

Sheep-like Folk

“Zoomorphism” is a derivative of the Greek words *zoon*, which means “animal”, and *morphe*, which means “form” or “shape.” It is a literary technique in which animal attributes are imposed upon non-animal objects, humans and events; and animal features are ascribed to humans, gods and other objects.

Some examples of a “zoomorphism” include –

- He is a bear of a man. (He’s huge, hairy and strong).
- She’s sly as a fox. (She is sneaky, furtive and lethal).
- The shoppers on Black Friday knocked against each other, like scared pigs in a chute. (The shoppers pushed and shoved each other in a panic).
- That lawyer is a snake. (The lawyer is slippery, slimy and dangerous). [“Jake the Snake”].
- My teen-aged son eats like a horse. (He eats a lot of food).

Zoomorphisms are common throughout scripture. They are used, for example, in describing the 12 tribes of Israel, such as Gad **dwelleth as a lion, and teareth the arm with the crown of the head** (Deuteronomy 33:20) and in the Revelation’s description of the four beasts, where we read the **first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf . . . and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle** (Revelation 4:7).

Our Lord Jesus Christ regularly utilized a specific zoomorphism – probably the most famous one in the Bible – when speaking of his elect people. He called them His sheep. A good sample of this is found in John chapter 10:

10 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.

²But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

³To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

⁴And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

⁵And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

⁶This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.

⁷Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

⁸All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

⁹I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

¹⁰The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

¹¹I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

¹²But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

¹³The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

¹⁴I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

¹⁵As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

¹⁶And 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.

¹⁷Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.

¹⁸No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

¹⁹There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings.

²⁰ And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?

²¹ Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?

²² And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter.

²³ And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch.

²⁴ Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.

²⁵ Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.

²⁶ But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

²⁸ And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

²⁹ 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.

I recently was watching an old episode of M.A.S.H. that featured a little lamb that had been slipped into camp for to be slaughtered and served up for dinner. Radar's mission (as he saw it) was to save that baby lamb. Looking at that little creature for just a few short seconds stirred in me soft, sympathetic feelings. The lamb's mien exuded at least these attributes: Sweet, innocent, helpless, trusting, naive, clueless, harmless, total reliance on others, happy, soft, quiet, meek, docile. It put me in mind of this verse: **He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.** (Isaiah 53:7).

So, let us take a look at John chapter 10 and the verses I just read you. First, some general observations and then a closer focus on some of the sheep-related verses in that passage.

General truths: Among other things, we see in these verses a peculiar, unique picture of true Christians. Christ describes them as sheep who hear the voice of the true Shepherd, and know His voice and as sheep who will not follow a stranger, but will flee from him **for they know not the voice of strangers.** (John 10:5). These verses teach us that there is a spiritual instinct in true saints of God, which generally enables them to distinguish between true and false teaching. When they hear unsound religious instruction, there is something within them that says “this is wrong!” but when they hear the real truth there is something in their hearts which responds “this is right!” Carefree and insincere men of the world see no difference between minister and minister, “church” and “church”, sermon and sermon, etc. The poorest sheep of Christ, though, spots God’s truth and knows it when he hears it. This is a deeply personal, individual thing with each person. I have had the experience of sitting in a foreign “church” and the so-called “preaching” leaves me empty. I hope you have had a similar encounter.

Another thing we can glean from these words in John chapter 10 is our Lord’s focus on the entire dependence of the sheep upon their Shepherd. Just as sheep in nature hear the voice of their own shepherd, and follow him, so do believers follow Christ. By faith they listen to His call. By faith they submit themselves to His guidance. By faith they lean on Him, and commit their souls implicitly to His direction. The ways of a shepherd and his sheep are a most useful illustration of the relation between Christ and the true believer.

These verses also show us one of the principal offices which Jesus Christ fills for the saints of God. Twice He says **I am the good shepherd.** (John 10:11, 14). It is a term rich in consolation and instruction.

Like a good shepherd, Christ knows all His people: Their names, their families, their dwelling places, their circumstances, their private history, their experiences, their trials, and so on. There is not a thing about the least and lowest of them with which Christ is not familiar.

Like a good shepherd, Christ cares tenderly for all His believing people. He provides for all their needs in the wilderness of this world and leads them to the Promised Land. He bears patiently with their many weaknesses and infirmities, and does not cast them off because they are wayward, erring, sick, footsore or lame. He guards and protects them against all their enemies, as Jacob did the flock of Laban. (That fascinating tale can be found at Genesis chapters 30 and 31, but suffice to say for our purposes that **Jacob fed**

the rest of Laban's flocks [Genesis 30:36]). And of those that God the Father has given Him He will be found at last to have lost none.

Like a good shepherd, Christ lays down his life for the sheep. He did it once for all when He was crucified for them, and only them. The sheep are saved for evermore because the good shepherd died for them; it's that simple! **Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.** (John 15:13).

Closer look at specific verses: Having laid down some general thoughts from our text, let's now look a bit closer at some specific verses from the text.

Ten:Three -- We begin with John 10:3 that says, in part, that **the sheep hear his voice and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.** Calling each sheep by his own name shows a close relationship between the shepherd and the individual sheep, the shepherd being well aware of that sheep's strengths and shortcomings.

But this is a 2-way street. On this verse, Ellicott notes that *"[a]ll animals learn to know those who love and protect them."* In a word, the individual sheep instinctively knows the shepherd that loves and protects him. 1 Samuel 17:34-36 gives us a good sample of that protection, when David (a type of Christ) says to Saul: **Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear[.]** Similarly, we read this touching account of love and protection of a lamb in Nathan's rebuke of David concerning Uriah the Hittite at 2 Samuel 12:3: **But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.**

Such close, intimate and warm relations we are to understand (from verse 3) exist between Jesus Christ and each of his individual fore-loved elect sheep. And sheep readily discern the well-known voice of one who is accustomed thus to attend them.

Ten:Four – John 10:4 pictures for us a fascinating practice involving shepherds and sheep and their interactions. The text says: **And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him for they know his voice.** Consider Ellicott, *viz. "This is one of the incidents in the management of an Eastern flock, which strikes all*

who see it for the first time, and is abundantly illustrated in books of Eastern travel. The details are here given with minute accuracy. When the last sheep has been brought out the shepherd places himself at their head, and the flock together follow him."

A good shepherd spends his time with his flocks. He goes before them finding the best pastures and watering places, and to defend them from danger. Some shepherds follow the flock. **Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel.** (2 Samuel 7:8). But the Great Shepherd of the Sheep with whom we have to do is out in front of his flock, leading the way. **Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.** (Psalm 80:1).

Similarly, genuine preachers of the gospel feed and lead the flock of God, but only when they follow the Chief Shepherd. So Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians, **[b]e ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.** (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Ten:Five – And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. On their journey, flocks of sheep will come across strangers who they do not follow. Some would, as thieves and robbers, seek to lead them away, imitating their shepherd's cry. But the sheep have, by long usage, gotten to know their shepherd's voice and will not follow the strangers. Note, this is stated as a fact; no surmising going on here.

But there's more. Not only will the sheep not follow the stranger, but the sheep flee from him. What the stranger says is a source of alarm and fright. With the known tone of their shepherd's voice they have learned to associate protection, guidance and food. But these strangers suggest the opposite; that is, danger, starving and lost in the wilderness.

And please realize as we consider this shepherd/sheep presentation in John Chapter 10, while we are dealing primarily with Christ, there is some secondary application to the elders or ministers, as Jamieson-Fausset-Brown describe: *"This and all that follows, though it admits of important application to every faithful shepherd of God's flock, is in its direct and highest sense true only of "the great Shepherd of the sheep," who in the first five verses seems plainly, under the simple character of a true shepherd, to be drawing His own portrait."*

Ten:Seven & Ten:Nine – What we want to examine in these two verses when considered together is the concept of the “door.” So, in verse 7 Jesus says **Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.** Then in verse 9, He returns to that same notion and says: **I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.**

All authors agree Christ is saying here that he is the only way to get into the true church – both the church militant and the church triumphant. So, for example, Barnes writes: *I am the door – I am the way by which ministers and people enter the true church. It is by his merits, his intercession, his aid, and his appointment that they enter.* John Gill’s lengthy observations on this topic include: *Christ is the door to them, by which they enter into a visible church state, and are let into a participation of the ordinances of it, as baptism and the Lord’s supper: no man comes into a church, at the right door, or in a right way, or has a right to partake of Gospel ordinances, but he that truly believes in Christ, and makes a profession of faith in him[.]* Now, I’m not saying this is the only meaning behind the “door” concept, and like many scriptures, there can be more than one application: but this seems to be the main meaning.

Please consider these verses on this matter: **For through him (Christ Jesus) we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God[.]** (Ephesians 2:18, 19).

Here’s the beauty of all this, if you ask me: Christ opens the door to His church to some, and closes it to others. When all the dust settles, we have no say. Perhaps we would make other selections; perhaps not. But many is the time in our experiences that it seems from all outward appearances that a certain individual should be in the church and there is no readily apparent rationale, earthly reason keeping that person from being in the church, yet there he is – not in the church! And *vice-versa*. It’s all beyond our human power and wisdom. Christ opens; Christ closes.

Ten:Fourteen – in this verse, we have a reciprocal “knowing.” Here’s the verse: **I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.** That is to say, Christ knows his sheep and his sheep know Him.

As to Christ knowing his sheep, He is saying “I know my people, or my church.” The word “know” here is used in the sense of affectionate regard or love. It implies such a knowledge of their wants, their dangers, and their characters, as to result in a deep

interest in their welfare. Jesus knows the hearts, the threats to safety, and the wants of his people, and His kindness as their shepherd prompts him to defend and aid them. Poole says it well: *I am no hireling; the sheep are mine own; I have a true love and affection for them, which obliges me to a just and true care of them; I know them by name, (as was said before), by a particular distinct knowledge; or I love them, and have tender bowels for them.* Indeed, Christ has a special, distinct and exact knowledge of all and each of his sheep, takes special care of them and owns and acknowledges them as his, both now and in the world to come.

As to the sheep knowing Christ, I offer Barnes and Gill. First, Barnes: *Am known of mine - That is, he is known and loved as their Saviour and Friend. They have seen their sins, and dangers: and wants; they have felt their need of a Saviour; they have come to him, and they have found him and his doctrines to be such as they need, and they have loved him. And as a flock follows and obeys its kind shepherd, so they follow and obey him who leads them beside the still waters, and makes them to lie down in green pastures.* And Gill: *[A]nd I am known of mine; not in a general way, as devils and external professors may know him, but with a special, spiritual, and saving knowledge: Christ's own approve of him, as their shepherd and their Saviour, and desire no other; they love him above all, in the sincerity of their souls, and with a love as strong as death; they trust in him as their shepherd, believing they shall not want; and appropriate him to themselves, as their own; and care for him, his cause and interest, his Gospel, ordinances, and ministers; and are not ashamed to own him as theirs, in the most public manner.* That's the kind of "knowing" that makes good ambassadors!

Ten:Sixteen - 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.

The "other sheep" are the Gentiles. So wondered the Jews among themselves when Jesus said he was soon leaving them, **Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? Will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?** (John 7:35). They so asked in the bitterness of scorn and mockery. But we find Jesus speaking to Paul by a vision, and directing that Paul **[b]e not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.** (Acts 18:9, 10). Those were some of the "other sheep." Oft in the Old Testament did the prophets foretell of the coming of the Gentiles, with Micah 4:2 being a good sample: **And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,**

and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

As to the “one fold” referenced in this verse, it were better rendered “one flock.” The word translated “fold” is different from that used in John 10:1 (referring to “sheepfold”), but is translated other places as “flock.” See, for example, 1 Corinthians 9:7 ([W]ho feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock) and Luke 2:8 (And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night).

Looking at the context of verse 16, there are obviously multiple folds because Jesus refers to other sheep that He has that are not of **this fold** (being the Jews). But there is only one flock and one Shepherd.

The idea of all this is best captured by the following from Ellicott: *It is not uniformity which is promised, but unity. The distinction is not merely one of words, but upon it depends a wide and important truth. It is not unity of fold which is regarded as the future of the Church, but unity of flock. There will be many folds, in many nations, in many ages, in many climes. But for all Christians there will be one true Shepherd who layeth down His life for the sheep, and all these differing folds shall, through living unity with Him, make one vast flock.*

Paul addresses this concept in his letter to the church at Ephesus where he says: **There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.** (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Ten:Twenty-Eight –

Now this is a potent verse, and says: **And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.** They “shall never perish” tells us the sheep shall never be destroyed or punished in hell. The original language is expressed in remarkable strength: “They shall not be destroyed forever.” The same thought is found in Matthew 18:14 – **Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.**

Nobody can pluck a single sheep out of the hands of Christ. That is to say, nobody can take Christ by surprise – as a robber at night – and steal a sheep by force. There is no

power in the universe that can accomplish the removal of one sheep; no cunning, no violence, no force and no adversity can get that job done.

Also, inherent in that language is that the sheep are in the hands of Christ. The idea of that language includes that Christ preserves and protects His sheep. And, to be in the hands of Christ is to be high in His esteem and favor. Gill says on this point: *[T]he saints are a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God; they are a signet on his right hand that shall never be plucked off; they are engraven on the palms of his hands: to be in the hands of Christ, is to be in his possession, and at his dispose, as all the elect of God are; and to be under his guidance, care, and protection, as they be; they are fed according to the integrity of his heart, and guided by the skillfulness of his hands; they are always under his care and watchful eye, who protects them from all their enemies, and hides them in the hollow of his hand.* So the Psalmist recognized this phenomenon: **For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.** (Psalm 95:7).

Closing thoughts – sheep interaction:

We speak often in this place of our inter-person interaction. I recently ran across a few quotes that may be helpful on that score. (1) Lincoln described his success in navigating a politically powerful and big ego-driven cabinet during the Civil War years this way: *So long as I have been here, I have not willingly planted a thorn in any man's bosom. I shall do nothing through malice: what I deal with is too vast for malice.* (2) One of our members Tweeted the following: *"Forbearing one another" [Colossians 3:13] in love is against our nature. It includes putting up with idiosyncrasies, putting the best construction on motives, and not amplifying offenses.* "Idiosyncrasy" is defined: "A characteristic, habit, mannerism, or the like, that is peculiar to an individual; a physical or mental constitution peculiar to an individual."

Gran: "The most difficult thing in life is getting along with people."



I love you. Amen!