

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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Jesus, the Loving Shepherd

In **John 10:11**, Jesus said, "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*" Jesus often used sheep and shepherds to illustrate spiritual truths. One passage in which He did so is **John 10:1-18**. In this passage, Jesus described Himself as both the door to the sheep fold and the good shepherd.

To appreciate Jesus' role as our shepherd, we must recognize our *need* for a shepherd. This involves accepting that we are, spiritually speaking, *sheep*.

Without a shepherd, sheep cannot take care of themselves. Without a shepherd, it will likely not be long before sheep are devoured by predators.

Though we may not like comparing ourselves to sheep, the truth is that we *are* like sheep, needing a trustworthy shepherd to lead us to *spiritual* security and safety.

This ties in with Jesus' point that He is the door to the sheep fold (**John 10:7**). In **verse 9**, Jesus said, "*I am the door. If anyone enters in by me, he will be saved, and will go in and go out, and will find pasture.*"

In Jesus, we can be saved from sin (**Matt. 1:21**) and the consequences of sin (**Rom. 5:9**).

As the hymn *Jesus, the Loving Shepherd* says, "without is danger," but in Christ, one is in "the fold of safety." In Christ, we are spiritually provided for, and in fellowship with God and His children.

By referring to Himself as both the door to the sheep fold *and* the good shepherd, Jesus shows us that not only is He the One *in whom* we have security, but He is also the One who *guides* us to safety.

Notice **John 10:2-4**: *But one who enters in [the sheep fold] by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. Whenever he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.*

These verses show us two ways in which Jesus, as our shepherd, leads us. He leads us, for one, by His words. As Jesus said, "*the sheep listen to [the shepherd's] voice.*"

Since He is our shepherd, Christ should be looked to as our leader. We should know His voice and obey His words (**Heb. 5:9**).

While sheep follow the voice of the true shepherd, the sheep "*will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him; for they don't know the voice of strangers*" (**John 10:5**).

Jesus' speech is significantly different from that of the false shepherds ("*strangers*") **John 10:5** refers to. Jesus' followers must properly distinguish between the deceiving "*voice*" of strangers, and the voice of the true shepherd. If we approach spiritual questions rightly, we will be able to differentiate between the two.

Like an earthly shepherd, though, Jesus not only leads us through His words, but He

also leads by going before us (**John 10:4**). Jesus has gone before us by living perfectly during His time on earth.

After exemplifying servitude in **John 13:3-12**, Jesus said to His disciples, *“If I then, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you”* (**John 13:14-15**).

Later in the same chapter, Jesus gave “a new commandment” to His disciples concerning their need to love one another (**verse 34**). The need for loving others was not a new commandment (**Lev. 19:18**), but in **John 13:34**, the disciples were given a new example of love they were commanded to emulate. Notice the last few words of the verse: *Just as I have loved you, you also love one another.*

Walking in Jesus’ steps is a theme of the New Testament (**Phil. 2:5; 1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6**). As sheep, we should follow our good shepherd where He leads us.

In describing Himself as the good shepherd, Jesus also expressed the care He has for His sheep.

John 10:10 says, *“The thief only comes to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.”* **Verses 12-13** say, *“He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who doesn’t own the sheep, sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and flees. The wolf snatches the sheep, and scatters them. The hired hand flees because he is a hired hand, and doesn’t care for the sheep.”*

While the “thief” only has selfish, greedy desires toward the sheep (**John 10:10**), and the “hired hand” puts his own interests

ahead of the sheep’s (**verses 12-13**), the good shepherd is different. Christ’s love for the sheep is such that He has laid down His life for the sheep (**verses 11, 15**).

Though the crucifixion of Christ was a demonstration of wickedness on man’s part (cf. **Acts 13:28**), it was a perfect demonstration of love on Jesus’ part.

Notice **John 10:17-18**: *Therefore the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down by myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. I received this commandment from my Father.* One thing these verses emphasize is Christ’s willingness to go to the cross. As Christ implied in **Matthew 26:53**, He could have been sent more than twelve legions of angels to stop His enemies from crucifying Him, but He chose to go to the cross.

We could not ask anything more of our good shepherd. We should be appreciative of our shepherd’s protection, provision, and willingness to sacrifice Himself for us.

Furthermore, we should accept His provision by following Him with full trust that He knows what is best for us.

When we do so, we can trust that we will be spiritually secure in the “fold of safety.” We can trust that no matter what persecutions or trials come our way, spiritual predators are nothing in comparison to our great Savior and Shepherd. Through Christ, we can overcome (cf. **Rev. 1:17-18**).

May we appreciate, follow, and trust Jesus, the loving Shepherd.

- Michael Hickox