

**~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:**

Jesus' shepherd and sheep analogy was much more understandable to His contemporary audience than to those of us who are unfamiliar with shepherding in general, and particularly to shepherding in Israel 2,000 years ago. So here is a little help:

First, when several flocks are grazing in one area or are sharing a corral, it might appear that the shepherds would never be able to sort out which sheep belong to which shepherd. All the shepherds need to do, however, is call their sheep, and the flocks immediately divide and follow their respective shepherds. Sheep know their shepherd's voice. If a stranger calls them, they will not follow him. Jesus' simple point was that those who belong to Him follow Him. Those who don't follow Him are not His sheep.

Second, shepherds kept their flocks safe at night by gathering them into corrals built of stone fences. There were no gates at the openings of those corrals, and so one shepherd would lie down across his corral's opening for the night, thus actually becoming "the door" of the sheepfold. That shepherd was the "doorkeeper" of 10:3. Jesus' point was that the only way anyone can gain entrance to salvation and to the sheepfold is through Him, "the door."

Moreover, those who attempted to gain access to the sheepfold by not going through the "door," obviously had ulterior motives. They were sheep thieves. So anyone who tries to infiltrate God's flock by some means other than through Jesus is selfishly motivated. Obviously, false teachers are in that category.

Third, a good shepherd sincerely cared for his sheep. At times he had to protect them from wolves. A temporary or hireling shepherd, however, would run at the first sign of trouble. The "hirelings" in Jesus' analogy were representative of the scribes and Pharisees, who had no real concern for the people. But Jesus gave His life for His sheep!

As with all of Jesus' metaphorical words, His shepherd/sheep analogy has been exploited by those who hope to find biblical justification for their doctrines that contradict so many other scriptures. For example, Jesus' promise that no one will be able to snatch His sheep out of His Father's hand (10:28) is a favorite of those who promote the idea of unconditional eternal security. Notice, however, that Jesus defined His sheep in the preceding verse as those who follow Him (10:27). Certainly no man can steal the salvation of a sheep who follows Jesus, but any of us can stop following Jesus if we desire to no longer be one of His sheep.

Remember that every analogy is imperfect. In the analogy we just read, Jesus is both the door and the good shepherd. We must be careful that we don't read more into any parable or analogy than what was intended by the speaker.

Calvinists often cite Jesus' words to the unbelieving Jews, "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep" (10:26), in order to buttress their idea that people don't believe because they haven't been preselected for salvation by God. This is grasping at straws. Jesus was simply communicating that His sheep are characterized by their belief in Him. If I said to a group of people, "You don't believe I can bench press 500 pounds because you are not on my team," does that prove that I didn't want them on my team? No, I was simply expressing that those on my team believe.

Another phrase in Jesus' sheep/shepherd analogy in which the greater context is ignored is that about the thief who "comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (10:10). This is not a reference to Satan, but to false spiritual leaders (10:1, 8). This phrase is often quoted to prove that anything that kills or destroys is of Satan and not of God. There are, however, numerous scriptures that attribute destroying and killing to God. One is James 4:12: "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy" See also Gen. 38:7; Ex. 13:15; 1 Sam. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:17; 2 Pet. 3:10-12; Jude 5. Let's stay balanced!