

Chapter 20: The Shepherding of Jesus

John 10:1–21

Today, when we speak about “shepherds,” we usually think about pastors who shepherd a congregation, since the word “pastor” is a Latin word that literally means *shepherd*; however, the Bible uses the word *shepherd* to describe all God’s appointed leaders and rulers across various spheres: judges, kings, princes, prophets, priests, and other religious leaders.¹ God himself is his people’s shepherd (Gen. 48:15; Ps. 23:1; 80:1; Isa. 40:10–11), but God also appointed some of his people to rule as undershepherds.² Those undershepherds, however, failed to care for God’s people (Isa. 56:9–12; Jer. 23:1–4; 25:32–38; Ezek. 34; Zech. 11), instead abusing their authority as a platform for their own enrichment. While they should have revealed the gracious, shepherding heart of God, they instead misused the power entrusted to them by devouring the flock.

In response, God promised that he would one day give a new shepherd who would care for God’s people as David himself had done: “And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd” (Ezek. 34:23). God will continue to appoint undershepherds (John 21:15–19; Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:1–5), but the Good Shepherd will carefully oversee the work of those undershepherds. In John 10, Jesus reveals that *he* is the one shepherd for whom God’s people have been waiting, and he describes his role as the Good Shepherd in this way: *Communion with the Good Shepherd both delights and unites.*

The Good Shepherd’s Communion (John 10:1–6)

John 9 ended with a remarkable contrast of leadership. After Jesus healed a man who had been born blind, the Pharisees became so angry at the man’s faithful testimony to the truth of what Jesus did that they excommunicated him from the synagogue (John 9:34). Jesus, on the other hand, sought out the man in order to lead him to faith in him (John 9:35). The religious leaders callously discarded a man who threatened their power and authority, but Jesus cared for that man from beginning to end. That story from John 9 is important on its own, but it also forms the backdrop for Jesus’ extended metaphor about shepherds and sheep in John 10. The Pharisees and other religious leaders are thieves, robbers, and even wolves who devour and scatter the sheep of God, willing even to drive those sheep out of the fold. Jesus, in contrast, is the Good Shepherd who gathers the sheep who know his voice back to himself.³

In John 10, Jesus condemns the abuse of God’s sheep at the hands of God’s appointed shepherds. Jesus uses an extended metaphor (“figure of speech”; John 10:6)—that is, an *allegory*—to draw a contrast between his own shepherding and the false shepherding of the thieves, robbers, and strangers.⁴

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by

another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. (John 10:1–6)

In this first section of the allegory, Jesus describes a sheepfold where the sheep (God’s people) enjoy the safety of a gated enclosure. There they wait for their shepherd to come to the gate in order to lead them out to pasture by his own voice. While Jesus later claims that he himself is the door (John 10:7, 9) as well as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14), this first part simply presents the basic idea of how shepherds *ought* to interact with sheep, as opposed to how God’s appointed shepherds *have* interacted with his sheep. Here, Jesus defines four characteristics of a true shepherd—not only to describe himself as *the* Good Shepherd, but also the legitimate undershepherds (pastors/elders) who faithfully shepherd Jesus’ sheep.

Enters by the Door

First, a true shepherd enters the sheepfold by the door (John 10:2), while thieves and robbers climb into the sheepfold by another way (John 10:1). For a shepherd possessing legitimate authority to collect his sheep, the door is the natural place to go. The gatekeeper opens to the shepherd because he knows that the shepherd is authorized to enter into the sheepfold (John 10:3). On the other hand, it is the gatekeeper’s responsibility to refuse entry to anyone *other* than the shepherd, which is why thieves and robbers must climb into the sheepfold by another way to gain access to the sheep. In the immediate context, Jesus is describing the way the religious leaders are seeking to steal Jesus’ sheep through the fear of being excommunicated from the synagogue (John 9:22).⁵ Legitimate shepherds of God’s people, however, lead God’s people openly, refusing to use manipulation, deceit, or intimidation to steal God’s sheep for their own purposes.

Calls his own Sheep by Name

Second, a true shepherd “calls his own sheep by name and leads them out....he goes before them” (John 10:3, 4). This shepherd’s knowledge of his sheep *by name* reveals that he has an intimate knowledge of his sheep.⁶ He shepherds his sheep with love and compassion because each sheep is precious to him. This deep love for each sheep plays a significant part in differentiating the shepherd from the mere hired hand (John 10:12), since the shepherd’s intimate love for each sheep leads him even to risk his life for those sheep (John 10:15). Additionally, the shepherd “leads them out” and “goes before them”—that is, leading them out to the pasture where they feed. A true shepherd of God’s people not only *knows* his people. Additionally, a true shepherd refuses to use that knowledge of his people for their harm, but rather to lead them out to *feed* on God’s word.

These ideas, along with John 10:9 (“go in and out”), fulfill the prayer of Moses, who asked that God would appoint a successor after him “who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd” (Num. 27:17). It is probably no accident that Moses’s successor was Joshua

(Num. 27:18), whose name translated in Greek is “Jesus.” Just as the Old Testament Joshua brought God’s sheep into the pasture of the Promised Land, so the New Testament Joshua (Jesus) will bring God’s sheep into the pasture of their eternal inheritance in the new heavens and the new earth.

His Sheep Know His Voice

Third, the sheep themselves know their true shepherd. Although Jesus will later speak of a single flock under one shepherd (John 10:16), here Jesus speaks about a true shepherd’s calling “his own sheep by name.” By this, it is likely that Jesus is imagining a situation where multiple flocks are kept in the same fold, all guarded together by a single gatekeeper: “Near-Eastern shepherds have been known to stand at different spots outside the enclosure and sound out their own peculiar calls, their own sheep responding and gathering around their shepherd.”⁸ One author gives this fascinating eyewitness account of seeing young shepherd boys in Africa bathing several sheep from different flocks at the same time:

We began to wonder how fifty or so sheep could be sorted, for it soon became apparent that the shepherds represented not one flock, but at least three. There were no tags, brands or collars, nothing to distinguish the animals of one flock from those of another. Things seemed a bit disorganized, the shepherds apparently more interested in adolescent trash-talk than anything else. I expected a bit of pubescent conflict to erupt any minute.

I was wrong. One shepherd simply began to walk east, another headed north along the beach, and a third strolled south. Each was talking or singing in a low voice. Within seconds, every shaggy head lifted, cocked an ear to listen, and then began to move. Within one minute, the flocks were completely separated. Each simply followed the shepherd's voice.⁹

Just as our own pets know our voices and respond to us in a way that they do not respond to others, so also sheep know and respond to the voices of their shepherds. Even more importantly, the sheep of the Good Shepherd know the voice of their Master, and they respond to him accordingly.

In the church, John Calvin calls this arrangement the *mutual consent of faith*: “because the disciple and the teacher are united together by the one Spirit of God, so that the teacher goes before, and the disciple follows.”¹⁰ A shepherd does not possess inherent authority over his flock in the way that Jesus possess authority over the flock. An undershepherd only exercises authority on *Jesus’* behalf, speaking with the voice of Jesus by ministering and declaring Jesus’ word. Therefore, when a congregation of Jesus’ universal flock follows a shepherd, they are not following the shepherd *in himself*, and neither is the shepherd leading them *in himself*. Rather, the shepherd is exercising the shepherding authority of Jesus, so that the flock is ultimately following Jesus. Where a sheep goes astray, the shepherd must lead that sheep back to *Jesus*; and when a shepherd abuses his authority, he must be disciplined for becoming a thief and robber of what rightfully belongs to *Jesus*.

A Stranger They Will Not Follow

The fourth principle follows from the third: if the sheep know of the voice of a true shepherd, then they will also refuse to follow a stranger. Pay careful attention to this point as it relates to church leadership: *Jesus rejects the idea of giving blind allegiance to church leaders*. When a shepherd

attempts to lead Jesus' sheep away from their true Master, the sheep must flee (John 10:5). Again, John Calvin is worth quoting:

[He] alone is a faithful pastor or shepherd of the Church, who conducts and governs his sheep by the direction of Christ. We must attend to the reason why it is said that the sheep follow; it is, because they know how to distinguish shepherds from wolves by the voice. This is the spirit of discernment, by which the elect discriminate between the truth of God and the false inventions of men. So then, in the sheep of Christ a knowledge of the truth goes before, and next follows an earnest desire to obey, so that they not only understand what is true, but receive it with warm affection. And not only does he commend the obedience of the faith, because the sheep assemble submissively at the voice of the shepherd, but also because they do not listen to the voice of strangers, and do not disperse when any one cries to them.¹¹

To the extent that an undershepherd leads people toward Jesus, people should humbly, obediently, and submissively follow that undershepherd, for their allegiance is not to the shepherd but to Jesus. But whenever a shepherd strays from Jesus, it is the duty of the sheep to refuse to obey the voice of that stranger, for he is abusing Jesus' own authority. The phrase, "A stranger they *will not* follow" is written in the strongest possible language with a double negative that we might translate as "in no way."¹² It is wholly inappropriate for the sheep to follow a rebellious undershepherd instead of the Good Shepherd himself.

The Good Shepherd's Delight (John 10:7–13)

Up to this point, Jesus uses a fairly straightforward allegory, but the people nevertheless fail to understand his meaning (John 10:6). Even so, Jesus presses forward, modifying his meaning with a significant change to the pastoral scene he has described:

So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:7–10)

The "door" by whom true shepherds enter to lead their sheep out to pasture (John 10:1–3) is Jesus himself.¹³ In general, this means that there is no legitimate access to the flock apart from Jesus, for if someone uses any point of entry aside from the door, "that man is a thief and a robber" (John 10:1). Notice, though, that Jesus is no longer talking about the role of undershepherds in calling out their own flocks from the sheepfold in order to lead them to pasture. Instead, the scene has changed so that Jesus now speaks about the necessity of entering into the sheepfold *by him* in order to be saved: "Here, the watchman has disappeared, and the only flock in the enclosure belongs to the shepherd who serves as the gate. In short, this is not an explanation of vv. 1–5, so much as an expansion of some of the metaphors found in those verses."¹⁴ By describing himself as the "door," he declares that he has come for the delight and joy of his people.

Thieves and Robbers

First, Jesus says that “All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them” (John 10:8). From one perspective, Jesus cannot mean that every last person in leadership over God’s people was a thief and a robber, or that God’s true sheep did not listen to them.¹⁵ On the contrary, God raised up righteous shepherds at various points throughout history, such as Moses and David. The significant difference between good shepherds and thieves and robbers comes in the way that each of these figures faithfully pointed forward to the coming ministry of *the* Good Shepherd. Even from afar, they pointed the flock of Israel toward the Jesus, the Door of the Sheep.

And yet, from another perspective, even God’s best shepherds failed by abusing the authority entrusted to them. So, Moses too was a shepherd of God’s flock (Isa. 63:11), but he was disqualified from entering the Promised Land when he failed to uphold God as holy in the sight of Israel (Num. 20:12). By misrepresenting God, he was an unfaithful shepherd to Israel by stealing glory from God. David also was in many ways a good shepherd over God’s people (Ps. 78:70–72), but David was not a perfect shepherd. When David sinned with Bathsheba, God sent the prophet Nathan to rebuke David for being a rich man who *stole* the prized lamb of a poor man (2 Sam. 12:1–7). And if even the bright stars of Israel failed as shepherds, then how much more did the others fail in a “general degradation of spiritual leadership” that we witness across the course of history up to, and including, the leadership of the Pharisees and Sadducees?¹⁶ Until the coming of Jesus, Israel has never had a truly good shepherd. To some degree or another, *all* who came before Jesus have been thieves and robbers, and the true sheep did not listen to them in the points at which they went astray. They did not seek the good of the people whom they shepherded, but they were willing to abuse the sheep in order to pursue their own good.

“I am the Door”

Second, Jesus tells us the purpose he serves as the door: “If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9). God’s sheep enter into salvation *through* Christ, and through no other person or process. This salvation, however, is not a one-time event, for when we enter into salvation by Jesus, our salvation in him governs every aspect of our lives. To “go in and out” is “a general Semitic expression for the course of human life (cf. Dt. 31:2; Ps. 121:8).”¹⁷ The salvation of Jesus touches upon all that we are and all that we do. Specifically, Jesus says that by going in and coming out we will “find pasture—that is, we “shall be fed to the full....otherwise [our souls are] faint and famished, and are fed with nothing but wind.”¹⁸ Jesus is the bread of life who satisfies the hungry eternally (John 5:35) because he is the Door through whom his sheep find pasture.

Thief Comes to Steal, Kill, and Destroy

Third, as the Door of the Sheep, Jesus not only feeds his flock, but he *protects* his flock from the destructive work of the thief: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10a). It is a characteristic of sheep to stray from our shepherd (Isa. 53:6), for we think that we can find something better if we could only escape the shepherd’s control to run our own lives. This is a lie, as wandering from our shepherd means leaving his protection to expose ourselves to the thief who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy. As the Door, Jesus can enclose his flock into his protection so that the

thief cannot snatch any out of his hand (John 10:28).

That They May Have Life Abundantly

Fourth, Jesus contrasts his own intentions with those of the thief: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10b). He has not come to destroy, but to give life through feeding his flock in the greenest of pastures. Here, Jesus begins to shift his imagery once again in a way that will lead directly into his self-disclosure as the Good Shepherd in John 10:11, for he speaks of himself in language reminiscent of Psalm 23: “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake...You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows” (Ps. 23:1–3, 5). As the Good Shepherd, Jesus came to give us abundant, overflowing life filled with green pastures, still waters, and overflowing cups. The Good Shepherd seeks to delight his sheep with real, lasting joy!

The Good Shepherd

At last, Jesus comes to the climax of his extended metaphor:

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.” (John 10:11–15)

Jesus reveals that he is not merely *a* good shepherd in the midst of *many* shepherds, and that he is not simply the door by whom God’s shepherds minister. He is *the* Good Shepherd, in a class of his own: “Jesus does not here compare himself with other shepherds; he asserts far more than that he is relatively better than other shepherds, namely that he is a shepherd in a sense in which no other man can ever be a shepherd.”¹⁹ As Hendriksen writes, “Everything in the way of rightful, complete, protective *ownership*, amazing, intimate, intuitive *knowledge*, and limitless, devoted, self-sacrificing *love* is wrapped up in this term.”²⁰

Significantly, this also means that even though Jesus employs shepherds in his church, Jesus alone is the Chief Shepherd:

For, though he employs their ministry, still he does not cease to fulfill and discharge the office of a shepherd by his own power; and they are masters and teachers in such a manner as not to interfere with his authority as a Master. In short, when the term shepherd is applied to men, it is used, as we say, in a subordinate sense; and Christ shares the honor with his ministers in such a manner, that he still continues to be the only shepherd both of themselves and of the whole flock.²¹

All faithful shepherding by ministers in the church of Christ comes in a subordinate sense from the ultimate shepherding of the Good Shepherd himself. Jesus alone does the shepherding, and Jesus’

undershepherds declare and minister the shepherding of Jesus to the flock.

A major question of interpretation revolves around how Jesus can claim *both* to be the Door *and* to be the Good Shepherd. Nevertheless, this dual symbolism should not surprise us, for “So great is Jesus that his significance can never be fully expressed. No symbol, taken by itself, can do justice to his fullness.”²² Indeed, William Hendriksen points out that the same phenomenon of dual symbolism happens repeatedly in Revelation, another book written by the Apostle John, where Jesus is both a lion and a lamb (Rev. 5:6): “So also here is John 10, though it is entirely true that a door cannot at the same time be a shepherd, it is also true that Jesus is both at the same time!”²³ More simply, Chrysostom writes, “When he brings us to the Father he calls himself a Door, when he takes care of us, a Shepherd.”²⁴ As the Door *and* the Good Shepherd, Jesus communicates the breadth of his ministry to his people.

Lays Down His Life

The chief difference between his own status as the Good Shepherd and every other claim to the office of shepherd of God’s people; namely, the Good Shepherd seeks to give his sheep life abundantly (John 10:10) to such a degree that he willingly embraces suffering in order to gain it for them, for “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11b). Now, shepherds were indeed held responsible for the sheep in their care, but this does not lessen the shock of what Jesus says here.²⁵ What shepherd (human being) would willingly lay down his life for his sheep (animals)? Such an action would be scandalous—but not nearly so scandalous as the eternal Son of God willingly laying down his life for his people. Moreover, whatever Jesus does as the Good Shepherd defines the nature of ministry for Jesus’ undershepherds, who must follow in the footsteps of their Master by willingly laying down their lives (whether through faithful ministry or in the ultimate sense of martyrdom) for the sheep whom Jesus died to save.²⁶

Not a Hired Hand

To illustrate more clearly the *goodness* of Jesus as our Shepherd, he contrasts his willingness to lay down his life with the cowardice of the hired hand (John 10:12). When the hired hand sees the wolf coming, the hired hand cares for his own life more than the sheep, so he leaves the sheep vulnerable to the wolf’s snatching and scattering. Jesus speaks rhetorically when he says that the hired hand cares “nothing” for the sheep (John 10:13). This does not mean that the hired hand has no affection whatsoever for the sheep, but that whatever compassion the hired hand might have for the sheep under normal circumstances comes to nothing when his own life is on the line. The hired hand does not share the abusive intentions of the thieves and robbers (John 10:1), but he also does not share the Good Shepherd’s compassion for the sheep that would lead him to lay down his life for the sheep.²⁷ Where every shepherd before Jesus has acted as a hired hand, only Jesus pursues the joyful delight of his people all the way to the cross.

The Good Shepherd’s Union (John 10:14–21)

Earlier, Jesus spoke generally of the fact that the shepherd calls his sheep by name, and that the sheep know the voice of their shepherd (John 10:3–4). Here, Jesus states the same idea more powerfully: “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father

knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:14–15). In this next section, Jesus clarifies that he has indeed come *for* his sheep, but that his coming is not *about* them. Instead, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who unites his sheep beyond themselves.

Union with the Good Shepherd

The first and most important aspect of the *uniting* role of the Good Shepherd is that the Good Shepherd unites his sheep with *himself*. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus knows his own, and his own know him (John 10:14). Through mutual knowledge and communion, we have *union* in Christ, and only through this union do we gain any access to God or to the benefits of salvation. Apart from Christ, we have nothing, but *in* Christ, we become joint heirs with him in his kingdom (Rom. 8:17). Apart from this union with Christ, where we are *in* Christ (Col. 3:3), we have no access to the blessings that the Good Shepherd freely gives to his people.

Union with the Father

Second, not only does our communion with Jesus unite us to the Good Shepherd, but our union with Christ also unites us with the Father himself. To start, Jesus says that our union and mutual knowledge with the Good Shepherd is *like* the knowledge between the Son and the Father: “I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father” (John 10:14–15). Our union with Jesus is in the same category as the union between the Father and the Son. But if *both* the Father is perfectly united with the Son *and* we are perfectly united with the Son, then it is also true that we are united with the Father through our mutual union with the Son. This idea clarifies the way in which Jesus functions as the Door to reconcile us with our Father in heaven: through our union with Jesus, we find an entry into union with the Father.

Union with Other Sheep in One Flock

Third, our union with the Good Shepherd unites us with other sheep in the Shepherd’s one flock: “And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd” (John 10:16). As Jesus speaks about laying down his life, we should notice that he explicitly states that he will lay down his life for his sheep, and *only* for his sheep (John 10:11, 14); however, “the love of God is wide as the ocean. The sheep are found everywhere. They are not confined to *one* fold.”²⁸ Jesus as the light of the *world* (John 8:12) because God so loved the *world* (John 3:16), so his shepherding is not restricted only to the Jews (“this fold”), but open to *whoever* believe in Jesus for salvation (John 1:12; 3:16)—as many as the Lord our God calls unto himself (Acts 2:39).

Furthermore, Jesus has not come to maintain separate, divided flocks. The Good Shepherd brings in the other sheep who are not of this fold so that there will only be *one* flock under *one* shepherd, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Ezekiel: “And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd” (Ezek. 34:23). Who, then, is a member of this one flock? In other words, who is a member of the true church of Jesus? Jesus is explicit on this point: the other sheep that Jesus will bring into his one flock are those who “will listen to my voice.” The true church of Jesus Christ is not defined according to some kind of purely *institutional* unity, but according to *true* unity found in obedience to the word of God.²⁹ Through our union with Jesus, we are perfectly united both with the Father *and* with the Shepherd’s other sheep as

one flock under one Shepherd, enjoying communion with the one Triune God.

By the Authority and Obedience of the Son

One final question remains: By what authority does Jesus take up the office of Shepherd of God's people? Jesus' claim to be Shepherd comes through his sacrificial act of laying down his life for his sheep, and Jesus insists on his absolute freedom in doing so: "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father" (John 10:17–18). In no way is the eternal Son of God compelled against his will to lay down his life, for he lays it down "of my own accord" (*ap' emautou*; John 10:18). Elsewhere, Jesus insists that the Son can do *nothing* "of his own accord" (*aph' heautou*; John 5:19), and that he has not come "of my own accord" (*ap' emautou*; John 7:28, 8:42). In the other passages, Jesus was defending himself against charges that he acted independently from the Father; here, Jesus insists that he has absolute freedom and power to lay down his own life, not being constrained against his will.³⁰ The Son has absolute authority to lay down his life, and he has authority to take his life up again. And yet, in the form of a servant during his earthly ministry, he willingly lays down his life according to the commandment he has received from his Father (John 10:18).

So, we must avoid two errors in how we imagine the relational dynamics between the Father and the Son. On the one hand, it is not the case that the Father sent the Son into the world against the Son's will. Quite the contrary! The Son has the authority both to lay down his life and to take it up again, and he does so of his own accord. On the other hand, we also should not imagine that the Father merely made a suggestion to the Son, and then respected his Son's final authority to make the decision about whether to come into the world to lay down his life for his sheep. This idea does not take into account what Jesus teaches at the end of John 10:18: "This charge (lit., *commandment*) I have received from my Father."

The reason that both of these explanations fail is that they imagine the persons of the Trinity as separate *parts* of the Trinity, as though the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit possess different minds, different wills, and different authorities that each person may exercise as he sees fit. Jesus teaches a very different idea here that he will make explicit in John 10:30: "I and the Father are one." Jesus *both* has authority to lay down and take up his life *and* he obeys the commandment of his Father because, as the Son of God, he is *one* with the Father. He shares the single mind, will, and authority of the Godhead, and he exercises that singular mind, will, and authority as the Son to lay down his life and take it up again. But, he does so in the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7) who has freely taken upon himself an "estate of humiliation" during the course of his earthly ministry.³¹ In the form of a servant, Jesus freely submits his *human* mind and will to obey the charge of his Father in heaven.

For this reason—his humble obedience even to the point of death on the cross—the Father loves the Son. Certainly, there is "another...higher reason" why the Father loves the Son in the eternal relationship of love between the persons of the Trinity.³² And yet, Jesus speaks here of a different kind of the Father's love for the Son that comes as a reward for the Son's obedience in laying down and taking up his life. Paul speaks of this reward-love of the Father for the Son in Philippians 2:9–11: "Therefore [i.e., *because* of his humble obedience even to the point of death on a cross], God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of

Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” From an eternal perspective in the intra-Trinitarian relationships, the love of the Father for the Son is infinite and unchanging. From another perspective in the time-bound mission of Jesus to lay down and take up his life for his sheep, Jesus enjoys the approval of his Father exclusively as a result of his willing, successful mission.³³

Another Division; Another Disunion

Once again, Jesus’ teaching creates a division among the Jews (John 10:19; cf. John 7:43; 9:16). Some say that Jesus has a demon and is insane, asking, “why listen to him” (John 10:20). Others recognize the clarity of Jesus’ words, saying, “These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” (John 10:21). The powerful signs and the powerful words of Jesus stand together to demonstrate that he is, without question, who he claims to be. Jesus is indeed the only Door by whom we can be saved (John 10:7, 9), and he is the only Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11, 14). Those who still do not believe in him after so many proofs remain spiritually blind, continuing in their guilt (John 9:41).

The reason for this division is the disunion of these people from the Good Shepherd. If they enjoyed communion with the Good Shepherd as the true sheep of the true Shepherd, then they would embrace the joy that he offers, and they would rejoice in their union with Jesus, with the Father, and with other sheep. While it is true that they are not Jesus’ sheep because they do not believe, it is also true that they do not believe because they are not Jesus’ sheep. Jesus knows his own, and Jesus’ own know Jesus. Because they are not Jesus’ own, they do not repent from their sins and look in faith upon the Savior.

Discussion Questions

1. Who shepherds *you*? Whose voice do you follow without hesitation? Whom do you trust? Who do you feel *knows* you and cares for you? Is your shepherd Jesus or someone else? Whom do you treat as strangers, reluctant to follow when they call? Do you treat Jesus as a stranger?
2. What has your experience been with shepherds in the past? Are you still reeling from thieves and robbers who have been entrusted with authority over you in the past, but abused it? Or, have your shepherds faithfully led you to Jesus, the Door?
3. What does it mean for you to find safety and protection? What kind of spiritual food do you need? What enemies do you need protection from—even to the point that the Good Shepherd would need to lay down his life for you?
4. Why is our union and communion with Jesus so critical? If we were not unified with Christ—and, through our union with him, further unified with the Father and with Christ’s other sheep—what would we lose? How does our union with Christ influence the way that we approach God? How does our union with Christ influence the way that we approach each other in the church?

Notes

1. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 99.
2. Many of the Scripture references from this paragraph come from Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 443.
3. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 98.
4. “The discourse about the good shepherd is called a *paroimia*. In general a *παροιμία* (literally, wayside saying) is a *figurative* saying (16:25, 29). Here in chapter 10 it is an *allegory* rather than a *parable*. The Gospel of John does not contain any parables. The very term *parable* occurs only in the Synoptics (and in Heb. 9:9; 11:19), while *παροιμία* occurs only in the Fourth Gospel (and in II Pet. 2:22). In the N. T. there is some overlapping in the meaning of the terms *parable* and *paroimia*: each may refer to a *proverb* (II Pet. 2:22; cf. Luke 4:23), but this is the exception rather than the rule. Similarly the Hebrew *mashal* has a very wide connotation: proverb, parable, poem, riddle (veiled and pointed remark). See on 2:19).
Essentially the difference in meaning between a *παροιμία* in the sense of *allegory* (as here in chapter 10) and a *parable* amounts to this, that the former partakes of the nature of a *metaphor*; the latter is more like a *simile*. A metaphor is an *implied* comparison (“Tell that fox,” meaning Herod); a simile is an *expressed* comparison (“his appearance was as lightning”). An *allegory* may be defined as an *extended metaphor*; a *parable*, as an *extended simile*.” (Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 99–100.)
5. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 104.
6. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 1, 807.
7. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 383.
8. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 382.
9. John R. Sittema, *With a Shepherd’s Heart: Reclaiming the Pastoral Office of Elder* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 1996), preface.
10. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 396. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvi.i.html>>
11. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 396–97. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvi.i.html>>
12. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John’s Gospel*, 713.
13. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John’s Gospel*, 715.
14. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 384.
15. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John’s Gospel*, 715.
16. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 357–58.
17. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 358–59.
18. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 400–01. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvi.ii.html>>
19. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John’s Gospel*, 722–23.
20. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 117.
21. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 401–02. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvi.ii.html>>
22. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 102.
23. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 102–03.
24. Cited by Beasley-Murray, *John*, 169.
25. “The Mishnah lays down the legal responsibility of the hired shepherd. An interesting provision is that

if one wolf attacks the flock he is required to defend the sheep, but ‘two wolves count as unavoidable accident’ (i.e., no blame attaches to the hired man for any damage they may cause). Jesus, however, gives his life for the sheep without condition.” (Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 454.)

26. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 402–03. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvi.iii.html>>

27. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 387.

28. “It is for *the sheep—only* for the sheep—that the good shepherd lays down his life. The design of the atonement is definitely restricted. Jesus dies for those who had been given to him by the Father, for the children of God, for true believers. This is the teaching of the Fourth Gospel throughout (3:16; 6:37, 39, 40, 44, 65; 10:11, 15, 29; 17:6, 9, 20, 21, 24). It is also the doctrine of the rest of Scripture. With his precious blood Christ purchased his church (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25–27); his people (Matt. 1:21); the elect (Rom. 8:32–35).

Nevertheless, the love of God is wide as the ocean. The sheep are found everywhere. They are not confined to *one* fold (10:16; see also on 1:10, 29; 3:16; 4:42; 6:33, 51; 11:52).” (Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 111.)

29. “We must observe the way in which the flock of God is gathered. It is, when all have one shepherd, and when his voice alone is heard. These words mean that, when the Church submits to Christ alone, and obeys his commands, and hears his voice and his doctrine, then only is it in a state of good order. If Papists can show us that there is any thing of this sort among them, let them enjoy the title of The Church, of which they vaunt so much. But if Christ is silent there, if his majesty is trodden under foot, if his sacred ordinances are held up to scorn, what else is their unity but a diabolical conspiracy, which is worse and far more to be abhorred than any dispersion? Let us therefore remember that we ought always to begin with the Head. Hence also the Prophets, when they describe the restoration of the Church, always join David the king with God; as if they said, that there is no Church where Christ does not reign, and that there is no kingdom of God, but where the honor of shepherd is granted to Christ.” (Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 408. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvi.iv.html>>)

30. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John’s Gospel*, 745.

31. Westminster Larger Catechism Questions #42, 46.

32. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, 409. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.xvi.iv.html>>

33. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 365.