

Notes on John 10

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John 10:1-21 is a continuation of John 9: a) referring to the healing of the blind man (10:21). b) When it says in v.19 “At these words the Jews were *again* divided,” these must be the same people mentioned in 9:16. c) In no other place in this Gospel does Jesus *begin* any conversation with a “truly, truly” as He did in 10:1 – further evidence that 10 is a continuation of 9 and not a new beginning. d) However, what ties these chapters together is the theme of the care or abuse shepherds have for their flock. The shepherd rulers in 9:34 were brutal in their treatment of one of their sheep. The Good Shepherd shows in John 10 what a true shepherd is like. I think the Apostle John chose to make a sharp contrast by reporting the persecution of the believer in chapter 9 as typical of the stealing, killing, and destroying done by false shepherds in 10:10. We will understand John 10 better if we ignore the chapter division and read 10:1 as a continuation.

The Lord speaks of His substitutionary death for His sheep. Five times He mentions laying down His life for the sheep. Of the things the Good Shepherd will do for his sheep, nothing is given more mention by Christ than this.

Just as He clarified true children of Abraham in chapter 8, in this chapter He will define His sheep as those who hear His voice. This cuts out many proud Jewish rulers because they rejected Him. Israelites who reject the One sent by the God of Israel are simply not part of Israel! Members of His flock enter by faith and are recognized and identified by obedience.

The Lord Jesus is presented as both shepherd and gate. He is the true Shepherd Who leads and gives life to His flock; He is the Gate through Whom His own become members. John 10 expands on who those are who receive Him (1:12). The Lord’s new and enlarged flock will have other sheep (Gentiles) added; Christ *must* include them as well. They will hear His voice even if Jesus’ own people reject Him. These Gentiles – drawn to Christ (6:44) and sought by Him (Luke 19:10) – will come. As children born of God, they will listen; they will believe; they will follow. In John 1:9-13 the Apostle previews the opposite responses to Christ we should expect to find in this Gospel. In the events of John 9 & 10, the blind man received Jesus, while the false shepherds’ rejection is vigorous. Throughout this Gospel, one written to encourage faith, the hostile nature of unbelief receives a remarkable amount of attention.

10:1-6 The misunderstood figure of speech The Lord mentions shepherds of two kinds and implies there are sheep of two kinds. The analogy also included a sheep pen with a gate and an employee who worked there. The Pharisees (mentioned in 9:40, 41) did not understand His extended metaphor in this paragraph, just as they did not understand His words in 9:39. Later Jesus will say that He is the good shepherd and that those who follow Him are His flock.

10:1-3 (Note the placement of “truly, truly” above.) Two kinds of shepherds are contrasted. It is not necessary to look for some meaning for the hired watchman. The simple point is that he recognizes and opens to legitimate shepherds; false ones sneak in some other way. Probably sheep of different flocks share the same protection and location at night. Every morning shepherds appeared to take their flocks out to pasture. If the shepherd is genuine, he has no need to enter in a secret way. The man at the gate opens for legitimate shepherds who have sheep inside. The sad truth is that there are false shepherds, a theme stressed by the prophets of Israel, as in Ezekiel 34 below. They do not benefit the sheep, but as thieves and robbers they serve themselves.

10:3-5 It is not only the watchman who discerns whether a man coming for sheep had a right to do so; the sheep also recognize or reject the man approaching them. In a land familiar with shepherding, all these things Jesus said were familiar to them. What they did not grasp was how He applied these figures of speech. The sheep recognize their shepherd and follow Him, just as the blind man believed (9:38). He heard the Shepherd’s voice (5:25) and showed himself to be one of the Lord’s sheep. Jesus’ sheep listen to His voice (v.3) and follow because they know His voice. This paragraph is not about how to recognize false teachers; their character is described later. His sheep (by the working of God’s Spirit, 1 John 3:21 – 4:3) are discerning, so they follow the right shepherd. This defines who His sheep are.

Individual and Corporate Since the Lord Jesus calls His sheep by name v.3. He is not dealing with them only as a group but as individuals. In my opinion, whenever a church is so large that members of the congregation are unknown to the leadership, it is too large to function normally. Christ loves His church as a corporate body (Ephesians 5:25), while He still calls His individual sheep by name. There is an elect people (Deuteronomy 7:6,7), yet conversion results from an individual "call". Each one called is justified when each one believes. John 10:3,4 teaches that each sheep is called by name, thus each is distinct. Each one called responds with the result that Christ leads out "*all His own*" leaving none behind. His assignment from His Father was that He should lose not one (6:39).

10:7-10 The metaphors change. Since the identity of genuine sheep is being emphasized, in these verses Jesus presents Himself as the gate. Only those who are of His flock go in with Him through that gate or leave for pasture with Him through that gate. Those who enter His flock by means of Christ the Gate are His; they are saved. "Whoever enters" (v.9) shows that "outsiders" are allowed in. Again Jesus stresses that the true sheep reject every rival to Him. A number of false messiahs had made great claims and succeeded in gathering a following. (Today too, many false shepherds call for us to follow them.) The Lord's sheep did not listen to deceptive messiahs, but when God's Anointed One appeared, they heeded His call and entered His flock. Salvation is by entering the Christ Gate; those who do, join the people of God.

False Shepherds and Murder The majority of the Pharisees and other religious leaders counseled their people in strong language not to follow Jesus. Chapters 7-10, beginning with the Feast of Tabernacles, record events in the fall of the same year. In this segment, John repeatedly records the leaders' efforts to turn their sheep away from Christ (7:47-52; 8:48-59; 9:16,24; 10:20). By doing this, they were closing the gate to the only way their sheep could be saved. With false doctrine they were destroying the flock of Israel. Rejecting Christ by believing lies would ensure that their people would die in their sins (8:21-24). By following false shepherds, those who remained within the walls of Jerusalem, did so because they did not believe Jesus' warnings. They died in the Roman massacre in 70 AD. Jesus said of such teachers, "*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to*" (Matthew 23:13). Such shepherding brought death; Jesus' ministry brought life. The Lord described their effect on the flock as killing. Satan is a murderer. False teachers copy the actions of their "father the devil" (8:38,44), a liar who blinds the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4) to keep from them the truth of Christ. With the gospel, whenever He wishes, God in His new creation commands the light of the gospel to shine into blind minds. In this way He gives the knowledge of Himself in Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Christ made this connection of deceit and murder in chapters 8 & 10. His saving work is an absolute contrast from the false shepherds, since He is both truth and the life (14:6). The one seeking to take away the sheep for his own evil purposes comes to kill; Jesus came that we might have life (v.10). We are familiar with Satan's work of deceit which is reproduced in Satan's servants. The Lord described the work of false shepherds as killing and destroying (v.10).

The Perversion of John 10:10 – "the abundant life" Some suppose that Jesus was teaching in John 10:10 that believers have eternal life, and that in addition to that, He came so His people might live in material prosperity. Some seeking to prosper financially from this teaching make the poor who listen to them even more poor! There are many reasons to reject this strange notion. Among them is the observation that if that were so, Jesus is a great failure, since so many of His people are poor and remain poor. This misinterpretation has no basis in the context. It is probably an example of people looking for what they wish to find in the Bible. John uses variety in the way he repeats basic themes, thus "faith" in this Gospel has a number of synonyms. Likewise life is often described as *eternal* life. We might suppose that it refers only to duration, so the Lord used another word to show the richness of the life He gives. This word (as a verb) is used twice in 2 Corinthians 9:8 for *abounding* grace and *abounding* good works. The life Jesus came to give is that we may know God (17:3). Those who inject the sense of material abundance into the Lord's words suffer from an impatience that is opposed to the contentment taught in Hebrews 13:5.

10:11-13 Shepherd & Savior When Jesus presented Himself as the Good Shepherd, He drew attention to His ministry. He not only prevents the wolf killing His own, He sacrificed His life for them.

First, as Shepherd Jesus is again revealing His deity. He acts as a shepherd because He is the Shepherd. It is essential that we read the NT in the light of previous Scripture. The words “I Am” are consistent with His claim of deity in 8:58. His title “Shepherd” is the language of God describing Himself as the Shepherd of Israel (Psalm 23:1; 80:1). The NT also speaks of Christ as the Chief and Great Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4, Hebrews 13:20). In light of OT affirmations of the Lord as the Shepherd of God’s people, it would be blasphemous for Jesus to speak this way of Himself if He were not the Lord God of Israel.

Second, as Sacrifice The sheep are sinful and a sacrifice must be made for them. In John 10 our sinfulness is not reviewed, but the sacrifice is. When the Lord spoke, He never gave all aspects of truth on one occasion. He does say the sheep will be saved which is also a salvation from our sin, as well as the power of the enemy. Five times in John 10, Jesus referred to His death on the cross as giving or laying down His life (vv.11,15,17, & twice in v.18). The only time He gave up His life was in the crucifixion. Because *He* laid it down, it was a willing act; His life was not taken from Him. Then the Lord stressed that His death had specific beneficiaries. He laid down His life *for His sheep*. In this chapter His sheep are limited to those who enter through Him, so He is not making a reference to every person on earth. In chapter 17 Jesus was explicit that He was not praying for the world. That prayer was priestly intercession, so it would not make sense to reason that the next day our Priest offered a sacrifice for those He refused to pray for the preceding evening! The solution is simple: “*The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep*” (v.11).

Substitutionary Atonement In Mark 10:45 the Lord said, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” In that statement the Lord used two prepositions. One means *for* as “for the sake of”; the other means “in the place of”. The Apostle Paul likewise uses both in 1 Timothy 2:6. (In both verses – Mark 10:45 and 1 Timothy 2:6 – one of the prepositions is part of the verb *ransom*.) Since the death of Christ is a) for the sheep, and b) the sheep deserve death for their sins, and c) by the blood of Christ we are redeemed from our own destruction, we must conclude that the death of Christ was substitutionary. He took our place under the wrath of God, receiving for us and in our place the punishment due to us.

In the Lord’s analogies, others bring harm to the sheep. The thief/robber with evil intent comes to destroy, while the hired man runs to save himself from the wolf. He cares only for his paycheck. In contrast, the Good Shepherd loves His sheep (John 13:1; 15:13) and gives His life for them. Pastoral work must recognize and counter the approach of the devil’s wolves to God’s flock (Acts 20:28-32; 1 Peter 5:1-11). The sheep do not belong to the hired man; they belong to Christ and the Lord knows His own (v.14). Belonging to Christ is the privileged position of every believer. This truth demands great commitment to the well-being of all our fellow Christians. To be a pastor is to share in the ministry of the Good Shepherd.

10:14,15 The intimacy of our relationship with Christ is in possessive language – “my own”. This time in the first person it is, “*I lay down My life.*” Further, He says we know Him. Seeing Him is not necessary to knowing and loving Him, but believing in Him is (1 Peter 1:8). Knowing someone we have never seen shows that this is a spiritual work done in us. Just as the Lord spoke of Israel in Exodus 33:12, when He came in human flesh He speaks the same way calling each of His own by name (v.3). What He does with the stars (Isaiah 40:26), He does with His children. The sheep also *know* Him, as new covenant promises that “all shall know Me” are fulfilled in us (Jeremiah 31:34). Experiencing fellowship with God is eternal life already begun (17:3). We were made in God’s image for fellowship with Him. This communion with God was lost in the fall, but the Good Shepherd Who knows His sheep, brings us to know the Lord again.

The knowledge the sheep and Shepherd have is like that of the Father and the Son. It is surprising that the Lord would say this, since God’s knowledge is infinite and transcendent, and Their fellowship is sinless. That intimate knowledge – i.e., of one divine Person with Another – is the foundation of our coming to know the Lord, as vv.17,18 make clear. It is also a foretaste of the eternal fellowship when God and man will walk together again (Revelation 21:3). Peter was present to hear all that John reports in chapter 10; he too speaks much of the believer knowing God in 2 Peter 1:1-8 & 3:18.

10:16 And I have other sheep [Gentiles] that are not of this fold [Israel]. I must bring them [Gentiles] also, and they [Gentiles] will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock [of Israel & the Church], one shepherd [Christ].

The other sheep that Christ has are the Gentiles; they are strangers to the covenants of promise; they are excluded from citizenship in Israel, separate from Christ, and without God (Ephesians 2:12). They are far from the sheep pen of the Good Shepherd. The Lord Jesus says He must bring them also. He *must* because it is His Father's assignment to Him (Isaiah 49:5,6; Zechariah 2:11). Doing His Father's will is the food on which Jesus lives (4:34). This shows that missionary work is not an option to the church but a matter of doing the will of God.

He says of these future believers that He *has* them, thus they are already His sheep. So it is certain that they will come by listening to His voice when the gospel is proclaimed to them. For this reason missionary work is never futile. These "other sheep" are also among those the Father has given Him (6:37-40). God can speak of having those He will yet save, as we read in Acts 18:10, when He told Paul prior to saving them, "I have many people in this city." In Acts 18:5 after Jewish rejection of the gospel, Paul turned to evangelize "other sheep," the Gentiles! After facing difficulty, the Lord spoke to him in a vision to encourage him. Part of that encouragement was that word that He had many people in that city (Acts 18:9,10). In Acts 13:44-52, Paul had spoken of their ministry to Gentiles as commanded by God in Isaiah 49:6. They were to be "*a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.*" Thus the Lord Jesus, Who promised to be with His servants till the end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20), was bringing in other sheep who were not of the original sheep pen. He was fulfilling His words in John 10:16.

The result of this salvation going to the ends of the earth is that all the gathered sheep will be one flock under one Shepherd. This raises in our day one of the perplexing differences of viewpoint among serious Christians over the relationship of the church of Christ and the nation of Israel. (Not the modern nation, Israel, but the people of God prior to the coming of Christ). See [Appendix 10A One People or Two?](#) for a longer review of this subject. My conclusion is that the one flock Jesus meant includes Gentiles once excluded from citizenship in Israel, and then in Christ admitted to Israel as fellow citizens (Ephesians 2:12 & 19).

The Contrast of Shepherds in Ezekiel 34

- 34:1-6 The Lord complains that Israel's shepherds care for themselves, not the flock. They consume the sheep under their care and treat them harshly and brutally, just as it was with the blind man in John 9.
- 34:7-10 The Lord swears – an unusual thing, not often found in Scripture (Hebrews 3:11 & 6:13) – to remove those false shepherds and to rescue His flock.
- 34:11-22 The Lord will personally intervene to do for His flock what the other shepherds should have done and did not. He will not neglect them. He will actively seek the lost (v.16). (See Luke 19:10.)
- 34:23 The key prediction is: "*I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David...*" The way the Lord will shepherd His flock is through the Shepherd He would send, the Son of David, the Lord Jesus. After this replacement Shepherd (Christ) arrived, He said, "*I have come that they might have life...*" John 10:10.
- 34:23,24 The Father switches from speaking of Himself to Christ. The way the Lord fulfills His promise is to intervene for His sheep through Christ as their Good Shepherd.
- 34:25-31 The results of salvation are peace and security. Israel will then know that the Lord is their God and they are His sheep.

Commentary This prophecy emphasizes the role of Christ as the "one shepherd" God will place over His people (v.23). The result of His ministry (which in John 10 includes laying down His life for the sheep) is a covenant of peace (v.25). The climax of Ezekiel 34 is that the House of Israel will know that the Lord is with them and that they are His sheep. John 10:16 is simply a NT statement of the same truth with notable parallels: one shepherd and one flock. The flock into which Gentile believers enter is the House of Israel.

10:17,18 The Father loves the Son for His obedience unto death (Philippians 2:8). He was authorized by the Father to make such a sacrifice, and He obeyed His Father's command. This obedience was seen in Gethsemane in His devotion to His Father's will (Luke 22:42). His submission to His Father (note: *of my own accord*, v.18) concerning His sacrifice, was the motivation for His coming into the world (Hebrews 10:7). Obedience was produced throughout Jesus' human life through suffering. By that obedience He qualified to be the Priest Who

could offer Himself as a perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 5:7-10; 7:27). The Father had assigned a task to Christ that no one else on earth could bear, yet the Lord Jesus Christ obediently pursued His path to the cross that His Father had set for Him (Luke 9:51; Matthew 16:21; John 12:27,28). Usually we read that the Father raised the Son (Acts 2:24). Here, as in 2:19, we have the less usual word that He took up the life He laid down. At times people sought to kill Jesus; all attempts failed (5:18; 8:59; 10:31-39; Luke 4:28-30) till the day Jesus surrendered Himself to the hands of His captors (John 18:4-8). No one took His life from Him, and in His Father's chosen time He took it back.

10:19-21 Many thought that Jesus speaking of laying down His life (which anyone can do) and taking it up again (which no man can do) was the speech of a madman. John reports many insults of those rejecting Him. (See Hebrews 12:3.) Yet there was no uniform assessment of Christ. Some could not escape the significance of His miraculous works (10:37,38). All the research the Pharisees pursued had only proven that the blind man had been blind from birth, and they knew it was Jesus Who had healed him. Such a wonder was not the kindness of a demon. The Lord taught in Matthew 13:3-9; 13:18-23 that we too will face a variety of responses when sowing the seed of God's Word. John 9 & 10 supports the principle: as it was with the Master, so will it be with His servants (John 15:20).

They were divided (9:16; 10:19), and the world today is still divided. Some day Christ will be seen even by those who crucified Him (Zechariah 12:10; John 19:37) and condemned Him to death (Mark 14:61,62). Then all shall know Who He really is, and all shall bow and every mouth will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:9-11). By exalting Christ, the Father will show the universe His love for His Son (10:17). Till that Day there will not be and cannot be on this earth a united humanity. Only when all Christ-rejecters are removed, and the full number of His sheep is gathered under one Shepherd, will there be peace on earth. Meanwhile, expect division and strife.

John 10:22-42 It is obvious from v.22 that the remainder of John 10 is at a later time than the previous verses. At times in this Gospel, John uses feasts to show a progression in time; now in chapter 10 the narrative comes ever closer to the crucifixion. Some events are a year apart in John 4, 5, & 6, but in John 7 – 10 the reported events come closer together. The Feast of Tabernacles (chapter 7) is in the fall and this Feast of Dedication was only a few weeks later in early winter. Though the time is later by a few weeks, the analogy of sheep and shepherd reappears. It is clear that these are different occasions, though Jesus may have been talking to the same people in both parts of John 10.

Jesus' enemies challenge Him concerning two key titles in John 10:22-39. The Jews asked for a straight reply whether He is **the Christ**, and were angry that the Son of God said He was **the Son of God**. These are the two descriptions of Christ that John uses in his summary statement of this Gospel in 20:30,31, and that Martha used in her confession (11:27). Note Matthew 26:63 where it also uses both.

Both confessions by Christ in John 10 stirred a strong reaction, including attempted murder. Certainly His own people did not receive Him (1:11). Controversy was frequent in the days building up to the cross. The Lord was greatly hated, yet within this atmosphere of hostility, He continued to teach in words that have fed our souls for all the centuries since. Words said during this controversy have been preserved for us to treasure. He taught in this short section of our security in His hands and the Father's. He proclaimed again His unique unity with His Father. He showed unbelievers how they could discern the truth of His claims, a basic prerequisite for faith. Jesus' evangelistic work continued in the face of hatred, misunderstanding, contention, and rejection. This chapter shows that evangelism can be done in the face of hostility.

In this brief section is a statement about Scripture that ought to be known far better than it is. Our view of the Bible should be the view that Jesus had, and here is one of the places where He reveals that.

10:22,23 the time and place The Feast of Dedication is not mandated in the OT. It celebrates one of the highest moments in all of Jewish history, an event in the years between the Old and New Testaments. The Jews rebelled against the extreme cruelty of a pagan king who had desecrated their temple by offering a pig on the altar of the Lord. The Jews succeeded in driving the Gentile power out and restored the worship of the Lord in His holy temple. Thus the term *Feast of Dedication* marks this joyful time. Known today as Hanukkah, the feast

began on the 25th day of that early winter month. Possibly related to colder weather Jesus was approached in a more sheltered place. He was not teaching a crowd at the time.

10:24 the question: “Are you the Christ?” A group approached and demanded of Jesus a straight answer whether He was the Christ. There is no record that Jesus ever used this title for Himself in a public context, prior to the time of the crucifixion. He did tell the Samaritan woman that he was the Christ in 4:25,26. Then in private with His disciples in Matthew 16:13-20, He affirmed that He was the Christ, but He would not permit them to tell that to others.

What Kind of Messiah? Some Bible teachers think the reason Jesus did not publicly refer to Himself as the Messiah, was that the Jewish people had views of what the Messiah should be that were so different from the Scriptures. They wanted a political savior to deliver them from Rome, one who would fight with the weapons of men (note Luke 22:38-51), who would feed them and rule as king (6:15). They had no understanding that they needed a Savior who would die in great humiliation to bring great glory to God. As the true Messiah, He would deliver His people from their real enemies: sin, Satan, and death by His sacrifice. Though they would not like it, the full manifestation of His kingdom would wait a long time until He gathered in a vast number of Gentiles. None of this was of interest to the Messiah-seekers of Jesus’ day. They did not know that it was God Who had set up Rome for its brief day of power (19:11). (See also Daniel 2:36; 4:17; 4:25; 4:32.) Rome would be replaced in God’s time (Acts 1:6,7) by the eternal kingdom of the Messiah that will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:13,14). This would all occur in a context of much suffering by His people (Acts 14:22) before entering a kingdom of great glory (Titus 2:13; Jude 24).

10:25-30 the answer Jesus answered their question without using the precise words they were looking for. He did not say for them, “I am the Messiah.” When He said, “I did tell you,” it means He had given them sufficient to know whether He was the Messiah.¹ They already had more than His words, because those who questioned Him were observers of His works, plus they had the OT Scriptures. The Apostle John in this Gospel reviews multiple indications that Christ was from God, sufficient to show He is the Messiah. From the Lord’s lips in that part of the temple area where they stopped Him, He gave the strong reply of 10:37,38. John 5:30-47 is a detailed statement of evidence for Who He was. His *action* in His Father’s House was a kind of claim that He was the Son of God, a term Jesus did use of Himself publicly (5:25). Often He said He was the One sent by God, an accurate description of the Messiah’s role. They already had ample answer from Him, because the works of God are also a kind of “speech” without words (Psalm 19:1-4 and Romans 10:18).

10:26,27 an explanation of unbelief They could look at Jesus’ works and not believe. This shows the blindness (2 Corinthians 4:4) and deceitfulness (Jeremiah 17:9) of the human heart. It believes and rejects what it wishes. Sin is more than self-deceit, it brings bondage rather than the will being free to do what it should. Adam chose a new master when He obeyed Satan, and Satan holds his victims in a powerful grip. Man’s salvation depends entirely on the intervention of God to bind “the strong man” (Mark 3:23-27). Christ acts to free, ransom, deliver, and save. Those He has chosen to rescue are again called His sheep. (For a fuller discussion see below Appendix 10 B Jesus’ Teaching in John 10 on Election and Related Doctrines.)

10:27 the sheep will follow In our day, the church has been damaged greatly by a doctrine that asserts that one may be a genuine Christian, and still live in sin without repentance. All that is needed is to believe, whether one accepts Jesus as Lord or not. This is a doctrine that one may have justification (which includes forgiveness) while not having sanctification (which deals with spiritual transformation and conduct). Jesus taught that His sheep will follow; the carnal Christian doctrine says, they may or may not, but if they have believed they are still His sheep, eternally safe. See below Appendix 10 C: The Carnal Christian. When the sheep listen, it means they hear the Lord obediently; they follow – all of them. Anyone who will not follow is not one of His sheep, and will find that out on the Judgment Day. We never become Christians by following; instead we follow because we are.

¹ *Messiah* and *Christ* are the same word. *Messiah* is Hebrew, and *Christ* is Greek for “the Anointed One”. Anointed means the One eternally chosen and then publicly appointed by God to be the King of Israel, the Mediator for His people, the Priest who would serve forever, and the ultimate Prophet to make the Father known.

10:28 the sheep are safe If they have eternal life, they shall never perish. These are simply two sides of the same coin, and the Lord stated them together. In John 6:39, the Lord said He would lose none. That looks at this from the angle of the assignment His Father gave Him, an assignment the Lord Jesus could not fail to fulfill. Now in John 10, from a different angle, He adds that He loses none because no enemy is capable of taking His sheep from Him. The power of Christ guards against the Evil One (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

10:29,30 the reference to the Father We would expect that being assured that no one can snatch His sheep from His hand would be adequate assurance. But since Jesus came to make the Father known, He encouraged by speaking also of the Father's commitment (see Colossians 3:3). A number of themes converge: the eternal purpose, the unity of God, the role of the Father and Son, and the commitment of the Persons in the Trinity to our eternal salvation.

This is the second of the three occasions in John where Jesus said that His people are the gift the Father had already given Him even before their conversion! (See the notes on 6:37,39.) Since the Father and Son have this eternal agreement (or covenant) between them, both share the commitment to see it fulfilled. Our salvation is not Jesus acting on His own, or even with only the permission of the Father. The Father has a greater role as the Head in the Trinity. Thus our salvation is at His initiative with the Son's full and obedient cooperation to be the Redeemer of God's elect. When we see the Son at work, we are always seeing the Father at work (John 14:10,11). The Father sent the Son. He does all that the Father does (5:19,20). Even though the Father and the Son have different identities (the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father), it is fully proper to say of the entire ministry of Jesus that this was the Father at work through Him. (2 Corinthians 5:19 is an example of this.) That is the unity of the Father and the Son. All that belongs to the Father belongs to Christ (John 16:15).

The ones yearning to hear if Jesus would say He was the Messiah received an answer that went beyond their question. Christ affirmed unity with God, not as another God beside God, nor simply as one who shared God's purpose, but One united to Him as Eternal Son to Eternal Father, sharing fully the same essence. The Word was with God and the Word was God. Our unity with the Lord is not a unity of equals; Jesus' unity with the Father is. Our unity is imperfect in practice, not thoroughly understood by us, and has a beginning. The unity of Father and Son has no such limitation or qualification. Christ and the Father are one.

10:31-32 the reaction When the Jews picked up stones (see 8:59), it was not because Jesus claimed a unity with God in purpose. That is the kind of unity they too would profess for themselves. They sought to stone Him because they grasped what He was really saying. In 5:17,18 the leaders could see that calling God "My Father" implied equality with Him, and for that reason there was eagerness to kill Him. Therefore when Jesus said, "I and the Father are one," those who spoke His language and heard His words understood this as a claim to deity. In Mark 14:61,62, Jesus affirmed that He was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, and the Son of Man Who would someday come on the clouds of heaven. That confession was also viewed as blasphemy because it was so clearly a statement that He is God. The penalty for blasphemy was death by stoning (Leviticus 24:13-16).

The Lord replied by drawing attention to another way He made the Father known. He used not only words but works. What is wrong with healing a man on the Sabbath who had lain there for thirty-eight years? What is so evil about healing the man born blind, or (later than John 10) raising Lazarus from the dead? These are specific miracles reported in this Gospel which happened in or close to Jerusalem. It is not difficult to see why there is no reply to Jesus' question. (Those who suspect that it is unspiritual to use logic should observe how rational the reasoning of Jesus was.)

As happened so often, Jesus' enemies avoided His question (see Matthew 22:41-45; Mark 10:17-22; 11:27-33; 12:13-17). They made no reply about His works. How could they admit that they might stone Him for good works? Later in 11:47-53, they decided to kill Him to stop His miracles.

10:33 the second charge Next they turned to challenge Him for saying that He was the Son of God (5:19-26). They probably wanted to hear Him say He was the Messiah so they could intensify their charges against Him. In spite of all the good works of great power, they assumed He was only a man claiming falsely to be God. With such a hardened view, they felt no need to weigh the evidence before them.

10:34-36 the defense Jesus' reply is full of surprise especially to us so many years later. First, it is a simple correction; the OT uses the word *god* for others than God! The NT uses the word for the devil in 2Corinthians 4:4! "God" is not a name for the Lord, but a title that means a leader or authority; it is often used for idols. In Psalm 82:1 & 6 the word "gods" refers to angels and human leaders. Jesus simply points out that the word does not always mean the Lord God of Israel. He was speaking to people who prided themselves on their knowledge of Scripture. Then Jesus asked if that word *god* could be used of lesser beings in Scripture, why would they accuse Him of blasphemy for using it? He had shown them good works that were all from the Father (v.32), which was evidence that the Father had set Jesus apart as His very own (v.36). If such a Person as that said He is the Son of God, their duty was to believe. Instead they accused Him of blasphemy.

Scripture cannot be broken With these words, Jesus showed His high regard for Scripture. He did not indicate that He simply agreed with the verse He quoted; He shows He accepted whatever was in Scripture because Scripture is God's Word. (At this time the word "Scripture" would refer only to the books of the Old Testament, because none of the NT had been written.) It is not that the OT simply is without error, but that it could not be wrong. We say, "Anyone can make a mistake!" But that is the very kind of thing Christ says cannot apply to the Scriptures; they cannot be wrong because they are not only the writings of the men who wrote them; they are at the same time the words of God. There is as much chance of the words that come from God being wrong, as there is that God might be wrong! None!

The Lord made this strong statement in the context of what seems to be a minor point. Jesus' enemies said He was wrong to apply the word *God* to Himself. Jesus showed that in one verse the word *god* is used for humans. It was not a mistake for the Scripture to do that. It could not be a mistake. The Holy Spirit had the Psalmist use that word that way. The Scripture cannot be proven wrong. Jesus' words have many applications. The Bible's predictions cannot possibly fail to be fulfilled in precisely the way they are stated. There is no error of science, history, theology, ethics or emphasis. In every line of the Bible, it was God's deliberate choice of what to include and what to omit, and to give as much to any topic as He chose. Thus the genealogies deliberately save the names of a multitude of persons we do not know, and pass over revealing many things about which we are very curious.

Jesus said that Psalm 110 was "David, speaking by the Spirit" (Matthew 22:43). He said not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18). With statements like these the Lord Jesus showed that He believed the Scriptures to be reliable, accurate, and the work of the Holy Spirit directing the choice of words – faithful right to the letters which composed those words!

10:37,38 the challenge This conversation began with a question about the word Messiah, and continued with an accusation of blasphemy. He gave them a vigorous reply. Jesus spoke of the significance of His works. He admitted that if He did not do what His Father did – God acting as God! – that would give them some room for not believing. But the miracles were well-known, observable, historical reality. The leaders looked for a way to escape the testimony of the miracles, but when they could not deny that the miracles had happened, they simply refused to believe anyway. The good works of Christ are God in Christ showing Himself in a convincing way. The rejection of Christ, His works, and the Father Who sent him shows the nature of the sinful heart. Jesus did not ask for a "leap of faith". He did not ask people to believe without a reason, because faith is in the certainty of God's Word and action. True faith is not irrational. They would not believe what they had been given, so they were denied more.

10:39 the rejection continued Nothing changed; they picked up stones to stone Him in v.31 (see also 7:30), but He answered their charges and made a further appeal to believe. They still tried to seize Him. Note that there was no rational response to His replies, just more heated rejection.

10:40-42 the transition Going far across the Jordan River to stay for a while, Jesus was away from the hostility centered in Jerusalem. Speaking of this exact location was the Apostle John's way to complete a section of this Gospel. He began (1:28) and ended with John baptizing in Bethany to the east of the Jordan River – which is not the Bethany mentioned in 11:1. John the Baptist's powerful witness and baptizing work had affected many in that area. John was a lamp that shone and some were still paying attention to that light after he died (5:35). In the next section of this Gospel, the narrative is of Jesus again near Jerusalem very close to the time of the crucifixion.

John the Baptist had been dead for some time, yet his testimony of Christ was still in the memory of people beyond the Jordan. (See the notes at 1:28 for more on the location.) John said many things in his call for repentance, but the core of His ministry was to identify the Lord Who was coming (1:7; 1:30) and in John's time had appeared (1:29-34). The people who heard John remembered this, and so when they came to Jesus (a way John the Apostle liked to speak), they saw that the Baptist's witness was true. Many believed. After the resurrection, the Lord appeared to more than 500 brothers at once (1 Corinthians 15:6). Probably some of the 500 believed during this last visit of Jesus across the Jordan.

God did not allow His servant the Baptist to have a greater ministry than Jesus (3:25-30). Even though he was a very great prophet, John never performed a miracle. God can use a Spirit-filled (Luke 1:15) ministry of preaching apart from supernatural signs. God had reserved miracles for the later ministry of Christ and His disciples.

Appendix 10 A: One People or Two?

How should we understand John 10:16?

One People or Two? I suppose that it ought to be obvious that salvation to the Gentiles results in one people of God. That is the simple reading of John 10:16. However, many sincere Christians [among them the majority of my relatives and very many of my closest friends] insist that we ought to maintain a distinction so as never to consider the church and Israel as the same people. The viewpoint is that there are two distinct programs of God, and that the current program in operation is the church age. A number have said that this age of grace (or the church age) is not foretold in the OT. It asserts as well that the program for Israel will resume once the church is removed from the earth in the rapture. (The rapture is the coming of Christ for the church only, not Israel.) They mean that the dead in Christ* who rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) are only those who are part of the church, *not* Israel. Saints such as Abraham, Moses, and Daniel will remain in their graves until a later resurrection. I think that view of the Lord's coming is difficult to reconcile with Hebrews 11:39,40. We will not be made perfect *apart from* each other in time. Since Jesus said there would be one Shepherd and one flock, surely He will not return to raise only one part of His unified flock.

* One rather serious problem with saying that the OT saints are not *in Christ* relates to the two different representations in Romans 5:12-19: being in Adam or in Christ. *In Christ* means we are represented by Him and united to Him. To be in Adam is to be without salvation, and to be in Christ is the only way to have salvation. Moses, who chose reproach for Christ (Hebrews 11:26), was surely "in Christ." OT saints had to be in Christ, or they could not be saved.

Q. 1 Does the OT foretell that in the present time Gentiles would be added to the people of God?

Answer: Yes. When God promised in Isaiah 49:8 to restore Israel in a time of favor, a "day of salvation," Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:2 that that was the time when he was writing. My brothers who differ from me consider the time of Paul's ministry as within *the church age*, yet Paul indicates that the promised day of salvation in Isaiah 49 was *now*. Thus the present age was predicted in the OT.

Q. 2 Do believing Gentiles become part of Israel?

Answer: Yes, Gentiles are not forever excluded from the house of Jacob; Isaiah 14:1,2 looks forward to a day when they will join it. Anyone who like Ruth joins the house of Jacob becomes part of Israel. "*The Sovereign LORD declares – he who gathers the exiles of Israel: 'I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered'*" (Isaiah 56:8).

Ephesians 2 may be the most explicit statement. Gentiles once excluded from citizenship in Israel (v.12) become fellow citizens of Israel (v.19). They are admitted in Christ as members (v.19) and are joined together (*together* means Jews and Gentiles together) in a holy temple (v. 21). The cornerstone of this spiritual temple is Christ Jesus (v.20). God provided and laid the tested stone (Christ) as the precious cornerstone for a sure foundation (Isaiah 28:16). This foundation of the church includes apostles and prophets (v.20). Yet Isaiah 28:16 says the cornerstone has been laid *in Zion*. Thus, it is within Israel and not apart from it that the church of Jews and

Gentiles has been formed by God's Spirit. According to Ephesians 3:6, Gentiles are fellow-heirs with believing Israel, *members of the same body* (Israel) from which they were once excluded, according to Ephesians 2, when they were separate from Christ. This *same body* is the church.

The Gentiles have been made partakers of the promise made to Israel (Ephesians 3:6). The promises to the patriarchs (Romans 15:8) included that in Abraham all families would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Christ became the servant to confirm these promises that the Gentiles might glorify God and rejoice *with His people* (Romans 15:8-12). All who believe in the God of Abraham become his children (Romans 4:16). The result is a united family no longer divided as Jew and Gentile (Galatians 3:28,29).

In Romans 11:11-24, Paul speaks of wild Gentile branches (the branches are individual Gentiles) being grafted into the cultivated olive tree of Israel, when as outsiders they believed. Jews who believe will be grafted back into the olive tree of their heritage. At no point does Paul's analogy allow for two trees or two peoples of God.

In 1 Peter 2:4-10, Peter speaks of Christ as the Stone laid in Zion. Note both Paul and Peter interpret Isaiah 28:16 as fulfilled in the church even though the foundation of the church is laid in Zion. The Cornerstone of the foundation is Christ. Believers are living stones of this building in Zion. Those who reject Christ are not part of the spiritual house. The chosen people of Peter's day (a time some call "the church age") are called "*a holy nation, a people belonging to the Lord.*" When Peter called the believers of his day a holy nation and a people, he used the words of Exodus 19:6 where God calls Israel "*a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*". Exodus 19:3 says, "*These are words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.*" Yet Peter applied those words to the church. The church must be the same nation and people. All one needs to do to become part of this holy nation, is to come to the Living Stone (1 Peter 2:4). Throughout the Bible, there is only one holy nation! When Gentiles believed in Christ, they became part of that nation of which Zion is the center. Once Gentiles were not a people of God, but now in Christ they are (1 Peter 4:10). (See also Romans 9:24-26.)

In the notes at John 10:16 above there is a box on Ezekiel 34. That prophecy emphasizes the role of Christ as the "one shepherd" God sets over His people. The first coming of Christ fulfilled this prophecy. The result is that the House of Israel will know that the Lord is with them and that they are His sheep. They never cease being the House of Israel (Ezekiel 34:30). When Jesus brings in the *other sheep* of John 10:16, those other sheep were simply added to the House of Israel under one Shepherd. John 10:16 in the NT and Ezekiel 34 in the OT both speak of Christ as the Shepherd and the flock in Ezekiel is only the House of Israel. There is no other flock into which Jesus brings His sheep.

Gentiles in this age brought into the new covenant. Every time we partake of the cup in the Lord's Supper, we have indicated our inclusion in the benefits of the new covenant, for Jesus said that the cup was the new covenant in His blood (Luke 22:20). This new covenant, of which Christ is Mediator, has made the first one obsolete (Hebrews 8:6,13). This is a fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:31-37, where the new covenant will be made *with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*. Yet when this new covenant was inaugurated and instituted, it began with the apostles of the church the night the Lord was betrayed. It is impossible to be brought into such a covenant unless one is being made part of the people to whom it was promised. The *one flock* teaching of John 10:16 has very solid support in the rest of Scripture.

The Lord Jesus is the Son of David. Thus He is the King of Israel and the promised Shepherd, though the false shepherds looked on his claim with disdain (John 19:19-22). John 9 shows the false shepherds slaughtering one of their own sheep, one that Christ had come to save. Of course, the kingdom over which the King of Israel reigns is Israel. We enter this kingdom in a new birth (3:3,5). When we are united to Christ, we are united to the King of Israel, so no believer can possibly be outside that holy nation He rules.

Q. 3 Will the OT saints of Israel and the believers in the church share a common future?

Answer: Yes. (Note reference to Hebrews 11:39,40 above.) The Lord spoke of the future in Matthew 8:5-13. He had healed the servant of a Gentile Roman military officer. Jesus marveled at the faith of the centurion since He had seen no faith like it in Israel. Then Christ predicted that in the final day many Gentiles would come. His contrast was that sons of the kingdom (i.e., Jews who do not believe) will be cast out, while those from east and west (i.e., outsiders to Israel) will eat with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the future kingdom of heaven. Just as He

contrasted the faith of the centurion with faith in Israel, He contrasted the destinies of Gentile believers and Jewish unbelievers. When Gentile believers in the future sit to eat with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it shows that they have been admitted into the fellowship as members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19).

Re. The New Jerusalem In Galatian 4:25,26 there are two Jerusalems. From Isaiah 54:1 Paul speaks of Jerusalem as the mother of believers. Believers have already come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22), the heavenly country God prepared for Abraham (Hebrews 11:16). He looked for the same city we look for (Hebrews 11:10). In Revelation 21:10-14 this city is the home of believing Israel and the church. The gates have the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the foundations have the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. That we have a common destiny is clear.

Q. 4 What difference does it make?

Answer: Accepting that God has one people gives a clearer sense of history. OT prophecies are not detached from the current agenda of God. This is crucial to understanding our time and our ministry role in it. Prophecies related to the coming of Christ and life in the eternal city, are all part of one divine program for all His people. As heirs of the same promises, we are not left wondering if some OT truth or promise applies maybe to us or maybe to them. That kind of distinction confuses. The encouragement of John 10:16 is that Christ with certainty will bring about the gathering of all His sheep into one fold under one Shepherd. This is exactly what the OT taught, and every time some soul is saved today, the prophecy spelled out in both Ezekiel 34 and John 10 is being fulfilled.

Appendix 10 B

Jesus' Teaching in John 10 on Election and Related Doctrines

My Father gave them to Me (v.29); You do not believe because you are not part of my flock (v.26); I lay down my life for the sheep (v.15); my sheep hear my voice (v.27); they follow me (v.27); they will never perish (28).

Few issues are as controversial among Christians as the question of election. The Bible teaches this doctrine in many places. It may use the nouns *election* and *predestination*. In the Gospel of John, the word *predestination* does not appear. In John the Lord used the verb *choose* (*eklego*) four times – all of which appear in the Upper Room the night He was betrayed (13:18; 15:16; 15:19). The chief ways election is taught in John is (a) by reference to those the Father had given to Christ, and (b) by attention to its effects, because election results in a positive response to the gospel.

A. His Sheep in Advance

In John 10 Jesus shows that He has a select group who are His and shall become His:

- He calls them *His* sheep.
- He knows them
- He teaches that whether they are His sheep will determine in advance whether or not they will believe, because His sheep will, and the others will not.
- He says they are ones the Father has given to Him.

1. He calls them His sheep. In vv. 4, 14, 16 & 27, His sheep are called *His* (v.4), *all His own* (v.4), and *My sheep* (v.27). He says, “*I have other sheep*” (v.16). This possessive language is consistent: If He *has* them then they are His. In v.16 Jesus referred to some He would later bring in as being His sheep even before they believed.

2. He knows them The way *know* is used in the languages of the Bible reveals activity and commitment. Of course Christ knew everything as factual information about all men. He knew what His enemies were

thinking in Matthew 12:25, yet He said of the disobedient in Matthew 7:23, "I never knew you." In that sense, for Jesus to know His sheep indicates that He claims, embraces them, or reaches for them prior to their faith in Him. Thus their response is to His knowing them. When God said in Amos 3:2, "*You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth...*" (NIV), the word for *chosen* is the Hebrew word for "known".

3. Only the sheep will believe. "You do not believe because you are not my sheep" (v.26). This is the negative way to state it. It implies that those who are His sheep will listen because in some sense they are His before they believe. That same point in v.4 is in positive terms: "His sheep follow him because they know his voice." Certain persons will not believe *because* they are not His sheep, and certain ones will *because* they are. They did not appoint themselves to be His sheep, so there must be another factor that explains this. That factor is stated in v.29.

4. His sheep are those the Father has given "*My Father, who has given them to me ...*" v.29 The only ones who will believe are those who have been given in advance to Christ by the Father. In John 6:35-45 the ones the Father *has given Me* is a description of those who will be saved, said of them before they did.

A related point: "*I have come that they may have life*"(v.10). Election is not an abstract idea isolated from events; it has definite results. The purpose of God for these sheep, results in an action of God to save them. In other words, Jesus came "so that". The Father gave them to Christ (v.29). For this reason Christ has a mission to bring them in (v.16) and give them life (v.10). This mission included laying down His life for them (v.11). Thus the Father's gift of persons to Christ, the work on the cross, and the conversion of specific persons are connected. They should not be separated.

B. Christ's Life Laid Down for His Sheep

"*The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*" v.11. This laying down is Jesus' voluntary death on the cross. The intended beneficiaries of His sacrifice are His sheep. They are identified within John 10 both as a gift from the Father, and as those who will believe and follow.

When the Lord speaks of bringing out *all his own* in v.4, He was acting for a specified group. What He was doing was for *all* of them, like the *all* in 6:37, with not one of them being lost (6:39). He does not bring out sheep who are not His. So when He laid down His life *for His sheep* (v.11), a definite group was indicated. When He said His death was for His sheep and later declared that His rejecters were not His sheep (v.26), His sacrifice cannot be for the rejecters as well. That offering was for His own. John 10 leads us to conclude that the death of Christ was for His elect.

C. The Negative Response

The natural thing for people to do, now that we have become sinners against God, is to reject the gospel. We will respond positively only if a divine intervention causes us to do so. Jesus said to some persons, "*I did tell you, but you do not believe*" (v.25). They were exposed to a powerful witness about Christ, because "*the miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me.*" But the nature of their hearts was such that He said, "*you do not believe because you are not my sheep*" (vv.25,26). If they had been His sheep, they would have believed, but unless God had decided they would be Jesus' sheep, they had no native inclination or ability to believe.

This aspect of human resistance to Christ is not developed in John 10. It is indicated though, in the fact that if one is not a sheep belonging to Christ in advance of hearing the gospel, then he simply will not believe. That such a soul cannot believe is taught in John 6 & 8, and other parts of the Bible. Since men are dead in their sins (Ephesians 2:1) and hostile to God (Romans 8:5-8), they have no ability or inclination to believe, but, if they are the Lord's sheep, He will bring them in (10:16).

D. The Positive Response

Other Scriptures in John tell how our sinful rejection is overcome. To get started we must be born of the Spirit, which is being born from above. This is a birth from God (1:13), which is new life from above (3:3-8) in the case of all in whom the Spirit is pleased to produce life (3:8)! Those who are not Jesus' sheep will not believe, but

those who are His sheep listen when He calls them (v.3). They follow Him because they know his voice (v.4). This is a positive response to Christ. In John 10, the only negative response found in Jesus' true flock is directed to false shepherds. *"They will never follow a stranger"* (v.5) or *"listen to them"* (v.8). In contrast, the Lord emphasized that they will listen to His voice (v.16) and follow Him (v.27). This is stated not as a description of what has happened, but as a certain response before it happens. It is said of persons before they were even exposed to the gospel. So, not only have the sheep been given to the Son by the Father, they will surely come, all of them, with no exception. Anyone who will not listen to Christ, is not one of His sheep. The sheep will not follow a false teacher, but they will believe in the Good Shepherd sent to save them. No person the Father has given to the Son opts out of this salvation. For the Father's gift of a bride for Christ means that salvation will occur in each case.

E. His Sheep Never Perish

Not only will His sheep believe, they cannot be lost when they do. *"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand"* (v.28). In 6:39, the Lord Jesus cannot lose them, and in 10:28,29 no one can take them away from the Son or the Father. The Shepherd finds them, holds them, and keeps them.

"His sheep follow him because they know his voice" (v.4). The positive response is not for one moment only. All who listen follow (v.27) and continue to follow. There is no such thing as one truly believing who does not then follow (a term that means "obey".) Not just believing but obeying is a mark of each and every sheep belonging to Christ. Following cannot refer to taking one isolated step but to a pattern of life. This is sanctification (Philippians 2:12,13). The Shepherd leads them out (v.3) and brings them in (v.16). The sheep listen and follow; they cleave to the Lord. *Keeping* describes the Shepherd's eternal commitment, while following/cleaving shows the heart response induced by the Lord (Ezekiel 36:25,26) in the sheep He has called to Himself.

Summary: Jesus asserted that He had persons the Father had given Him, spoken of as His sheep before they even believed. He said He came for them to have life, and for them He died. He said they would hear and follow, and would never be lost. John 10 links a lot of related doctrine in one package.

The five sections above from A to E could be given doctrinal labels as: A. Election by God, B. Definite Atonement, C. Human Inability, D. Irresistible Grace, and E. Perseverance of the Saints.

The emphasis such teaching has in the rest of this Gospel: This specific kind of teaching is not confined to John 10. In other parts of John we find:

- The normal response to Christ is rejection, yet people receive Christ and become children of God only because they have been born of God and no other cause (1:10-13 from what the Apostle John wrote in the Prologue. The following quotations are what the Lord said.)
- Man cannot see or enter the kingdom of God unless he receives life from the Spirit, Who gives life as He pleases (3:3-8).
- Likewise the Son gives life to whom He will (5:21).
- All are commanded to come, yet none are able to do so unless the Father draws that person; and all the ones given by the Father will come. Those the Father has given, the Father draws to Christ, and the Father teaches them so they will surely learn and come to Christ (6:35-45).
- Those who are of God hear, but of the others Jesus said, "The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God" (8:47).
- Jesus knew those He had chosen; Judas was excluded (13:18).
- The other disciples did not choose Christ, but He chose them out of the world (15:16,19).
- Christ gives eternal life to those the Father has given to Him (17:2). He revealed the Father to them and they responded in obedience (17:6).

Appendix 10 C: The Carnal Christian

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me (John 10:27)

In the 20th century a new doctrine became popular in much of the evangelical church, especially in North America. This teaching is that there is a class of Christians called the carnal Christian. In contradiction to this new view, Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. In this way He *defined* a Christian as one obedient to the Lord: Christians are those who obey (Hebrews 5:9). They do not walk after the flesh as the natural man does (Romans 8:4). Only those who love God are the chosen, called and justified (Romans 8:28). Those who love God keep His commandments (John 14:15,21; Revelation 14:12). The degree of fruitfulness varies, but only those who bear fruit are genuine believers (Matthew 13:18-23).

Yet for all these emphatic statements of Scripture, the notion that one may live in carnality and yet be a justified person persists in our day. This error is countered by the warning that *without holiness no man will see the Lord* (Hebrews 12:14). The carnal Christian is a person without holiness, so he is not a Christian at all. When they ought to fear (Hebrews 4:1) they presume. Repeating, “Lord, Lord,” while not doing the will of the Father, they will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21-23). Christ knows His sheep, and this results in their obedience. Those He knows follow; no exception is given in any Scripture.

To the disobedient, Jesus will say, “*I never knew you!*” No horror can be imagined that exceeds the eternal shock when this false confidence that one is “in” is shattered by Christ. Those who would not obey learn when it is too late, that the Lord never ever knew that soul, and the door is forever closed. The land that bears thistles will be burned (Hebrews 6:7,8), the fruitless branches will be thrown into the fire (John 15:1-8), but those with true faith have in their lives fruit that always accompanies salvation (Hebrews 6:10). Only the Holy Spirit can produce such fruit.

The Argument for the Carnal Christian from 1 Corinthians This is the single passage that some recent teachers (note, never any old ones) believe supports three classes of man. In 2:14,15 Paul mentions two classes: the natural and the spiritual man. When he speaks of ones who have received the Spirit Who is from God (2:12), Paul includes the ones he will then describe as carnal in 3:1. In 1:2 he said of them that they are “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” It is impossible to be sanctified without a change in life. The testimony of Christ had been confirmed in them (1:6), because in terms of John 10, they were sheep who had listened to the Shepherd’s voice and followed Him. They had spiritual gifts and were waiting for the second coming of Christ (1:7) – a way that Hebrews 9:28 describes Christians. As saints (1:2) they could not be in a different class from those who are spiritual (2:15).

In the rest of this letter, the apostle scolds them for a surprising number of deficiencies. For example, their callous eating in the presence of others who were going hungry was shameful (11:20-22). That is one of many flaws in those saints whom Paul loved so much and challenged so vigorously. To have a party spirit and its strife is distinctly carnal behavior (3:3,4). The source of it was not the Holy Spirit but their sinful nature. Cleansing from this was needed.

We should not argue that their condition created the class they were in. We are not spiritual based on our conduct, but on God’s intervention for us in Christ, His uniting us to Him by faith, and His giving us His Spirit. We did not become sinners by sinning, but because we were represented by Father Adam in the Garden. We began our lives as “natural” persons, sinners before we committed our first sin! Within this status of being in Christ, and being a saint, or a spiritual person, there are many lessons needed, many applications of the blood of Christ and the Word of God to sanctify us. The spiritual man is not a man without sin, and the Christians in Corinth who were carnal in conduct and attitude were still in Christ, indwelt by the Spirit (6:19). They were not the same natural persons they were prior to their conversion (6:11). They did not lose their status as Christians, nor did they by carnality create a new one, for if that were so, we would all be in this other class! A Christian may commit adultery, but we do not erect a new category of Christians, “adulterous Christians”. Christians may lie, but we do not have a new status of “lying Christians,” etc. And when we act the way we did before we were

brought to Christ, it does not create a middle category of carnal Christians. Overriding all of this is the truth that settles the issue. It is that sin, while present in us and causing us damage, is never the ruling power in any believer. The powerful Holy Spirit always brings us to repentance.

Two Classes of Human Beings In contrast to this three-class teaching, the Bible views men in two. There are two roads, the broad and the narrow (Matthew 7:13,14). Jesus did not make room for the notion of a broad road which somehow still leads to life. In the same Sermon on the Mount, He spoke of two possibilities only: building on the rock or building on the sand. The man who built on the sand fits the description of “the carnal Christian”; he hears Christ’s words but does not obey. However, he does not go to heaven anyway, riding on a profession of faith in the Christ he disobeys; his house will fall in ruins (Matthew 7:24-27).

Paul speaks in Romans 8 of a two-class humanity, those who live according to the flesh, or according to the Spirit (v.5). The mind of the flesh is death; it is hostile to God (vv.6-8). No room is left in what Paul said for any possibility being dominated the flesh yet being recognized as Christians. According to Ephesians 5:5, no one who is sexually immoral, impure, or covetous has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ – in other words there are no carnal Christians. Though this new doctrine would give comfort to supposed carnal Christians, it is a false hope. The apostle is utterly clear, “*Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient*” (Ephesians 5:6). The “carnal Christian” will reap the destruction Paul contrasted with eternal life (Galatians 6:8). This is not a matter of simply losing a reward, but missing eternal life itself.

The New Covenant Includes Transformation by the Spirit Every believer has the Holy Spirit or else he does not belong to Christ (Romans 8:9). This Spirit wars against our flesh successfully (Galatians 5:16) and gives us spiritual life (Romans 8:10,11). In the new covenant we have been promised forgiveness. Those who advocate that there are carnal Christians teach that those in that class do have forgiveness, however, the new covenant promises that God will also give a new and obedient heart (Ezekiel 36:26,27; Jeremiah 31:31-34). We should reject any doctrine that divides these blessings by saying we can have justification without sanctification. (See Appendix 8B.) It is an insult to the work of the Holy Spirit (even though never intended as such by serious believers) that one can be a Christian without the Spirit effecting obedience. The new birth is the giving of new life. We must not allow a contradictory doctrine, which asserts that the Spirit in regeneration has given new life to people who then do not live transformed. New life is not like a possession that can be stored in a closet unused. Life is life, and thus the Spirit’s work affects all the motions of the heart and constantly works to overcome the carnality present in every spiritual person on earth. If the new covenant does not result in changed hearts and conduct, then God has broken His promise. This is, of course, impossible. So the real explanation is that any person without obedience has not received any new covenant blessing including forgiveness of sins (Jeremiah 31:34). He is still an unsaved man.

The Two Classes of Men in Romans 5:12-21 According to Romans 5:12-21, we are either in Christ or in Adam; there is no middle position. In this life, we are in Christ with sin still in us, but our standing with God is in the righteousness of Christ, for it is based in His obedience not ours. The apostle teaches two standings before God, and thus two classifications. If we do not have an additional classification, then we can legitimately speak of variation in maturity and conduct. Christian conduct depends on being in Christ. All in Christ have the Spirit (a point not made in Romans 5:12-21 but elsewhere), and all in Christ “reign in life” because of the free gift of righteousness that came to us through Christ (Romans 5:17). Thus it is not possible for one to have the status of being in Christ without being a “spiritual man”. Paul is consistent with both new covenant promises; in Christ we have both “*justification and life*” (Romans 5:18). The carnal Christian doctrine comes from a tendency to divide things that God has made inseparable, such as justification and life. Jesus taught that those who are really His sheep follow Him.

Union with Christ The idea that one may be saved and yet not saved from the domination of sin is a way of saying a saved person might not really be saved. The Christian’s salvation is not finished, but the changed relationship to Christ and to sin is such that Paul says of each one united to Christ that he is “*dead to sin and alive to God*” (Romans 6:11). We are to consider that as true, not that our considering it will make it true, but because it is true. When we believed, we became obedient (Romans 6:17). Obedience has begun.

The Warning from James James makes us face whether our professed conversions are genuine. We are justified apart from works (Romans 3:28), but a faith that does not result in good works is not a faith that saves; it is a false faith. Faith without obedience is dead (James 2:14-26). This text alone should cause us to deny the possibility that one may have a true faith and yet have a life dominated by the old sinful nature.

The Word from John *“No one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or known Him”* (1 John 3:6). John does not leave room for the possibility that a person may be a Christian of a different class; John is denying that there has been a conversion if a person lives in sin; such a soul has never seen the Lord. (Compare with John 3:3.) *“Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil”* (1 John 3:8), and hopefully no one is suggesting that there is a kind of Christian who is still of the devil. If a man has been born of God, *“he cannot keep on sinning!”* (1 John 3:9). In a very clear assertion of two classes, John says, *“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother”* 1 John 3:10. John is so emphatic about this that I wonder how anyone could hold to the carnal Christian hypothesis while reading 1 John.

1 John is a book that calls for spiritual reality. It gives many contrasts to polarize sin and righteousness. A strong emphasis is, *“We know we have come to know Him if we obey His commands”* (2:3), and if a person continues in sin, he has never been born of God (3:9; 5:18). Thus one way to know we have been born of God is to see evidence of it in our lives. We will obey (2:5,6), do what is right (2:29; 3:7,10), love others (2:10; 3:14,18; 4:12), love God (5:2,3), and hold to the truth we have learned of Him (2:21, 4:2,15). The transformed life of a person is evidence that he has been born of God. We are very cautious about telling anyone to look within his own heart for assurance. When we examine ourselves we will discover sin. 1 John 1:8-10 is very clear about this. Yet if God has given us His Spirit (3:24; 4:14), then we should see major changes from the old life of sin. By this transformation we know we belong to Christ (2:3,5,29; 3:14,19,24; 5:2,13).

In John 10 the Lord identified Himself as the Good Shepherd. As our Shepherd He keeps His sheep. He linked their behavior (i.e., that they *follow*) to their membership in His flock. They all reject false shepherds, but listen to, hear, and follow the true One. When our Lord Jesus said that His sheep follow Him, He was defining Christians as ones who follow. We live in a day when false distinctions are made: as if we can have Jesus as Savior but not as Lord, as if we can be believers but not disciples, and as if we can be members of His flock but not sheep who follow. Jesus’ words do not allow for that kind of discrepancy, so we must conclude that the notion of a carnal Christian is a false one. The truth is that everyone born of God is an “overcomer” (1 John 5:4). Their lives are afflicted but not controlled by their sinful natures; they are led by the Spirit (Romans 8:14).

I should add that the idea of a carnal Christian was one I once accepted when, early in life, I was taught this viewpoint.² In time I learned that the Lord who is our righteousness is also our sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30). I must also add that those dear Christians who taught me that some Christians are spiritual and some are in the class of a carnal Christian, never lived in carnality themselves, and never justified sin. They pursued righteousness as the genuine saints that they were. Most of my teachers are now with the Lord and are already perfected in holiness. Their memory is sweet, and I sincerely honor them, though I must disagree with this part of their teaching!

² A text we used, which is still in use, was He That is Spiritual by Lewis Sperry Chafer. Dr. Chafer taught that the flesh dominates carnal Christians, p.10. He says a carnal Christian is not in the flesh, but the flesh is in him. This implies that the flesh is not in the spiritual man, which is quite an error. He said carnal Christians *walk according to the course of this world*, a strange thing to say because Paul uses that very description of the unregenerate in Ephesians 2:2! We should not assume that those who hold to some way of stating the carnal Christian viewpoint would use such an argument for it today. Dr. Chafer said further that the carnal Christian is characterized by a walk that is on the same plane as that of the natural man. My response to that is: It is fair to say that by such assertions he was teaching there can be little or no difference in the lives of carnal Christians and unsaved men. Dr. Chafer’s book is old, © 1918 and mistaken.

In 2005, the Campus Crusade for Christ website continues to promote three categories of Christians. In their diagrams they show no difference in the pattern of life of an unbeliever and a carnal man. In both cases the life is self-directed; the only difference depicted is that the carnal person has Christ in his life. Lately, they have included a helpful warning: “The individual who professes to be a Christian but who continues to practice sin should realize that he may not be a Christian at all, according to 1 John 2:3; 3:6, 9; Ephesians 5:5”. However, these texts do not agree with the “may not be” aspect of the warning, because those Scriptures insist that one who continues to practice sin has not been born of God at all. At least Campus Crusade is considering the right words of Scripture; I hope they will come to agree with what those verses are really saying.