

HOW TO KNOW YOU BELONG TO THE GOOD SHEPHERD

10 ⁷Therefore Jesus again said to them, I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All those who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not respond to them. ⁹I am the gate; if anyone enters in through me he shall be saved, and shall come in and go out, and shall find pasture. ¹⁰The thief only comes in order to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand is not a shepherd—the sheep do not belong to him. When he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³[He runs away] because he is a hired hand and does not care about the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd; I know mine own [sheep] and my own [sheep] know me—¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold; I must also bring them. They, too, shall respond to my voice; there shall be one flock [with] one shepherd. ¹⁷The Father loves me because I lay down my life—[I lay it down] in order that I may take it again. ¹⁸No one takes it away from me, I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. I received this commandment from my Father.

¹⁹Because of these words a division once again arose among the Jews. ²⁰Many of them said, He is demon-possessed and is insane; why listen to him? ²¹Others said, These are not the sayings of one possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?

²²It was the time of the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem.²³It was winter; and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade ²⁴The Jews gathered around him, saying, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. ²⁵Jesus answered them, I told you, but you do not believe. The works that I am performing in my Father's name, these [works] testify about me; ²⁶but you do not believe, because you are not [numbered] among my sheep. ²⁷My sheep respond to my voice; I know them and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life—they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one. ³¹Again the Jews picked up stones, [intending] to stone him. ³²Jesus asked them, I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of those works are you seeking to stone me? ³³The Jews answered him, We are not seeking to stone you for a good work, but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, claim to be God. ³⁴Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your Law, I said, You are gods? ³⁵If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be set aside—³⁶how can you say to the one whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, You are blaspheming; because I said, I am the Son of God? ³⁷If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me. ³⁸But if I am doing those works, even though you do not believe me, believe the works; so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.

³⁹Again they tried to seize him, but he went away out of their grasp. ⁴⁰He went back across the Jordan [River] to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days [of his ministry]; and there he remained. ⁴¹Many people came to him and were saying,

*It is true that John performed no sign; but everything he said about this man was true.
42And many believed in him there. (Jn. 10:7-42)*

Introduction

Mrs. Ruth Graham, the wife of evangelist Billy Graham, testifies that as a young girl of thirteen she had spiritual struggles concerning the assurance of her salvation. She knew that Jesus had come to save sinners, and she had received Him as her Savior, but somehow she didn't *feel* included in that salvation—she didn't *feel* that she was one of His sheep. She states, "I went through a black, black period." (*POWER*, 12/3/89, p. 6-7)

Rob was a young man who experienced a very similar struggle. While in high school he began to attend a student Bible study. In the process of studying the Bible, Rob became convinced that it is, indeed, the very Word of God. But yet he was plagued by doubts. For months Rob struggled with the question of how he could know for sure that he was a Christian. He could not seem to *feel* that he was totally forgiven, that he was accepted by God, that he was one of Christ's sheep (*POWER*, 11/4/90, p. 3.)

Many sincere Christians at one time or another undergo a spiritual struggle such as that experienced by Mrs. Ruth Graham and the young man named Rob: a lack of assurance, a *feeling* of not being forgiven or accepted by God, a questioning as to whether or not they are one of Christ's sheep. This present passage of Scripture can serve as a helpful and objective remedy for such a spiritual struggle. This passage of the Gospel of John informs us that the chief characteristic of Christ's sheep is a God-given faith that enables them to respond to the Shepherd's voice and follow Him.

To help visualize these things, it may be helpful for a moment to take a tour of the Holy Land as it was in the days of the Lord Jesus—let us especially observe the manner of shepherding as it was practiced in those days. As we approach the outskirts of an old Judean village, we see a large animal pen—it is a large enclosure for sheep, it is a community sheepfold. In the ancient Near East many flocks of sheep would be sheltered together for the night in one community sheep fold, with a night watchman standing guard at the door. Early in the morning each individual shepherd would come to this community fold, he would be permitted entrance by the gatekeeper. The shepherd would enter the large enclosure, and wading through the mass of sheep, he would call his own sheep to himself—calling them by name, for he would know each one of them personally. The sheep that belonged to this particular shepherd would recognize his voice and gather around him. When he had gathered all of his sheep to himself, he would lead them out to pasture, and his sheep would follow him.

Jesus tells us that He is the Good Shepherd and His sheep respond to His voice and follow Him. If you recognize Jesus as the Good Shepherd and follow Him, be assured that you are one of His sheep.

I. Be Assured that You Belong to the Good Shepherd, If You Recognize His Voice

Jesus declares, *“My sheep respond to my voice”* (vs. 27.) When the Good Shepherd calls His sheep, His sheep recognize His voice and respond: their ears perk up, their hearts beat with excitement, and they come running to their shepherd. The rest of the sheep in that community fold pay little or no attention: they are uninterested—the things of God do not stir their souls; the Shepherd’s voice goes unheeded, unnoticed, or even rejected.

“My sheep respond to my voice.” That is to say, His sheep recognize who He is, they recognize that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior, and they are drawn to Him. Consider the response made to Christ by such men as ...

Andrew: One of the two who heard John [speak] and who followed [Jesus], was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹The first thing he did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, We have found the Messiah, (which, being translated, [means], the Christ.) (Jn. 1:40-41)

Philip: The next day [Jesus] decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, Follow me. ⁴⁴Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and told him, We have found the one of whom Moses wrote in the Law, and of whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. (Jn. 1:43-45)

Nathanael: Nathanael said to [Philip], Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him, Come and see. ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, Here is a true Israelite in whom there is no guile! ⁴⁸Nathanael asked him, When have we met? Jesus answered, Before Philip called you, while you were [still] under the fig tree, I saw you. ⁴⁹Nathanael answered him, Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are King of Israel. (Jn. 1:46-49)

Peter: Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have believed and know that you are the Holy One of God. (Jn. 6:68-69)

The man born blind: Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he asked, Do you believe in the Son of God? ³⁶He replied, Who is he, Sir? [Tell me,] so that I may believe in him. ³⁷Jesus said to him, You have seen him and he is the one who is speaking to you. ³⁸Then [the man] said, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him. (Jn. 9:35-38)

Jesus declares, *“My sheep respond to my voice.”* The reaction of those who are Christ’s sheep is in striking contrast to the world’s natural reaction to Christ. Consider some of the reactions recorded in the Gospel of John:

There is Nicodemus' initial estimate of Christ: *Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you are doing, unless God is with him.* (Jn. 3:2)

The Jewish leaders considered Christ to be both a Sabbath breaker and a blasphemer: *the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did these things [referring to Jesus' act of healing the paralyzed man] on the Sabbath*" (Jn. 5:16); *"the Jews tried even harder to kill him; not only because he broke the Sabbath, but also because he called God his own Father, making himself equal with God."* (Jn. 5:18)

The multitudes considered Jesus to be a miracle worker: *Jesus answered them, I tell you the truth, You are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.* (Jn. 6:26)

The religious authorities viewed Christ as a sinner: *So a second time they summoned the man who had been blind and said to him, Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner.* (Jn. 9:24)

Some even claimed that Christ was demon-possessed: *Many of them said, He is demon-possessed and is insane; why listen to him?* (Jn. 10:20)

"My sheep respond to my voice." As we learn from John 10:30-39, reaction of those who are Christ's sheep is in striking contrast to the world who rejects Christ in spite of the evidence:

I and the Father are one. ³¹Again the Jews picked up stones, [intending] to stone him. ³²Jesus asked them, I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of those works are you seeking to stone me? ³³The Jews answered him, We are not seeking to stone you for a good work, but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, claim to be God. ³⁴Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your Law, I said, You are gods? ³⁵If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be set aside—³⁶how can you say to the one whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, You are blaspheming; because I said, I am the Son of God? ³⁷If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me. ³⁸But if I am doing those works, even though you do not believe me, believe the works; so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father. ³⁹Again they tried to seize him, but he went away out of their grasp. (Jn. 10:30-39)

In response to their demand, "*If you are the Christ, tell us plainly*" (vs. 24,) Jesus insists that He has told them; He points to His works as evidence (vs. 25,) and then concludes by declaring, "*I and the Father are one*" (vs. 30.) The religious leaders now respond by seeking to stone Jesus (vs. 31.) They recognize His claim to deity, but they refuse to believe it—stoning was the penalty for blasphemy.

Jesus answers their charge that He is a blasphemer by appealing to His works (vs. 32.) He points to His many **good** works—noble works, works that are the very display of goodness itself; works that originate from the Father, (they are the Father’s works that He is performing through Jesus)—these works serve as Jesus’ divine credentials. Then Jesus asks, *“For which of those works are you seeking to stone me?”* Here is Jesus’ argument: “If you refuse to believe what I **say** about Myself, then let My **works** convince you; after all, actions speak louder than words!—Anybody can **say** that he is God, but only God can **act** like God!”

How do the Jews respond? They state their reason for seeking to stone Jesus: *“We are not seeking to stone you for a good work, but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, claim to be God.”* Observe their reasoning: “We do not seek to stone you because of what you are **doing**, but because of what you are **saying**”—i.e.; they confess that Jesus’ actions back up His claim; but, nevertheless, they still refuse to accept His claim! Their reaction to Christ reveals a heart and mind that are set against Christ and against the truth.

Jesus restates His argument (vs. 37-38): He once again appeals to His works as an evidence to induce faith in Him as the Son of God and the promised Messiah. But these people refuse to evaluate and receive Jesus in the light of the evidence; on the contrary, they insist upon rejecting Him in spite of the evidence! (vs. 39.) Jesus pronounces the following indictment against such people: *“You do not believe, because you are not [numbered] among my sheep”* (vs. 26.)

Jesus declares, *“My sheep respond to my voice.”* The first part of true assurance rests in the fact that you respond to the Good Shepherd’s voice: you recognize Christ and accept Him for who He really is, the Son of God and the promised Savior. By the grace of God and the working of His Holy Spirit, you accept the witness of the Apostle John:

Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and by believing you may have life in his name. (Jn. 20:30-31)

II. Be Assured that You Belong to the Good Shepherd, If You Follow Him

Jesus declares, *“My sheep respond to my voice, ... and they follow me”* (vs. 27.) That is to say, there is a personal identification with the Good Shepherd—there is not only the recognition that Jesus is the Good Shepherd, but there is also the acknowledgment that Jesus is **my** Shepherd. There is the same response to Christ as was made by Peter and the other original disciples: *“Jesus therefore said to the Twelve, ‘Will you also leave?’ ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’”* (Jn. 6:67-68.) There is the same testimony as that made by the Psalmist: *“The LORD is **my** shepherd”* (Ps. 23:1.)

“My sheep respond to my voice, ... and they follow me.” In Galatians 5:16 Christ’s sheep, (i.e.; His disciples,) are exhorted to *“walk [i.e.; live] by the Spirit.”* This means living the life prescribed by the Holy Spirit as He reveals God’s will through the Scriptures; and doing so by relying upon the power supplied by the Holy Spirit. Then in Galatians 5:18 Christ’s sheep are described as being *“led by the Spirit.”* This is speaking of the divinely-imparted compulsion to obey: There are occasions when the Christian is confronted with sin, but in spite of his desire, he finds that he cannot yield himself to commit the sin; or when confronted with the need for righteous action, he finds that he must respond. This is speaking of the divinely-imparted compulsion to persevere: There are occasions when the Christian feels spiritually weary and wants to give up, but he cannot; he finds that he is driven to continue in the faith despite doubts, oppressions, opposition, or spiritual fatigue. This is speaking of the divinely-imparted compulsion to return to Christ: There are occasions when the Christian indulges in sin, but he finds that he cannot remain in that state and he finds that he must repent; there may even be occasions when the Christian departs from Christ and lives in sin for a time, but it becomes unbearable to him and he is compelled to return to Christ. To *“walk by the Spirit”* refers to a willing submission to the Holy Spirit and His ways—it is the believer’s active response to the Holy Spirit’s presence in his life. To be *“led by the Spirit”* refers to a divinely compelled submission to the Holy Spirit—it is the Holy Spirit’s gracious dominion over the believer’s life. This two-fold work is produced by the Holy Spirit, and carried on by the Spirit, in the life of Christ’s sheep.

Jesus declares, *“My sheep respond to my voice, ... and they follow me.”* This is in contrast to the world, which refuses to respond to the Shepherd’s voice and follow Him. When confronted with the Person of Christ the Jewish leaders rejected Him: they sought to stone Him, they would not submit their lives to Him (vs. 39.) Consequently, they were finally rejected by Christ: He left them (vs. 40.) But for His sheep, such a response to Him with the consequent result of having the Shepherd depart from them is utterly unbearable. We see this demonstrated at the time Jesus washes His disciples’ feet in the upper room (Jn. 13.) When He stoops to wash Peter’s feet, there is the protest, *“You shall never wash my feet”* (vs. 8.) Jesus must then solemnly inform Peter, *“If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.”* Upon hearing this, Peter cries out, *“Lord, not only my feet, but wash my hands and my head also!”* Although he does not fully understand what Jesus is doing and all that it means, out of love for Jesus and not being able to bear even the thought of being separated from Jesus, Peter submits himself to Jesus’ humble ministry. For Peter, as a disciple of Christ, as one of His sheep, it is unthinkable to live without Christ and be separated from Him. Thanks be to God that ultimately, it is out of the question for Christ’s sheep to permanently reject Him and be rejected by Him:

All whom the Father gives me will come to me; and he who comes to me I will by no means reject; ³⁸for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me,

[namely,] that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰My Father's will is that every one who looks to the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (Jn. 6:37-40)

"My sheep respond to my voice, ... and they follow me"—and He bestows upon His sheep eternal life and eternal security. Verse 28 contains the promise of security: His sheep shall never perish and no one shall ever snatch them out of His hand. Verses 29-30 contain the grounds for this security: God the Father who has given the sheep to Christ, is greater than all, no one is able to snatch the sheep out of the Father's hand. Since Christ and the Father are one, no one is able to ever snatch the sheep out of Christ's hand!

Jesus declares, *"My sheep respond to my voice, ... and they follow me."* Here is the second and completing part of true assurance: the fact that upon recognizing Christ for who He truly is, you respond to Him in faith and commitment, no matter how feeble that commitment at times may be.

Conclusion

What enables a man to recognize Christ for who He really is and entrust his life to Christ? Nothing other than the gracious working of God in our heart:

But to all who did receive him, to those who are believing on his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God—¹³they were born, not by natural descent, nor by human will, nor by a husband's desire, but by God. (Jn. 1:12-13)