus has a personal interest in each disciple.

This also demonstrates how the flock hears His voice. They hear His voice one by one. That is, the flock is His, because each individual sheep is His. The flock follows Him, because each individual sheep follows him. Other sheep may go in other directions following other shepherds, but each individual sheep in this flock follows this shepherd. They are not following the flock; they are following the shepherd. Their trust is not in the flock but in the shepherd. The leader is the shepherd, not the flock. Each one follows, because each one knows the shepherd personally.

This illustrates the individual responsibility of each person to choose to serve the Lord. No one can do this for us and no one can make the choice for us. This choice must be made on the basis of a personal commitment to the Lord, not to the church or the people. This commitment must cause each sheep to follow the shepherd. That is, each one must obey the shepherd's commands. There is no promise of safety, providence, or protection for those that wander off and refuse to follow. Following requires obedience, which is required of all disciples (see on John 8:31,32).

The fold appears to represent a position of security and protection for the sheep or disciples of Jesus. This might seem to represent the church, yet v9 speaks of going in and out of the fold, and v16 speaks of having sheep that are not of the fold. That cannot fit the church. It is true that the church is the relationship in which Jesus places all saved people (Acts 2:47), but we do not go in and out of that relationship with His approval. Nor does He have more than one true church (see on v16). Perhaps a better view is that the fold simply represents the protection Jesus

gives His people, and going out to find pasture (v9) represents Jesus' provision of spiritual nourishment. So, going into the fold for protection and going out for nourishment simply expresses Jesus' provision of all that we need: protection and nourishment. V16 will use the word in a more specific sense. Being in the church is better expressed by being in the flock, one of Jesus' sheep (disciples).

Verses 6-8

5. List at least 2 other **passages** that use shepherds and/or sheep to illustrate spiritual lessons.
6. What illustration is used for Jesus in vv 7-9, and what is the point?

Jesus is the door of the sheep.

The Jews did not understand Jesus' illustration, so He explained further. He said that He is the door of the sheep and all who came before Him were thieves and robbers.

Like many illustrations, this one does not fit perfectly with real life. In real life, the shepherd cannot also be the door of the sheep. Yet, Jesus here is represented by both the shepherd (v11), and the door of the sheep (v7).

The door is the means of entrance. Jesus not only provides care and protection for His sheep, He is also the means by which they can enter the place of safety. He makes it possible for us to pass from the world with its spiritual death and danger into the security of His protection. He made this possible by offering us forgiveness of sins through His blood. But v9 shows that other blessings besides salvation are also included.

But there were others who claimed to provide for the sheep and who wanted the sheep to follow them. These were thieves and robbers. They did not have legitimate claims that the sheep should follow them nor could they prove their claims. "All" who came before refers, not to Old Testament prophets, but to others who claimed to be Christ and perhaps to any other false teachers. They wanted the sheep to follow them, but their claims were not legitimate. The only ones who would follow them were not the true sheep.

Verses 9,10

7. How do thieves differ from Jesus according to v10? (Thought question: What is the "abundant life" Jesus gives people?)

Jesus provides for His sheep, but the thief destroys them.

As the door, Jesus provides the means for the sheep to obtain what they need. If they enter by Jesus, they can be saved. This surely refers to forgiveness of sins, which can be obtained only through Jesus (Acts 4:12).

But the door provides access to other blessings too. The door allows the sheep to go in and out and find pasture — spiritual nourishment. Sheep need nourishment to live and grow. But they are foolish and cannot find pasture and drink for themselves. The shepherd must lead them to it. Jesus provides this need by feeding us on His word so we can grow and be strong (Psalm 23:2; Ezek. 34:2,23; 1 Pet. 2:2; Col. 1:9-11).

The thief, however, has no interest in providing for the nourishment or well-being of the sheep. He steals the sheep for his own gain, not for the benefit of the sheep. He will kill them, destroy them, harm them, misuse them in any way that he thinks is to his advantage regardless of the effect on the sheep.

In the same way, false teachers do not work for the good of the sheep (though of course they must claim to do so or no sheep would follow them). They really just want to "fleece" the sheep. They may want to get rich off them, become popular or famous or powerful, or in some other way use them for their own personal pleasure. Even if they are sincere but themselves deceived, still they are unwittingly leading the sheep to their destruction.

Jesus, in contrast, works for the real good of the sheep. He provides what they need to have life and have it abundantly. He gave forgiveness so they need not die, but He also gives spiritual nourishment to provide for their life and continued growth. This is provided abundantly.

Note that Jesus is abundant in His care for us. We should not fear that our needs will not be met. Does our shepherd not love and care for us? How then will He let us be lost, if we truly strive to please Him? He wants us saved and will help us find the means and the strength to go on serving Him, if we will truly trust Him and willingly submit to Him.

This does not mean, as materialistic modernists think, that Jesus promises to give us physical wealth and health in this life. He speaks, not of physical blessings, but spiritual. His people suffer physically in this life like other people do, but we have abundant spiritual blessings and the hope of eternal life.

Verses 11-13

8. Who did Jesus say He was in v11, and what would He do for the sheep?

9. What is a hireling, and how would one act differently from the good shepherd?

(Thought question: What do the hirelings represent?)

10. What two things in this illustration both represent Jesus?

The good shepherd compared to the hireling

Jesus then plainly identifies Himself in His illustration as being the Good Shepherd (cf. Psalms 23; Ezekiel 34; 37:24; Isaiah 40:11; Zech. 11:7; Jeremiah 23). He loves and cares for the sheep, even to the point of giving His life for the sheep. Consider the example of David (1 Samuel 17:34-36).

Sheep are among the most defenseless of animals. They have many natural enemies, such as wolves, bears, and lions. They have little means to protect themselves, and domesticated sheep are completely dependent on the shepherd to protect them. Likewise, by ourselves alone Jesus' disciples are unable to defend ourselves against the Devil, the roaring lion who seeks to spiritually devour us (1 Peter 5:8). But we can resist him using the means the Good Shepherd provides.

At times, however, all of us have wandered astray and allowed Satan to capture us (1 Peter 2:24,25). To rescue us, Jesus had to die on the cross in our place. Sometimes a shepherd hazards his own life to save the sheep because he genuinely cares about them (Luke 15:3-7). Jesus has that kind of love and care for us. He does not want Satan to destroy us, so He was willing to die on the cross in our place to give us the hope of salvation.

Jesus then brought another person into the illustration — the hireling. A hireling is one who does not own the sheep, but cares for them only for pay. The Bible teaches that a preacher is worthy of his hire (1 Timothy 5:17,18), so being paid is not itself the problem. The problem is that some people do the work only if they are paid. If they see no personal benefit, they don't do the work.

The hireling does not own the sheep, so he does not have love and concern for them as their owner would have. He may be willing to do some work for the sheep to earn his pay; but he is not going to endanger himself in any way, since he does not really care for the sheep. If severe danger comes, he flees for his own safety, not caring that destruction results to the sheep.

This seems to illustrate middle-of-the-road compromisers. Unlike thieves, their motives are not overtly malicious. They do not seek personally to harm the sheep or even to misuse them for their own purposes. But neither do they really love them. They lead them, but don't care much about their wellbeing. When God's people face sin or any problem that threatens them, hirelings would not take the firm stand needed to help the people. They value their own safety and convenience more than the salvation of the people. Jesus was not like that, but would even give His life for the people whom He loved. Cf. Zechariah 11:17.

The hirelings may have represented others of the Jewish rulers who really provided some care for the people and perhaps were not selfishly seeking to benefit at the expense of God's peo-

ple. But they were compromisers and would not stand against the false teachers who harmed the people. Hirelings do not themselves do harm to God's people, but neither do they protect them as is needed. They may not teach false doctrine, but they will not risk their own reputation, inconvenience, etc., in speaking out against it and opposing those who do teach it. There are still such people today.

Verses 14,15

11. Who knows one another according to vv 14,15? (Thought question: What is the point of the statement?)

The Good Shepherd knows both the sheep and the Father.

Jesus here repeated that He is the Good Shepherd (see notes on v 11), and that He will lay down His life for the sheep (see notes on v11), in contrast to the hirelings who flee in the face of danger.

He said further that he knows which sheep are his, and the sheep know Him (see notes on vv3-5). He compared this to the fact He knows the Father and the Father knows Him. He had earlier said that the Jews did not know Him or His Father (8:54,55). But He knew the Father, and in the same way He knows His sheep.

Again, as in vv 3-5, shepherds in that day could tell their sheep from others, and the sheep would recognize and follow their own shepherd. Does a man know and recognize his own father? Of course, and so Jesus knew His Father, and in a similar way knows His sheep.

This should be a great encouragement to the true sheep: the Good Shepherd knows us just as sure as He knows the Father! How can anyone doubt that Jesus knows His Father? He will not mistake the Father for an enemy or an enemy for the Father. Likewise, if we truly follow Jesus, He will not mistakenly treat us as frauds. He will not overlook us or fail to protect us, though we may be surrounded by many whom He does not care for. We can rest assured in the care of the Good Shepherd, so long as we diligently follow Him. And even if we stray, He will pursue us to bring us back. He even died to save us. Surely, He will not lightly let us be lost!

At the same time, Jesus' illustration should serve to warn the false sheep and the false teachers. If we are not His true sheep, He will not honor and reward us. He will make no mistake. If we teach error, we can expect Jesus to oppose us with all His might through His word. He knows who are and are not His true sheep, just as surely as He knows who is and is not His Father.

Verse 16

12. Who else did Jesus say must become part of His flock, and how many flocks and shepherds would there be?

13. Special Assignment: Explain the reference to the sheep who are not of this fold. Does this teach that all the denominations are acceptable to Jesus? Explain.

Other sheep from outside "this fold" will hear his voice and become one flock.

In this illustration, the flock represents the church. "This fold" represents the Jews, to whom Jesus was speaking. The sheep that are not of this fold represent Gentiles who would (in the future) hear Jesus voice and be brought into the one flock, the church.

From the very beginning, Jesus intended for people of all nations to follow Him. Cf. Eph. 2:13-18; Acts 10:34,35 (see 10:1-11:18); 2:38,39; chap. 15; Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Gal. 3:28; etc. All saved people are added by Jesus to His one church over which He is the Head and sole authority: Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47; John 17:20-23; Ephesians 4:3-6; 1:22,23; 5:22-25; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 12:20; etc. This is the only viewpoint that fits all passages of Scripture, and surely fits the context here as Jesus spoke to the Jews of "this fold."

As illustrated previously, a fold in that time might enclose sheep of many flocks all sheltered together at night. In the morning, different shepherds would come and each would call his sheep and they would separate themselves from the other flocks to follow Him. Jesus is saying that He

would call some sheep from the Jewish fold, and many would follow Him (but some Jews would not follow Him). But there were other folds to which He would also extend His call, and some people from those folds would also follow Him.

Speculators have had a field day with the various folds of this verse and what they refer to. Some claim this represents people in the eastern world who followed the Bible and people in the Americas who received other revelation (such as the Book of Mormon). Others say it represents various modern nations or nationalities. But all such views are speculation having no shred of real proof. And such theories invariably contradict the Bible on many points.

Others even claim that the folds represent people of different denominations, so they use the passage to rebuke anyone who condemns denominational division and teaches that there is only one true church. Yet, the Bible clearly condemns denominational division (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 12:25; Galatians 5:19-21; John 17:20,21; Luke 11:17; Romans 14:19; 16:17; Titus 3:10; Proverbs 26:21; 6:16-19; Ephesians 4:4-6).

The verses already cited prove there is only one true church, and this passage simply confirms that view. Just as there is only one true Shepherd, so He has just **one** flock, not many different, contradictory flocks. Incredibly, people are using the passage to prove exactly the opposite of what the Lord said. He plainly said He wanted all His sheep to be in **one flock**, just as surely as there is only one shepherd. We have no more right to believe that God will accept many different flocks than He will accept many different chief shepherds.

For further discussion denominational division as compared to Jesus' one true church, see articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Verses 17,18

14. What power did Jesus have, and therefore what could no one else do to Him? (Think: Why does this make Jesus more worthy of love? Where else did Jesus teach this?)

Jesus would lay down his own life.

Because Jesus was willing to lay down His life for the sheep, His Father loved Him. Jesus then plainly stated that, though He knew He was going to die, it would not be because these Jews and His enemies would overpower Him and take His life against His will. On the contrary, no one could take it from Him if He was determined to stop them. He could call 12 legions of angels to stop it (Matt. 26:53).

He had power from the Father to lay down His life and power to take it up again. Therefore, when He died, He would be dying because His love for His sheep led Him to willingly lay down His own life. It would be a voluntary sacrifice. Though others would slay Him, they could not do so if He chose to stop them. This makes it a real sacrifice and therefore something for which we too ought to love Him above all others.

Note also that Jesus here plainly said He would take up His life again (cf. 2:19-22). He is here predicting not only His death but also His resurrection from the dead. And again, we are clearly shown that Jesus knew all this ahead of time. He here acts as a prophet predicting His own death and resurrection. When the prediction was fulfilled, it would offer further proof that He was truly from God.

Verses 19-21

15. What 2 viewpoints again created division between people (vv 19-21)?

The words of Jesus again divide the Jews.

Now again, just as in 7:43 (cf. 9:16 and others), the people were divided over His sayings. Some thought he had a demon and was insane, so people should not listen to Him (see 8:52;

etc.). But others thought He could not have a demon, since He had opened the eyes of the blind (cf. 9:29-33,16). See notes on these other passages for further discussion.

We are shown again that Jesus spoke truth, even when He knew it would lead to confrontation. It simply is not true that He and His faithful servants will always be peaceable, even if it means submitting to error. He stood for truth, even knowing that it would result in conflict. But the conflict was the fault of those who would not accept the truth, not the fault of those who taught it. As long as some people are bound to accept error, faithful teaching of truth will lead to division, strife, and conflict. We should stand as He did, even when similar problems result.

Specifically, we see again that, when people did not accept Jesus, they attacked Him as having a demon and being from the devil. Truthfully, this is the only fair alternative to accepting His claims as true. If we do not accept His claims, then it is folly to say we still think He is a good man and a great religious teacher. If His claims are not true, then He is not a good man at all, but is from the devil.

But we need to be honest with the evidence. Those who appealed to the evidence on this occasion, concluded that His words were not those of a demon-possessed man. He did not speak like a crazy man would be expected to speak. Rather, He gave calm, reasoned responses based on evidence. He could answer all His opponents' arguments and answer them convincingly. And His miracles, such as the healing of the blind man, could not possibly be harmonized with the view that He was from Satan. Satan could never empower anyone to do what Jesus could do.

This is the proper approach to the issue. Remember that the healing of the blind man in chap. 9 is what had provoked this entire discussion. Those who deny Jesus' real nature want to dismiss or ignore the evidence of His miracles. Those who focus on His miracles find no alternative but to accept His claims as true. And note again that the people who were there could not deny the reality of the miracle. They had tried to disprove it but could not. They could not avoid the conclusion that He is who He claimed to be.

Further Conflict at the Feast of Dedication — 10:22-42

Verses 22,23

16. What feast did Jesus attend (v22), when was it, and where was He walking? (Thought question: What was the purpose of this feast? What was Solomon's porch?)

Jesus in Solomon's porch at the Feast of Dedication

Further discussion with these unbelieving Jews occurred at the Feast of Dedication. This was in the winter. This feast was also called the Feast of Lights (modern Hanukkah), and commemorated the time when the Maccabees cleansed the temple and rededicated it to the service of God (*Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*). As such, it was not a required Old Testament holy day. Even though it celebrated a religious event, it was more like a national holiday.

Jesus was walking in a porch of the temple called Solomon's porch. This was not part of the actual temple itself, but was a large covered area in the temple grounds. It was often used later by the early church as a place for meeting and teaching - cf. Acts 3:11; 5:12. This demonstrates that it was a large enough area to accommodate very large crowds where everyone could yet hear one who was speaking.

Verses 24,25

17. What demand did the Jews make, and how did Jesus respond (vv 24,25)? What can we learn?

The Jews demand that Jesus affirm or deny that He was the Christ.

The Jews confronted Him again, surrounding Him, and challenging Him to tell them plainly whether He were the Christ. It is likely they were again looking for something to use against Him. Had He plainly answered, they would have just rejected it again. So, He simply pointed out

that they had abundant evidence on which to base their conclusion. He had answered the question and they would not accept the answer. Why should He answer again?

It is true that He had not given them direct statements, such as He had given others. Compare His statements to them in 5:19ff; 8:36,56,58 to the statements in 4:25,26; 9:35-37. Nevertheless, no one who had really listened to His statements could deny that He had answered this question affirmatively. But what is more, He had given the proof that confirmed the answer. He again called their attention here to the proof: the works (miracles) He did in His Father's name. He and others had appealed to this proof repeatedly (3:2; 5:36; see notes above on 10:21). It is also this same proof that His disciples later repeatedly appealed to in order to convince unbelievers (Acts 2,3,10, etc.)

Note that Jesus Himself plainly claimed that His miracles answered the question as to whether He is the Christ. What answer can they give other than an affirmative answer: He is the Christ? To use Jesus' miracles as evidence to confirm His claims is not a misuse of them; on the contrary, this is exactly the primary purpose of His miracles. This is the same proof honest people today must consider, and it is the same proof we should offer to those who doubt. When people today doubt who Jesus is, we should do as He did here: point out the evidence, then call on them to consider what conclusion that evidence leads to. We should use the same approach when confronted by any who are confrontational to our stand for truth: instead of beginning with direct answers, call attention to the evidence.

Verses 26-29

18. According to Jesus, why did the Jews not believe in Him (v26)?

19. What must Jesus' sheep do, and what does He give them?

20. Describe the protection Jesus and His Father give the sheep (vv 28,29). (Thought question: What does this mean?)

21. Case Study: These verses are a major proof text for "once saved, always saved" (the doctrine that a person who has been forgiven cannot be lost). How would you respond to someone who believes this?

No one can snatch Jesus' sheep from His hand or His Father's hand.

Jesus stated again that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (10:3-5). The reason these Jews did not follow Him was that they were not His sheep. They would not accept the truth that He taught, regardless of the evidence for it. Again, the problem was not a lack of proof but an attitude problem in the hearers (see notes on 8:43-47,55; 5:38,45-47; etc.). Those who will to do the Father's will can know whether or not Jesus spoke the truth – 7:17. These men were confused because they were not dedicated to doing the Father's will, and that is why they were not among Jesus' sheep!

He said then that He gives eternal life to His sheep and they will never perish. In fact, no one can pluck them out of His hand, nor out of His Father's hand, and His father is greater than all. He had earlier promised eternal life to those who believe in Him (8:51; 6:68,27,40,47,54; 3:15ff; etc.) Here He says that, if His sheep will truly listen to Him (hear His voice) and follow Him, no force outside themselves can ever cause them to be lost. This is a wonderful promise.

Does this prove "once saved, always saved"?

Some claim this promise is so unconditional that, if a person has been forgiven of sin, his soul cannot be lost no matter how wickedly he lives. This is a major proof text used for "once saved, always saved." However, consider the following: (See also notes on 3:36.)

The context gives conditions — vv 27,28.

Note the repetition of the word "**and**." Receiving life and never perishing are tied by the Lord Himself to **hearing Jesus and following Him**. These are conditions, exactly like other passages teach (John 15:1-6; Acts 8:12-24; Romans 6:12-18; 8:12-17; Galatians 5:1-4; 6:7-9; 1

Corinthians 9:25-10:12; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 5:8; 2 Timothy 2:16-18; Hebrews 3:6,11-14; 4:9,11; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 2 Peter 1:8-11; 2:20-22.)

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus protects His sheep so no one can destroy them, **as long as the sheep hear Jesus and follow Him**. But what if they **cease** to hear and follow, as the above verses show they can do?

“Pluck” refers to an outside force.

“Pluck” (KJV) or “snatch” (NKJV, ASV) means “to seize, carry off by force” (Grimm-Wilke-Thayer). This is what Jesus said a thief might do (vv 1,8,10,12). Jesus is not here denying that the sheep can wander away and be lost. He is affirming that neither Satan nor any outside force can steal believers from the Lord, as long as they remain faithful to Him. It is the thief and the wolf that cannot snatch us away.

Other passages show that we must “resist the devil,” and then we have assurance he will flee from us (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8,9; Ephesians 6:10-18). What happens if, through negligence or willful rebellion, we wander away from the protection of Jesus’ fold?

Sheep can stray from the shepherd’s protection.

Luke 15:3-7 — 100 sheep belonged to the shepherd (vv 4,6), yet one became **lost**.

Acts 20:28-30 — Wolves may enter among the flock, speak perverse things, and **draw away** the disciples. They cannot compel us to follow them and be lost. We have the power to choose to continue following the Lord’s voice. But false teachers can **lure** us, attract us, and tempt us.

1 Peter 5:8,9 — Satan is a roaring lion seeking to devour us. If we do not withstand him, he can capture and destroy us. But we can withstand him if we have **faith and vigilance**. This is exactly what Jesus is promising in John 10 — no more and no less (John 17; 6:37-40; 1 Peter 2:25).

If sheep cannot possibly stray, even of their own free will, then that would deny our free moral power to choose. We could not become lost even if we wanted to!

Indeed, this passage contains a great promise that we should all appreciate. Jesus is the Good Shepherd there to protect us so no wolf or thief can steal us from Him. But we must be diligent to continue serving Him for this promise to be true.

For further discussion of once saved, always saved, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Verse 30

22. What is Jesus’ relationship to the Father according to v30, and where else did He make a similar claim? (Thought question: In what sense is this true? Are Jesus and His Father the same person or being?)

Jesus again affirms His unity with the Father.

Jesus had stated that no one could snatch a believer out of His hand or His Father’s hand. Then He proceeded to affirm that this was really one and the same thing, since He and His Father are one. This is not saying they are one and the same individual person or being, but that they are one in nature and work. Hence, a person can no more take a believer away from Jesus than he could from the Father.

The necessary consequence of this statement is that Jesus is claiming unity with God in a way other people do not have. He is claiming Deity. See notes on 8:58; 1:1; 20:28; etc.

Some people, however, argue this means Jesus and His Father are the same Being or Person, and hence there is just one being in the Godhead: “Jesus only.” The Father and the Spirit are just different titles or different parts of that individual, etc.

We agree there is one God, but the question is: **how** is God “one” — in what sense? Is it one individual, or is there some other sense in which three individuals could be “one”?

John 17:20-23 explains **how** the Father and Son are **one** — even as believers should be one. We are not one individual, but many different individuals. We are united as one body, one church, united in faith, practice, goals, character, etc. The inspired comparison is that there is **one God** or Godhead that consists of plural members, just as there is **one** church that consists of many members (Acts 4:32; Rom. 12:4,5; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 12:12-27; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 1:22,23; 2:14,16; 4:1-6,16; Phil. 1:27; 2:2; etc.)

In many passages the pronouns for Jesus and His Father imply plural individuals (“we,” “us,” “I and Thou,” “I am not alone,” etc.). In fact, this very passage itself implies plural individuals: “I and my Father” (an individual and his father make two individuals). See notes on John 1:1 showing in greater detail that Jesus and His Father both possess Deity, yet are two separate individuals.

Statements affirming the oneness of God are intended to contrast to the plural gods of heathen idol worship, not to deny there are a plurality of individuals in the one true God. Those contexts are not discussing the relationship of Father and Son, for example, but are contrasting the true God to the plurality of different gods such as heathen idol worshipers embrace — gods having different character, authority in different areas of life or different areas of the earth, and often disagreeing and even warring among themselves in their beliefs, purposes, teachings, and their wills for men. We worship, not such gods as these, but a united, harmonious God with one will and plan for us.

For further discussion of the number of individuals in the Godhead, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Verses 31-33

23. What did the Jews want to do to Jesus, and how did He respond (vv 31,32)?

24. What accusation did the Jews make as the grounds for their act? (Thought question: In what way was their charge invalid?)

The Jews attempt to stone Jesus

The Jews recognized, properly, that Jesus was claiming Deity. They were convinced, however, that He was just a man, not God in the flesh. If they were right, He would be committing blasphemy to claim oneness with God, and blasphemy was punishable by death. So, they took stones to kill Him. Cf. 8:59.

Jesus responded by calling attention again to His miracles: His good works. He had done many, and obviously the power had to come from God. So, He asked which one of them was their justification for stoning Him. Of course, He knew they were not stoning Him for the miracles, but His intent was to point out that, in determining to stone Him, they were again overlooking His miracles.

No matter how many miracles He did proving He was from God, they were determined to find fault with Him. They ignored the evidence and attacked anything that seemed to imply that He was from God. But if the evidence was valid, then He was from God and there was no grounds to attack Him. They ought instead to have accepted and followed Him. So, He called attention to His miracles and asked which of them was grounds for killing Him.

They responded that it was not His good works that led them to seek to kill Him but the fact He claimed to be God, though He was a man. This, of course, assumed without proof the issue to be decided — i.e., that Jesus was just a man. If He was who He claimed to be and who the miracles proved Him to be, then He was not just a man but was the Son of God. So, their whole position again is based on their preconceived determination not to admit that He was from God.

But note again that the Jews here recognized Jesus’ statement as a claim to Deity. The idea that Jesus claimed Deity is not something invented by the disciples hundreds of years after He

died. The issue arose during Jesus' own lifetime based on His own statements. Even His enemies recognized that this was the import of His statements.

And note also that the deeds of a religious teacher must not be separated from His words. Jesus' claimed to be the Son of God, Savior of the world, etc., he taught the truths of the gospel, but then He proved that all this was true and He really was from God by the miraculous deeds He did. There can be no explanation for these deeds except that God did them through Jesus. Therefore, we ought to believe His words. The Jews attempted to ignore Jesus' miracles and judge Him entirely on the basis of His teachings and whether or not they agreed with His teaching. This is improper. A man who claims to be a prophet must be judged on the total evidence of his deeds and his words, as Jesus claimed here.

Verses 34-36

25. What Old Testament passage did Jesus quote in response, and what did it say? (Thought question: In what sense were men called "gods" in this passage?)
26. What argument did Jesus make from the passage (vv 35,36)? (Thought question: Is Jesus saying He is a "god" like these other men? What is His point?)
27. Explain Jesus' attitude toward the Scriptures (v35). What lessons could we learn?

Jesus cites an Old Testament passage calling men "gods"

Jesus' response is difficult in several ways. He cited a passage in which men were called "gods" — Psalm 82:6. In this passage, the inspired writer was, apparently, speaking to the judges of Israel calling them gods. This is confusing, but apparently the idea is that they were representatives of God, acting in God's place for the people. Hence, they are spoken of as gods. The word does not, of course, here mean that they really possessed Deity.

We may compare this to Exodus 4:16; 7:1,2, where God said Moses would be "as God" to Aaron. The word "as" was added by the translators (in 7:1,2), so the statement is that Moses was God to Aaron. This is explained to mean that God would reveal His word to Moses, then Moses would act as prophet in passing God's words on. But Moses would pass the words to Aaron, who would then be Moses' spokesman. So, Moses stood in relationship to Aaron like God stood in relationship to Moses. This explains the significance of the statement in Psalms 82. The judges were not gods in fundamental nature, just as Moses did not have the nature of God. But the role they filled made them like gods to the people, as Moses had a role in relation to Aaron that was like God.

Jesus appealed to this passage in their "law" — that which they themselves accepted as authority. He then argued that, if the Scriptures so spoke, how could they object if He Himself claimed to be the Son of God, since He obviously had evidence that God the Father had sent Him into the world?

Jesus' argument apparently stopped them temporarily from proceeding with their intent to kill Him. He could show where other men were called gods, so why should they object if He claimed to be one with God? They had to ponder this one.

Yet, it is difficult to see why Jesus would make the argument, since it could be taken to mean that He was just a "god" in the sense these men were — i.e., not God in His fundamental essence or nature. The best answer I can find is that Jesus is answering a misconception they may have gotten from His statement that He and His Father were one, and He is arguing from the lesser to the greater.

It is possible they assumed that He meant (as some people today assume from this passage and others) that He was the same person as the Father or that He was denying that He was a man. His statement here would correct that possible misconception. He was not claiming to **be** the Father. Nor was He denying that He was a man. By citing this passage, He showed that the term "god" could be used for people who were human and who were not the Father. Hence, it was not blasphemy for the term to be so used for Him.

On the other hand, we must not conclude from this, as some have, that Jesus is here *just* claiming to be a man who represented the Father, like these Old Testament judges had been. The claims elsewhere show this is not the case. He is not denying His humanity, but He is claiming Deity. He was both God and man.

So apparently, He is reasoning from the lesser to the greater. These men, who were *just* humans, could be called “gods,” and even these Jews could not deny it since it was in their own law. But surely Jesus had presented much evidence (see next verses) that He too was from God and that He was much greater than those judges had been. Surely, He was at least as great as these Old Testament judges, and therefore it was not proper to stone Him if He used the term “god” for Himself.

Note that Jesus powerfully confirmed the authority of Scripture by saying “the Scripture cannot be broken.” This showed the high esteem with which He held the Scriptures. People today, who claim to be Christians yet who question or deny the authority of Scripture, need to consider Jesus’ statement here. If He so esteemed Scripture, and if we are His followers, then shouldn’t we likewise esteem Scripture?

Never did Jesus try to excuse disobedience to Scripture, as some today do, claiming that the men were just writing their own human beliefs, or that God gave them the ideas but the men might have made mistakes in how they expressed them, or that the message might have been lost or changed in the centuries since it had been written, or that the meaning had been lost in translation, etc. Men today try to make all kinds of such excuses. But Jesus never did. He respected Scriptures and so should we.

Verses 37,38

28. What proof did Jesus give for His claims in vv 37,38?

29. What was Jesus’ relationship with the Father (v38)? Where else did He make such claim? (Think: What is meant by this expression?)

Once again Jesus appealed to the evidence of His works.

If the people had trouble believing Jesus’ claims, they needed to accept the conclusion proved by His works. He had to be from God. There was no other sensible explanation for His miracles. They surely had no grounds therefore to kill Him, for His very miracles proved God was working through Him. To kill Him would be to oppose God.

He expressed His relationship with God by saying the Father was in Him and He in His Father. This again implies Deity (though not so directly as in v30). Yet, some again misunderstand. Some today claim that, since the Father is in the Son, this proves they are the same individual — the Father is the Spirit that dwells in the Son’s body. See notes on v30.

However, many other passages speak of separate persons being “*in*” one another. To say one is “in” the other does not prove they are the same individual. For example, Christians are “in Christ” and “in the Father”; and Father and Son abide “in” us — John 14:20,23; 15:4-7; 3:21; 6:56; Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 2:20; 3:26-38; Eph. 3:17; Phil. 1:1; 3:8,9; Col. 1:27; 1 Pet. 5:14; 1 John 2:6,24; 3:24; 4:12-16. Do these verses prove that we are the same individual or personal being as the Son or the Father?

(Note also that the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians — 2 Tim. 1:14; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

Again, John 17:20-23 explains the real meaning of the expression. For Jesus to be “in the Father,” and vice-versa, simply means for them to be “one.” “That they all may be *one*; as thou, Father, art *in me*, and *I in Thee*, that they also may be *one in Us*...; that they may be *one*, even as *we are one; I in them, and Thou in Me*, that they may be made perfect in *one*...”

To say that one person is “in” another simply means that they have fellowship and unity — a harmonious, united relationship. It does not mean they are one individual. (Compare John 1:18

— in the bosom of the Father — and see again the notes on Jesus' relationship to the Father in John 1:1ff.)

Verses 39,40

30. Where did Jesus go (v40)?

Jesus escapes and travels beyond the Jordan.

The Jews again attempted to seize Jesus, but He escaped. Whether they simply wanted to arrest him or whether they again sought to kill Him (v31), we are not told. Perhaps His answers had given them sufficient reason to reconsider stoning him, but they were still angered by His claims that He and the Father were in one another.

Jesus finally left Jerusalem as a result of their opposition. He had been struggling with the Jewish rulers throughout this current stay in Jerusalem. Efforts had been made to mob Him, arrest Him, and kill Him. See 7:19,32,45; 8:37; 10:31,39.

It was obvious that the Jews would not accept Him. No doubt Jesus knew this all along, but He had continued teaching to provide evidence to any in the multitudes who might be honest and also to prove conclusively that there was no excuse for these leaders. They had their chance and could never later say that no one tried to show them the truth.

Perhaps He realized that He had now pushed the conflict as far as it could go without them killing Him, and the time had not yet come for that. He knew He was to be sacrificed at the Passover. So, He went for a time east of Jordan (beyond Jordan) to the place where, some time earlier, John had been baptizing (see notes on 1:28). Here the people were more receptive, so He had one final period of safety before returning to Jerusalem for the final confrontation that led to His death.

Verses 41,42

31. What attitude did people there have toward Him?

Many in the area east of Jordan come to believe in Jesus

The people there, obviously, were familiar with John and His teaching. They remembered what John had said about Jesus (see chap. 1). They concluded that what he had said about Jesus was true, and they believed in Him.

Note that John did no miracles. None were ever recorded, and here we are told directly that he did not do them. Nevertheless, the people accepted him as a prophet.

So far as we know, most prophets did miracles to confirm their revelations were from God (see Mark. 16:20; Acts 14:3; etc.). Those that did not do miracles themselves, had people in company with them that did miracles. John is about the closest there is to an exception to this, and even He worked to prepare the way for Jesus, who surely did many great miracles. Hence, had there been any doubt about John as a prophet, the fulfillment of His work in Jesus and His miracles removes all doubt.

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