

John 10: Being Good Sheep

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Being Good Sheep

In John 10 Jesus tells us that He is the Door of the Sheep, and the Good Shepherd. We can see how important it is that He declared these things; being the door means He is the only way to get to heaven, and being the Shepherd means He is the only one whom we should follow. But what we sometimes overlook is that the same passages (particularly John 10:1-16) also describe to us the nature of a sheep, and what it means for us to be a GOOD sheep.

Christians are called sheep in numerous passages. Consider:

- Matthew 7 – warning of wolves
- Matthew 9 – sheep without a shepherd
- Matthew 10 – lost sheep of Israel
- Matthew 10 – disciples are sheep among wolves
- Matthew 12 – the lost sheep on the Sabbath
- Matthew 15 – sheep of Israel
- Matthew 18 – parable of the lost sheep
- Matthew 25 – judgment of sheep and goats
- Acts 20:28 – warning of wolves in the flock
- Romans 8:36 – suffering as sheep
- Hebrews 13:20 – sheep equipped by the Shepherd
- 1 Peter 2:25 – sheep gone astray
- 1 Peter 5:2 – elders act as shepherds
- Revelation 7:17 – led as sheep to the water of life

Dispelling a Myth

Many people find the idea of being called a “sheep” distasteful or offensive. It has become commonplace for political pundits to use the expression “sheeple”¹ to suggest blind adherence to a doctrine or idea. Many mistakenly believe that sheep are a “dumb” animal, as far as animals go. However, recent studies have shown that sheep are a highly intelligent animal, particularly in relation to memory and facial and voice recognition². Indeed, the issues we typically identify as “dumb” (their tendency to wander or follow one another into danger) relate to their need for a shepherd. Sheep are not dumb, as any shepherd would tell you; they need a good shepherd!

Let us consider what Jesus said about sheep. He expects that His sheep will enter through the door (vs. 9). Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:7-16 that there is a path to Him that we need to work at in order to reach Him. Sheep can work out difficult puzzles in order to get to their destinations. We need to work out and make effort to reach Jesus.

Jesus also expects His sheep to know Him and to know His voice (vs 14, 5). An article in Nature magazine (November 2001) pointed to findings that indicate sheep are as good as people at finding known faces in a crowd. Jesus expects us to know Him by discerning His word (1 John 4:1-2, 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22). If it is not Jesus, He expects His sheep to flee from strangers (vs. 5). How many times are we told to flee from evil (1 Corinthians 6:18, 10:14, 1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 2:22)?

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheeple>

² <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1356069/Sheep-intelligent-make-executive-decisions.html#ixzz4BILZI500>,

Finally, He expects us to act as one flock (vs. 16). This speaks to the need for unity. Sheep herd for their protection, and Christians have a flock for safety as well. We are told repeatedly not to forsake this flock (Ephesians 4:1-3, Philippians 1:27) but to dwell together for safety.

Bad Sheep

We might also make some points at what it means to be bad sheep. Bad sheep wander from the shepherd and the flock (in a sense, the same place). Paul told Timothy in 1 Tim. 6:10 that many wander away because of the love of money. Another bad sheep problem is following one another instead of the shepherd. Peter warned us in 2 Peter 2:1-2 not to be misled (John would say such bad shepherds come from among us).

John 10 points to the Good Shepherd, but it also points to being good sheep.