

Title: **THE SHEEP**

Text: John 10:1-5

Subject: *Characteristics of Christ's Sheep*

Date: Sunday Morning — October 11, 2009

Tape: John #63

Reading: *John 10:1-31*

Introduction:

The title of my message is **THE SHEEP**. I want to show you something of what the Word of God teaches us about the Lord's, the sheep Christ came to save. My text is...

John 10:1-6 “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. (2) But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. (3) To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. (4) And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. (5) And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.”

There are some people among the fallen sons of Adam whom God almighty has purposed to save. They are called in our text, “**his own sheep**.” These sheep are sinners **loved of God** with an everlasting love, **chosen by him** unto salvation and **redeemed by Christ** the Good Shepherd. **They shall, each of them, be called to life and faith in Christ by the power of God's irresistible grace at his appointed time and preserved in him unto everlasting glory.**

I am on the trail of Christ's sheep. I am seeking the Lord's sheep. It is my prayer, as I preach this message, that God the Holy Spirit will open the hearts of some of his sheep and cause you to hear the Shepherd's voice and follow him.

SHEEP AND GOATS

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According to the Word of God, the whole human race is divided into two categories: sheep and goats. Sheep never become goats; and goats never become sheep. Our Lord plainly tells us that some men and women are his sheep; and some are not his sheep. Some are goats.

Matthew 25:31-33 “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: (32) And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd **divideth his sheep from the goats:** (33) And he shall set **the sheep** on his right hand, but **the goats** on the left.”

John 10:16 “And **other sheep I have,** which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, *and* one shepherd.”

John 10:26 “But ye believe not, because **ye are not of my sheep,** as I said unto you.”

This division of the human race was made in eternity, in God’s sovereign purpose of grace in eternal election. He chose some to salvation and passed by others.

This division is made manifest in time, at the time of love, when the sheep are called by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel to life and faith in Christ. The call of the Spirit and our resulting faith in Christ do not make the division or make us sheep, but make the division manifest and make it manifest that we are Christ’s sheep, chosen, redeemed and called by grace.

This division of the human race is a permanent, immutable division. As I said a moment ago — Sheep never become goats; and goats never become sheep.

LOST AND FOUND

As the human race divided into two categories (sheep and goats), so, too, **the Lord’s sheep are divided into two categories: straying sheep and returned sheep, lost sheep and found sheep, wandering sheep and folded sheep.** This is what Peter tells us in...

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1 Peter 2:25 “For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”

Whenever I preach the gospel, my mind is upon the sheep. My heart is fixed upon the sheep. I am not much interested in goats. I have nothing for goats. And I am not disturbed by goats. My business is with sheep. I am seeking the Lord’s sheep who are lost. I am here to feed those sheep who are in the fold. **Having my mind and heart fixed upon the sheep, I know that I have a good and noble object and that I am in harmony with the will of the Shepherd, because the Shepherd’s mind is ever upon his sheep.** The Shepherd’s heart is always upon his sheep. The Good Shepherd’s glory is wrapped up in and is one with the salvation of his sheep.

FOUR WAYS

The Lord Jesus often speaks of “*my sheep*.” He calls his people “*his own sheep*.” **But how did he get his sheep?** How did those who are his sheep come to be his sheep? I have studied this subject a good bit over the past forty-three years; and I can find only four ways by which a shepherd can obtain the possession of sheep. Let me show you. Here are four ways in which God’s elect belong to Christ as sheep belonging to a shepherd.

1. A man can come into the possession of sheep by a gift; and we were given to Christ as his sheep from eternity in the covenant of grace and in time by the effectual call of the Holy Spirit.

John 6:37-40 “All that the Father **giveth** me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. (38) For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. (39) And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he **hath given** me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. (40) And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Those whom the Father has given to the Son from eternity, and those whom he is now giving to the Son in effectual calling, and those who come to believe on the Son by the gift of his grace, and those whom it is the Father’s

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will that Christ raise up to eternal life at the last day are all the same people. They are “*his own sheep!*”

2. **A man may also obtain the possession of sheep by lawful purchase;** and the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Good Shepherd, purchased his sheep out of the hands of divine justice by the lawfully demanded price of his own precious blood.

John 10:11, 15 “I am The Good Shepherd: The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” (15) As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

3. **Third, if a man owns a flock of sheep and those sheep give birth to other sheep, then the new born lambs belong to the original owner by birth.** So it is that we belong to Christ instrumentally by birth, too.

Isaiah 66:8 “For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.”

4. **And, fourth, a man may become the owner of sheep by inheritance as well.** If the original owner gives his sheep to another person as his inheritance, then the sheep become his property by inheritance. We are the inheritance of our dear Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we are called “*God’s heritage*” (1 Peter 5:3).

Ephesians 1:18 “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of **his inheritance in the saints.**”

Psalms 2:8 “Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* the heathen **for thine inheritance,** and the uttermost parts of the earth *for thy possession.*”

10 BIBLE DESCRIPTIONS

Now, I want to describe the Lord’s sheep for you in Bible language. Obviously, I cannot, in the few minutes remaining, tell you everything the Lord teaches us about his sheep. But I have searched the Scriptures and found ten things plainly revealed in the Word of God about those people who are called by the Son of God “*his own sheep.*”

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1st — All who belong to Christ as his sheep are **CHOSEN SHEEP**.

John 15:16 “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.”

Ephesians 1:3-6 “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: (4) According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: (5) Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, (6) To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

2 Thessalonians 2:13 “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:”

Sheep love the doctrine of election. We know that had there been no election of grace there would have been no salvation by grace. Election is the sheep’s friend. And all sheep are the friends of election. They all confess...

“‘Tis not that I did choose Thee,
For, Lord, that could not be.
This heart would still refuse Thee,
Hadst Thou not chosen me.
My heart owns none before Thee.
For Thy rich grace I thirst,
This knowing—If I love Thee,
Thou must have loved me first.”

2nd — All the Lord’s sheep are, by nature, **STRAYING SHEEP**.

Isaiah 53:6 “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

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Sheep! A more suitable word could not be found to describe us. It is ever the nature of sheep to stray. We went astray in our father Adam. We went astray from the womb, speaking lies. We went astray all the days of our lives, by willful, deliberate choice, each one to his own way, until God the Holy Spirit arrested us by his almighty grace.

Ephesians 2:1-5 “And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins: (2) Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: (3) Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (4) **BUT GOD**, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, (5) Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).”

We all know what it is to stray. None of us know how to return. **Even after experiencing the grace of God in salvation, it is still the nature of our evil hearts to stray from our God.** And, even now, when we stray we would never return to him if he did not fetch us back to himself. Even now, we are compelled to cry, “Turn us, O God of our salvation and we shall be turned. Draw me, and we will run after thee.”

“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love.
Here’s my heart. Oh, take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above!”

None of the Lord’s saved sheep have any problem with the doctrine of total depravity. It is the bitter reality of our daily experience!

3rd — I rejoice to read in the Word of God that all the Lord’s sheep are **REDEEMED SHEEP.**

“Redeemed! How I love to proclaim it!
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.
Redeemed by His special atonement!
His child and forever I am!”

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John 10:11, 15 “I am The Good Shepherd: The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”(15) “As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

- We have been eternally redeemed (Revelation 13:8).
- We were justly redeemed (Romans 3:24-26).
- We were particularly redeemed (John 10:25).
- We were vicariously redeemed (Galatians 3:13).
- We were effectually redeemed (Hebrews 9:12).

Talk to sheep about limited atonement, and they will rejoice. Tell them about effectual blood, and they will sing. Proclaim to sheep how that they have been particularly redeemed, and they will shout, “Hallelujah!” And they will honor the man who preaches that message as God’s messenger to their souls. Sheep honor the Shepherd’s precious blood.

4th — At God’s appointed time, in the time of love, each and every one of those chosen, redeemed, straying sheep are **CALLED SHEEP**.

John 10:2-4 “But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. (3) **To him the porter openeth**; and **the sheep hear his voice**: and **he calleth his own sheep by name**, and **leadeth them out**. (4) And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and **the sheep follow him**: for **they know his voice**.”

The Good Shepherd always seeks his sheep “*til he find it*.” And when he finds it, he always fetches it home by his almighty, effectual, irresistible call. This irresistible call is what David described as **fetching grace**, when he commanded Ziba his servant to go bring Mephibosheth to his palace, saying, “*Fetch him!*” So it is, in the time of love, that the Lord Jesus sends his Spirit to his chosen, redeemed, straying sheep, saying “*Fetch him.*” Notice how he describes it here in John 10:2-4.

- **Our Good Shepherd calls “his own sheep.”** He never calls goats, but only “*his own sheep*,” his personally chosen, redeemed, predestinated sheep.
- **When he calls his sheep, “they hear his voice.”** He never calls in vain.
- **“He calleth his own sheep by name.”** That is a particular, personal, effectual call.

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- **And when the Son of God calls his sheep, he always “leadeth them out.”** His call is an almighty, effectual, irresistible call.

Illustrations: Zacchaeus — Lazarus

God’s sheep rejoice in the knowledge of his almighty, irresistible grace. **What sane man would quarrel with irresistible love?** What sane man would be angered by **infallible grace?** What man in his right mind would ever get upset with a friend who snatched him from the jaws of death when he was both unaware of his condition and unwilling and unable to do anything about it?

5th — Everyone of the Lord’s sheep are **SPECIALLY KNOWN SHEEP.**

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

The Lord Jesus says, “*I know them.*” The world does not know them (1 John 3:1). Before they are called, the church does not know them, the preacher does not know them and they do not know themselves. Sometimes even after they are called churches and preachers do not know them. But Christ says, “*I know them.*” And that is enough!

- He knows them eternally.
- He knows them distinctively (Matthew 7:23; Romans 8:29).
- He knows them universally.
- He knows them savingly.

The Lord’s sheep rest in his love. We rest in his distinguishing knowledge of us. **It is his knowledge of us, not our of him that is the source and cause of our salvation, justification, eternal life and assurance.** The experience of eternal life is found in our knowing him; but the cause is in his knowledge of us.

Isaiah 53:10-11 “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. (11) He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: **by his knowledge** shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.”

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6th — Our Lord Jesus declares that all his sheep are **KNOWING SHEEP**.

John 10:14 “I am The Good Shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine.”

Not only does The Good Shepherd know his sheep, he says, “*I am known of mine.*” They know him and “*they know his voice*” (John 10:4). The Apostle John explains this for us in...

1 John 2:20-27 “But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and **ye know all things.** (21) **I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.** (22) Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. (23) Whosoever **denieth the Son,** the same hath not the Father: (*but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*) (24) Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. (25) **And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.** (26) These *things* have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. (27) But **the anointing** which ye have received of him abideth in you, and **ye need not that any man teach you:** but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.”

- Goats are driven to and fro with every wind of doctrine because they do not know the Shepherd’s voice.
- Sheep, all of them, know the Shepherd’s voice and follow it.

John 10:4-5 “And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for **they know his voice.** (5) And a **stranger will they not follow,** but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.”

7th — The Word of God tells us that all of the Lord’s sheep, as soon as they are called, are **FOLDED SHEEP**.

Ezekiel 34:11-15 “For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, *even I,* will both **search my sheep,** and **seek them out.** (12) As a shepherd

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seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep *that are* scattered; **so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.** (13) And **I will bring them out from the people,** and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and **feed them** upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and **in all the inhabited places of the country.** (14) I will feed them **in a good pasture,** and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: **there shall they lie in a good fold,** and *in* a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. (15) **I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD.**”

When the Lord calls his sheep, he brings them into his fold. **It seems to me that he is telling us here that he brings his sheep into his church.** I realize that all true believers, when they are born of God are born into the church and kingdom of God. But I think the prophecy here refers not to the church in its universal aspect, but to the local church. So that the promise is this — **I will bring my sheep into the fold of a local church.**

- Here he feeds them in a good pasture.
- Here he refreshes them with living water.
- Here he causes them to lie down in peace and safety in this good fold.

I realize that many make light of believer’s baptism and church membership. I recognize, as you do, that neither baptism nor church membership has anything to do with our salvation. But we must never be seduced into thinking that the ordinances of Christ and the church of Christ are non-essentials. **I cannot find in the Word of God any evidence that the Lord’s sheep are found outside his fold once they have been called.**

Ezekiel 20:37-38 “And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: (38) And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD.”

- All Christ’s sheep follow him into the waters of believer’s baptism.
- All Christ’s sheep dwell with him and his sheep in the fold.
- Sheep need each other. — Sheep are never found alone unless they are either lost or sick.

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8th — All the Lord's sheep are **FOLLOWING SHEEP.**

John 10:4, 27 “And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and **the sheep follow him**: for they know his voice.” (27) “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and **they follow me.**”

I have already shown you that none of the sheep follow the Shepherd by nature. Yet, our Lord says, “*They follow me.*” How can both things be true? The answer is simple. The Shepherd causes the sheep to follow. Yet, he causes them to do so in such a way as to make them perfectly willing to follow him.

- He entices the sheep to follow him by his goodness.
- He lovingly forces his sheep to follow him with his rod.

Illustration: Sometimes, when a shepherd has an unruly, stubborn sheep he may be forced to break one of the sheep's legs. Then he will set the leg and carry the sheep in his bosom, so that the sheep has to depend upon him for everything. By the time its broken leg is mended, the sheep is at his heels constantly.

- **But the sheep, all the sheep, do follow the Shepherd.** — His Word — His Spirit — His Will.
- **Listen to the description given of these sheep when they have all been gathered up to glory...**

Revelation 14:3-4 “And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred *and* forty *and* four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. (4) These are they which were not defiled with women” (false religion); “for they are virgins. **These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.** These were redeemed from among men, *being* the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.”

9th — Our Lord Jesus assures us that all his sheep are **SECURE SHEEP.**

John 10:28-30 “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. (29)

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My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand. (30) I and my Father are one."

In this world the sheep must face many dangers. **Many wolves** seek to devour them. **Their own flesh** is ever opposed to them. **The devil** seeks by every means to destroy them. And **the world**, both the religious world and the material world, are instruments by which our adversary the devil seeks our ruin. **But in the midst of all our enemies and all our dangers, all the sheep are perfectly safe. We are in the hands of our dear, almighty Shepherd.** And he and his Father are one. That is a simple declaration that our security is to be found in the Persons of the triune Godhead.

- The Father's purpose cannot be defeated.
- The Son's blood cannot be wasted.
- The Spirit's seal cannot be broken.
- Immutable grace cannot be altered.
- Omnipotent power cannot be subdued.
- The will of God cannot be resisted.

10th — In the last place, the Word of God speaks of some sheep in a very singular way. They are called "**OTHER SHEEP.**"

John 10:16 "And **other sheep I have**, which are not of this fold: **them also I must bring**, and **they shall hear my voice**; and **there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.**"

As I said in the beginning of my message, I am on the trail of these "*other sheep.*" I pray that there are some of these "*other sheep*" here this hour. It is my prayer that some of you "*other sheep*" have now been called by the Shepherd's voice. That, however, is altogether up to him. We will bow to his will. But let me tell you what the Scriptures tell us about these other sheep.

- These other sheep belong to Christ as surely as the rest.
- The other sheep have been redeemed by Christ.
- The other sheep are safe and secure in the hands of Christ.
- The other sheep shall be effectually called by Christ. If you are one of these "*other sheep,*" the Good Shepherd says concerning you, "**Them also I must bring.**" If you are one of these "*other sheep*" The Good Shepherd will get you. He will return you to himself.

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- If you are one of these other sheep and the Lord has called you, come on into the fold!

Psalms 23 “The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. (2) He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. (3) He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. (4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (5) Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. (6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

Illustration: “I know the psalm. He knows the Shepherd.”

Amen.