

# One Shepherd and One Flock

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In John 10 we have the privilege to see every Person in the Godhead engaged to carry out the divine counsels concerning Christ and His sheep: (a) the Father sending the Son (36), giving the sheep to Christ, and caring for them as they are held in His hand (29); (b) the Son calling the sheep by name leading them out of man's world, going before them, giving His life for them, and forming them into one flock; (c) the Holy Spirit (under the figure of the porter) opening the door for Christ so that His voice is heard and the sheep drawn to Christ. Moreover, no power of the devil, no opposition of man, nor failure of the disciples could prevent the counsels of God being carried out. Nor is it otherwise today! It is good indeed for our souls to realise that in spite of the turmoil in the world, the corruptions of Christendom, the opposition of religious leaders, and the failure of the true people of God, Christ's sheep are being reached, blessed, led through the wilderness and brought home to glory.

The chapter opens with an allegory (v. 1) in which the Lord uses the familiar customs of an Eastern country in relation to a shepherd and his sheep, to set forth His own gracious work in the midst of Israel. The nation is likened to a sheepfold. False prophets and pretended Messiahs had risen from time to time seeking to obtain influence over the sheep for their own profit and exaltation. Such were only thieves and robbers. They did not enter in by God's appointed way — the door (v. 2). But at last One came into the Jewish fold by the way that God had foretold. In Him the varied prophecies as to the coming of the Messiah were fulfilled. He was born of the virgin, according to Isaiah; and at Bethlehem according to Micah. Thus Christ entered by the door and was manifested to be the true Shepherd of Israel, the "One Shepherd" foretold by Ezekiel (Ezek. 34: 23).

"To Him the porter openeth" (v. 3). The porter is a figure of the power of God, whether acting providentially in ordering circumstances, or by the Spirit working in the hearts of men. Thus the way was opened for Christ to reach "His own sheep." However, while the Lord presents Himself as the Shepherd of the sheep, it is not as in Ezekiel 34. to deliver Israel from their enemies and establish them in their land. For that the time has not yet come. Israel has rejected Christ, and the nation is left in its blindness. Thus, the Lord is presented as the Shepherd calling His own sheep and leading them out of the Jewish fold into all the blessings of the new Christian flock. Of the mass of the Jewish nation, by whom He is rejected, He has to say, "Ye are not of my sheep." (26). Here, then, the Lord is seen in the midst of the corrupt Jewish nation exclusively occupied with His sheep, while they recognise no voice but His. Then we learn the three great activities of the Lord on behalf of His sheep. (1) The Shepherd calls His own sheep by name, and they hear His voice. Hearing His voice implies that they not only heard the words of the Lord, but, that His words conveyed a personal message that reached their hearts. Preaching at Antioch, Paul can say to the Jews that their rulers "Knew Him not, nor yet the *voices* of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath day." (Acts 13: 27). Thus though they heard the prophetic Scriptures, these Scriptures conveyed no message to the hearers. They did not hear the *voice* of the prophets. The sheep "hear His voice," He has personal dealings with them. "He calleth His own sheep by name." As we trace the Lord's path, recorded in this Gospel, we hear Him calling His sheep one by one. Simple fishermen, like Andrew, Simon, and Philip, are called. Nathanael, an Israelite in whom is no guile; Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a ruler; a fallen woman by a well side; a nobleman of Cana; a helpless man at Bethesda, and a blind beggar by the wayside are called. They came from very different grades of society, but one thing marked them all, they "heard His voice." (2) Having called them, the Shepherd does not leave them in the Jewish fold, that had rejected Christ. "He *leadeth them out*" of the Jewish nation that was passing on to judgment.

(3) Having put the sheep out, the Shepherd does not leave them when they are outside, for we read "He goeth before" to lead them in the path of life and blessing (v. 4). On their side, the sheep "hear His voice," "follow Him," and "flee" from the stranger that would seek to draw them from the Shepherd. They flee, not because they know but because they *know not* the voice of strangers (v. 5). "It is not the sheep's knowledge of the stranger but of the voice of the Good Shepherd that keeps it from the snares which he tries to set for it. They know what they hear is not *that* voice. It is thus the simple are kept; the wise wish to know everything, and are deceived." (J.N.D.). We are to be "wise unto that which is good and simple concerning evil" (Rom. 16: 19). Thus we have a striking picture of a flock of sheep wholly dependent upon the Shepherd. Sheep are foolish and feckless things, prone to wander, easily frightened and soon scattered. Left to themselves they would be in a hopeless plight. Under the guidance of the Shepherd, in spite of their weakness and folly, they will be safe. If they are hungry and faint, He is there to lead them into green pastures. Are they thirsty, He will lead them by still waters; have they to tread a rough bit of road, He is there to guide them in the way; does the wolf seek to attack the sheep, the Shepherd is there to protect. The Shepherd is there wholly devoted to the sheep, and the sheep are entirely dependent upon the Shepherd — "they know His voice," and flee from others. Such is the lovely picture of the Christian flock formed of believers, outside the Jewish camp, gathered to Christ.

Blinded by Jewish prejudices, the Lord's hearers "understood not what things they were which He spake unto them" (v. 6). Alas! it is still true that Christendom (including many true believers) fails to understand the Lord's allegory. Ignoring His teaching, Christendom has again formed folds after the Jewish order. Thus we find vast religious systems in which the sheep of Christ are linked up with unbelievers under the control of human heads, bound together by human ordinances. Thus, if Christendom has again formed itself into a religious camp, after the pattern of Judaism, the word still applies, "Let us go forth therefore *unto Him* without the camp" (Heb. 13: 13). Let us, however, remember that if we go forth from the camp, it is not simply to escape its evils, but to give Christ His place. We go forth "unto Him." Having left the camp we are not simply a company of believers left to our own devices, but under the guidance of Christ. Taking a place outside the religious organisations, it is still possible to walk in the light of these great truths and give Christ His place as the Shepherd of the sheep, and refusing every stranger voice, to look only to Christ as our great Leader — the One with all wisdom, love and power, to guide us through the wilderness and home to glory.

In the verses that follow, the Lord applies His allegory (7, 8); unfolds the blessings into which He leads His sheep (9); warns us of the dangers to which we are exposed (10-13); presents Himself as the great resource of the sheep in the presence of every foe (14, 15); tells us of the other sheep drawn from the Gentiles, to form with the Jewish sheep one flock. (1) In applying the allegory, the Lord tells us that He is the door of the sheep. God had set up the Jewish fold, and though man had corrupted it the godly remnant had no direction to leave the fold until Christ came. But Christ having come, and being rejected, the nation is left to pass on to judgment, and He is presented as the One sent of God to be a door of escape for the godly from the guilty nation. So after Christ was risen, Peter can present Christ as the One through whom believers could save themselves from this untoward generation (Acts 2: 40).

(2) The Shepherd is not only the door by which the sheep can escape from the corrupt Jewish fold, but He is the door into the positive Christian blessings. If "any one" (Jew or Gentile) enter by personal faith in Christ, into the new circle of blessing of which Christ is the centre, he will find salvation: — *i.e.*, salvation for his soul from sins and judgment, and then salvation from all the power of the enemy during the wilderness journey. Moreover, the sheep under the leading of the Shepherd will be brought into liberty, by which they can enter within the veil as worshippers, and go out to all the

world with the glad tidings. Further, under the leadership of Christ the sheep are fed, — they find pasture.

(3) The Lord warns us against the opposition we shall meet as we pass through this world. He speaks of the "thief," the "hireling," and the "wolf." Already the Lord has told us that the thief does not enter by the door; he breaks into the house secretly, unawares, and to rob. Later we are warned by Jude against "certain men who crept in unawares" amongst the people of God (Jude 4); and Peter warns against false prophets who privily shall bring in destructive heresies (2 Peter 2: 1). The hireling does not necessarily teach false doctrine, but he serves for wages. Peter warns us against shepherding the flock of God for "filthy lucre" (1 Peter 5: 2) and that there will arise those who "through covetousness" will "make merchandise" of the saints (2 Peter 2: 3). Christendom has largely fallen into the snare of the hireling. The hireling may profess to tend the sheep but his motive is self. Thus when danger arises, he thinks of his own safety and flees. The wolf comes to the flock in sheep's clothing. He makes a fair profession by which the saints are deceived. So the Apostle Paul can warn us that after his departure wolves would enter in among the saints "not sparing the flock" (Matt. 7: 15: Acts 20: 29). The wolf cannot seize the sheep out of the hand of the Shepherd but he can seize and scatter the sheep. Alas! what havoc these have wrought in the Christian profession! It is only as we give Christ His place as the Shepherd of the sheep that we shall escape their depredations. In contrast to the thief, that robs, Christ came to give life, and to give it abundantly in all its fulness. In contrast to the hireling who thinks only of himself and flees in the presence of danger, "the Good Shepherd" giveth His life for the sheep." He is not only "the Shepherd of the sheep" separating them from the Jewish fold, but He is also "the good Shepherd" devoted to the sheep. We may fail in following Him but He will never fail in devotedness to the sheep. This devoted love is seen in the Lord giving His life to save the sheep from the thief and the wolf.

(4) We find in Christ our one resource in the presence of all we have to meet. We have the blessed assurance that the One loves us unto death, is the One who knows us through and through. As the Lord can say, "I am the good Shepherd and *know* my sheep." He had been the Object of the Father's love as He passed through this world. In the same way the sheep are the objects of the Lord's love and care as they pass through this wilderness. How good to realise that He knows the sheep: He knows our trials, our difficulties, our sorrows, our circumstances, our weaknesses — all is known to Him! Moreover the sheep in their little measure know the Shepherd and confide in Him, as He, in the perfection of His way, trusted in the Father.

(5) In laying down His life for the sheep the Lord opens the door for His sheep from among the Gentiles. His sheep are not only found in the Jewish fold: He has a vast number among the Gentiles. They, too, must be brought out of heathen darkness into the Christian flock; they, too, will hear His voice and will form, with the sheep from the Jewish fold, one flock under One Shepherd.

Thus we have the Lord presented as "the Shepherd of the sheep" separating His sheep from an earthly religion; as the "Good Shepherd" devoted in love to the sheep; and as the "One Shepherd" uniting the sheep into one flock. Like Himself, He would have His flock to be *separate* from the corrupt religious profession, *devoted* to Himself and *united* to one another. This, then, is the beautiful picture of Christianity presented by the Lord. Alas! in Christendom we see little that answers to the teaching of the Lord. But the truth remains. It is still possible to refuse all that is contrary to it and seek to walk in the light of the Lord's teaching. This will only be possible as we have the Lord before us as "the Shepherd of the sheep," "the Good Shepherd," and the "One Shepherd." HAMILTON SMITH.