

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10

All but the youngest classes are probably already familiar with this story. But even the best-known parts of the Word are inexhaustible in their meaning and yield new thoughts every time they are read.

Doctrinal Points

In order to hear the Lord we need to keep our hearts and minds humble and trustful.

Anyone who puts his own ideas or the ideas of other men above the teachings of the Lord is stealing from the Lord.

Notes for Parents

Everyone seems to know and love the twenty-third Psalm. It appeals to people universally because deep down in every person the Lord has stored up states of innocence and trust which that person experienced in infancy. These “remains” of our early states are referred to symbolically as the Lord’s “lambs.” We sometimes instinctively call a little baby a “lamb.” By the same token, the Lord’s “sheep” are the virtues which we have allowed to grow up out of these remains: humble recognition of our ignorance and weakness, trust in the Lord, kindly feelings toward all His other children, etc.

The modern world does not seem to think too much of these humble, childlike states, advising us instead to be self-confident and self-assertive. But in our Bible chapter the Lord teaches us that our only hope of safety and of heaven is in keeping our hearts and minds humble and trustful so that we shall hear His voice and follow him.

Many today who profess to be Christians are like the hirelings of whom the Lord speaks. They do right because of what they

hope to get out of it (reputation in the community and honor from men), not because they really love goodness. Whenever doing right seems to threaten them with personal loss, their principles break down. This is why the Lord tells us that all who came before Him are thieves and robbers. All who put their own ideas or the ideas of other men before the teachings of the Lord are stealing from the Lord. The Lord is the door. Only obedience to the truth which He gives us in His Word leads us to safety and happiness.

All whose minds are open to hear the Lord's voice and whose hearts are willing to follow Him are His sheep, whether they belong to the Christian fold in this world or not. There are many good people in the world who have never learned about the Lord. They can, however, be taught about Him when they come into the other world. But those who, like the Pharisees in the Gospels, let their own self-importance and self-will close their ears to what they might learn here cannot be taught in the other world either. The Lord says of them, "You will not believe because you are not my sheep." When, a moment later, the Lord said, "The Father and I are one," these same people refused to consider His statement and merely accused Him of blasphemy and threatened to stone Him. This is exactly the same attitude that some people today have toward the Lord's words.

Primary

The correspondence of sheep is one which can be explained and illustrated even at this age level. This lesson offers a good opportunity to introduce the children to the thought that Bible animals represent traits of character with which they are familiar. The *main* objective of the teacher, however, should be to put into their minds thoughts about the Lord's tender love and care, and of our need of trustful obedience to Him. Read the lesson from the Word with them, giving them time to think of what each verse may mean.

Most of you have seen sheep. If not you have probably seen pictures of them; you may even have seen a picture of the Good Shepherd and a lamb. Sheep are gentle, useful animals. Their flesh is good to eat and their wool is very useful to us in another way.

Every winter their woolly coat grows very thick to protect them from the cold; in the spring, when it is warm again, their owners can cut the wool off and sell it to make cloth for clothing and blankets to keep people warm.

In some countries today sheep are still cared for very much as they were in the Holy Land long ago when the Lord was on earth. The shepherds lead the sheep out into the pastures in the spring and live there with them, guarding them in the daytime from wild animals and at night leading them into enclosures or folds where they can be safe from attack while the shepherds sleep. The shepherds love their sheep and call them by name, and the sheep know the voice of their own shepherd and follow wherever he leads them.

Did you ever hear someone call a baby a “little lamb”? It is a natural phrase to use because babies are gentle and innocent and like little lambs. The Lord called His followers His sheep. Let us read what He said about them. [Read John 10:1-14.]

Sheep and lambs picture innocence, the quality which leads us to trust in the Lord instead of ourselves. Shepherds, who lead and guard sheep, picture those who care for and protect this quality. The shepherds at Bethlehem who were told of the Lord’s birth had this same meaning, representing this beautiful and important quality.

The Lord knows and loves each one of us just as a shepherd knows and loves his sheep. We should listen when He speaks to us in His Word, and learn to love Him and follow Him willingly wherever He leads us. One especially lovely part of the Old Testament tells us this, too. Let us read together the twenty-third Psalm, which is sometimes called the “Shepherd Psalm.” It is probably known by heart by more people than any other part of the Bible except the Lord’s Prayer.

Do you remember a much earlier part of the Bible, the time when the Israelites were first commanded to celebrate the Passover?

What was the reason for the first Passover?

What did they eat for Passover?

There was a reason why the meat to be eaten was lamb. When we eat, the food eventually becomes part of us, doesn’t it? The

things we take into our minds and hearts become part of us, too. Everything which the Lord commanded the people to do in Bible days pictured something necessary for us, when understood spiritually, if our souls are to become healthy and strong. In the Word, different animals represent different traits of character. Everyone knows, for instance, what we mean when we call a person a pig. It may not be so obvious to us, though, that sheep and lambs picture innocence.

Who do you think are the Lord's sheep?

The Lord knows and loves each one of us as a shepherd does his sheep. We should listen to the Lord's voice as He speaks to us in His Word, and follow Him wherever He leads us. Then He can feed our souls and keep us safe. No one else can be trusted to lead us safely. This is part of what He means when He says, "I am the door." Think of this when you join in the closing benediction in Sunday school: "The Lord keep our going out and our coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore."

Junior

The correspondence of sheep and their relation to the shepherd can be given in some detail to this class, as well as the meaning of the Lord's being the "door" of the sheep. This is a good lesson in which to impress on them the responsibility that goes with our freedom of choice.

What kind of meat was eaten at the Passover?

What was David doing when he was called by Samuel to be anointed as king?

Who were the first to be told of the Lord's birth at Bethlehem?

How does Psalm 23 begin?

In John Worcester's book *Animals of the Bible* we read:

The shepherds of the East give a name to each member of their flocks, which the sheep soon learn, and to which they instantly respond. In the dry season many shepherds with their flocks meet at regular times around the wells. The flocks mingle at the troughs, drinking. But when all are satisfied, the shepherds move off in different directions, calling their sheep, which immediately follow, every one its own shepherd, with scarcely the possibility of a mistake . . . It is a peculiarity of sheep

that while they are so easily *led* by one whom they know, they are *driven* with difficulty. They huddle together as if frightened and the more they are pressed, the more frightened they seem; but if the leaders start forward, the flock follows. Affection for their shepherd is stronger than their mutual love. Him they will follow away from their friends.

The sheepfold mentioned in the first verse of John 10 refers to an enclosure into which the sheep could be led for safety. In those days there were evidently thieves and robbers to be guarded against as well as wolves and other wild animals.

Although the Lord spoke of natural things familiar to His hearers then, He was also talking about and to people in all times. His words are meant for us as well as for the people who listened to Him long ago. Let us learn some of this timeless language. For instance, we may hear someone call a baby a “little lamb.” This is not just a casual expression. A human infant shows characteristics that correspond to those of a lamb, being innocent and trustful, looking to someone wiser for care and protection, and having no desire to harm anyone. Babies soon grow out of this state, however, and begin to want their own way and to try to get it even if it leads to injury of others. It is easy to see that these later traits are not good and beautiful like the first ones.

In our chapter the Lord is saying that innocence and trust are qualities He wants us to keep, and that if we will trust and follow Him, as the sheep trust and follow their shepherd, He will “feed us in green pastures,” as the twenty-third Psalm says, and care for us and protect us always. It is only when we refuse to listen for His voice in order to follow him that we wander away from safety and fall prey to the “wolves” of selfish and cruel feelings.

What does the Lord call Himself in verse 9?

What does He call those who do *not* enter by the door?

What other kind of person is mentioned (verse 12)?

What does this person do when a wolf appears?

If you think a little you will see what this means spiritually. Thieves and robbers are those who try to steal sheep away from their true shepherd. This means that when anyone refuses to accept

the Lord as God or to be obedient to Him, but tries some other way to enter a heavenly state, that person is acting like a robber, trying to steal from the Lord what is his and to lead the Lord's sheep astray. In the same way, a hireling means a person who claims to be working for the Lord, but who is really only interested in the good reputation of the Lord's followers. Whenever obeying the Lord threatens to be a disadvantage to such a person, he turns his back on his duty.

The last part of John 10 relates a conversation the Lord had with some of His enemies as he walked in the portico of Solomon, the colonnade on the east side of the temple.

What did they ask Him to tell them?

Why did the Lord say they wouldn't believe Him?

What did He finally tell them (verse 30)?

Then what did they try to do?

Why did they say they wanted to stone the Lord?

This shows us what the Lord meant by His sheep and by calling Himself the "door" of the sheepfold. You are old enough to understand that the Lord has given each one of us the freedom to choose whether to will to be good or bad. First He tells us what is good, and then He tells us that only those who are good can ever be happy. If we choose to believe Him and try to do what He tells us is right, we can become His sheep and follow Him in safety and peace. But if we choose not to believe Him, we shall never know what safety and peace are. We may be able to get *some* things we think we want, but we shall soon tire of them and want other things. Such people will never be satisfied or happy either in this world or the next.

Intermediate

The meaning of innocence and charity should be impressed upon this class through the correspondence of lambs and sheep. It is at this age that young people often develop the most obvious and disagreeable form of self-assurance, and the teacher can help the parents by leading the class to see that this trait is not admirable but is a "wolf" come to steal away their good qualities.

Did you ever stop to think how many familiar passages in the Bible involve sheep and shepherds? We might begin with the story of Cain and Abel, in which Abel was a keeper of sheep and his offering of the firstlings of his flock was accepted by the Lord. Then in the story of Abraham's trying to sacrifice Isaac, the Lord provided a ram as a substitute. When Jacob fled from Esau and came to the well at Haran, he fell in love with Rachel when he saw her coming with her father's sheep to the well. The meat commanded for the Passover feast was lamb, and many of the sacrifices specified in the laws at Sinai used sheep and lambs. When Samuel was sent to anoint David, David was called from tending his father's sheep. And the twenty-third Psalm, which next to the Lord's Prayer is probably the best-known passage in the Bible, begins: "The Lord is my shepherd." In the New Testament we think at once of the shepherds at Bethlehem watching over their flocks by night, to whom the angels announced the Lord's birth. Then there is the parable of the lost sheep; the instance of the Lord's telling Peter, "Feed my sheep . . . feed my lambs"; and the statement of John the Baptist when he saw the Lord coming: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) Finally, in the book of Revelation the Lord is many times called "the Lamb."

But why should the Lord be called the lamb and also the shepherd? It is because the quality which sheep and lambs represent is the inmost quality of the Lord and also the quality which He is always seeking to develop and preserve in each one of us, His children. It is the quality of charity or genuine goodness—represented by sheep—which develops out of the quality of innocence—represented by lambs. The word *innocence* literally means "not harming," but this is a result of the quality called innocence rather than the quality itself. Swedenborg tells us that innocence and also charity are inmosty the acknowledgment that we are not either good or wise in ourselves, but that all goodness and wisdom are in and from the Lord. This is the quality which makes a person always ready to hear and obey the voice of the Lord and always careful to

do nothing which may tend to harm another. If we have this quality we follow the Lord just as sheep in the eastern countries follow their shepherd. And if we do this, the Lord can watch over us and keep our souls safe from selfish and cruel impulses which, like wolves, are lurking in all of us ready to spring out when we are “off our guard.”

A sheepfold is a picture of heaven, and the Lord Jesus Christ is its only door. He alone is a safe guide, because He alone loves us with pure, unselfish love which is divine love. All other guides we may choose to follow are either thieves and robbers, trying to steal us away from the Lord and heaven, or to some extent at least “hirelings,” claiming that they are serving goodness and truth but really doing so for the sake of their own reputation and comfort, and not to be trusted if their own interests are threatened.

But there are many people in the world who have the quality of innocence—who sincerely want to be good—who, for one reason or another, have never come to recognize Jesus Christ as the true shepherd. These are the “other sheep” the Lord speaks of in verse 16. Swedenborg tells us that such people can be instructed in the truth after they come into the other world, because their hearts and minds are open. (We should know that in this verse 16 in KJV there is an error in translation. The word correctly translated “fold” in the first part of the verse is not the same word used in the last part, which should be translated “there shall be one flock, one shepherd,” as in several more recent translations.) There are many different societies in heaven—many folds—but all are the Lord’s sheep, recognizing Him alone as their shepherd.

In the last part of John 10 the difference between those who are the Lord’s sheep and those who are not is made clear by the Lord’s conversation in the temple. The people asked Him about Himself not because they wanted to learn the truth but that they might find an excuse to condemn Him. They thought themselves wise and considered themselves good; they were not innocent. The Lord told them plainly, “Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep.” Their pride in their own wisdom and goodness had closed

their minds and hearts. Such people cannot be taught the truth either in this world or in the next.

Basic Correspondences

shepherd = one who leads and teaches and protects those who are in good

wolf = the evil that is opposite to innocence and goodness and seeks to destroy them

Senior

This is a good opportunity to point out to Seniors the shallowness of a worldly attitude, and also the weakness of the belief in Christ in many Christian groups today. They need clear sight and a firm hold on the Lord and His own teaching to safeguard them as they go out into the world.

There are two lessons in our chapter for today about which we should think very seriously. One centers about the Lord's statement that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him, and the other about His statement that He is the door.

Lambs and sheep represent innocence and the genuine goodness and charity which develop from innocence. The ground of both innocence and charity is humility. In our modern civilization this is not a popular virtue; in fact, it is scarcely considered to be a virtue at all. The emphasis in politics, in business, and in professional life is on self-confidence and self-assertion. When a modern man says people are like sheep, he is not meaning to compliment them. He means that they are easily led to do what "everybody" is doing, and much of our modern advertising is geared to this fact.

Our chapter for today gives us a very different thought about sheep. They are indeed prone to follow rather than to lead, and without the true shepherd they are easily stolen by thieves or destroyed by wolves. But they also recognize the voice of the true shepherd when they hear it, and follow Him willingly and trustfully. This means that those who have humility can be led to the heavenly fold. Here read the quotation at the end of the notes for Adults.

Those who believe in their own wisdom and goodness close their ears to the shepherd's voice and go their own way to destruction. The Lord told a group of the people, "Ye believe not, because ye are not my sheep." Confidence in self may achieve fame and fortune for a time in this world, but even here its achievements are not lasting. The great people of history have not been of this kind.

Once a person has the basis of innocence and goodness in the heart there is only one great need, and that is to find the true shepherd. Read Jeremiah 23:1-4. (*Pastor* is another word for shepherd.) The false shepherds of whom Jeremiah speaks are the thieves and robbers mentioned in our chapter, and also the "hirelings." A hireling is one who professes to be serving the Lord, but is really concerned chiefly with his own importance and welfare. The Lord alone is the true shepherd, and we hear His voice when we read the Word in an affirmative spirit, accepting what He says as true because He says it, and trying our best to understand and obey.

This is why the Lord calls Himself the door of the sheep. You will be surprised, as you go out into the world and mingle with Christian people not of your own church and attend their services and meetings, to find how much of their teaching they draw from what others have said about Christ and how little they attend to what Christ said about Himself. Remember always that as New Churchmen you believe that Jesus Christ is the door by which we must enter heaven, that He knew what He was saying and spoke the simple truth when He said (verse 30), "I and my Father are one," and when later (John 14:9) He said to Philip, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

We have to make up our minds as early as possible whether we are going to devote our lives to getting what we can of this world's goods and honors, closing our minds to the consideration of what lasts to eternity, or whether we are going to develop the deeper and higher possibilities which the Lord offers to each one of us. The people around us may not understand what we are trying to become. They may even think that we are foolish. But the Lord

knows each of us through and through. He says: “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep.”

Adult

The teacher of this class should read also the Senior notes, for many adults are prone to be over-impressed with modern worldly reasoning and with Bible studies based on disbelief in the divine inspiration of the Word. The quotation on innocence at the end of the lesson notes may also be used as discussion material.

In the writings sheep are variously interpreted as “celestial things,” “those in charity and thence in faith,” “the good of the will,” or simply “those in good.” Lambs picture especially the good of innocence, that inmost affection which must be in everyone who enters heaven, and which especially reigns with the angels in the celestial heavens (AE 314; HH 276-283), the tender, gentle, loving spirit which does not trust in self but looks to the Lord alone for guidance. It has no selfish wish, and because this is the inmost quality of the Lord’s love, He is so often called a lamb (John 1:29, 36; Isaiah 53:7; Revelation 5:6, 7:17). Because we must never forget that this quality is an essential part of true worship of the Lord, the people in Old Testament days were commanded to offer every day. “two lambs of the first year without spot,” one in the morning and one in the evening (Numbers 28:3-4). we keep this statute in spirit when we pray morning and evening, “Deliver us from evil,” desiring to be kept from thinking or acting in any way which would injure the Lord or the neighbor. It is this love that saves us from bondage to evil and falsity; it was for the same reason that lamb was the meat of the feast of the Passover (Exodus 12:3-10). Because infants are the external embodiment of this love, a lamb was the appropriate offering for the birth of a child (Leviticus 12:6).

Those who guard and cherish this innocent love are called shepherds. The Lord is primarily the Good Shepherd, as we learn in our chapter for today, and in many other places in the Word He is called a shepherd (Psalm 23; Isaiah 40:11). We likewise know that

the beautiful parable in Luke 15:3-7 teaches of His loving care. He sent the apostles forth as lambs among wolves (Luke 10:3), but we are promised that a time shall come when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb (Isaiah 11:6; 65:25), picturing the time when our evil affections will be completely restrained by the power of the Lord's love in our hearts. When we read of the Lord asking Peter if he loved Him, telling him three times to feed His sheep and His lambs (John 21:15-17), it is a solemn reminder that if we do not cherish tender and gentle affections in ourselves and others, we do not truly love the Lord. When He came into the world, those to whom His advent was first made known were shepherds keeping their flocks by night around Bethlehem. This means that those who in the midst of ignorance and evil guard and cherish the good of innocence are prepared to recognize the Lord. Another interesting story in the Word is the coming of Joseph's brethren before Pharaoh, when they concealed their true calling of shepherds and said their trade had been keepers of cattle, because "every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians" (Genesis 46:34). This pictures the fact that the natural mind can recognize value in affections for useful work—represented by cattle—but has no use for the inner qualities of the heart. Throughout the Word the Lord's providence is pictured as feeding and cherishing the inmost affections for goodness, and as protecting and leading those in whom these affections are found.

In Jeremiah 23:1-4 we read a condemnation of false pastors or shepherds who neglect their duty and destroy and scatter the Lord's sheep, and we have there the promise of the Lord's coming to gather the sheep again into their folds. In our chapter for today the Lord presents Himself as the fulfillment of this prophecy. We have seen that He is the lamb, in that His inmost love is innocence. Now we find that He is also the Good Shepherd and the door of the sheepfold. He is the Good Shepherd in that He cares for and feeds the things that are His own in us; and He is the door in that He is the truth by which alone we can find the way into His fold, which is heaven. Those who seek to enter heaven without recog-

nizing the Lord are thieves and robbers, claiming as their own what belongs solely to the Lord. His sheep hear His voice; those whose hearts are innocent recognize the Lord as God and obey Him. And “he calleth his own sheep by name”; i.e., He recognizes the true quality of each one. “‘To call the sheep by name’ means to teach and to lead every one who is in the good of charity according to the state of his love and wisdom.” (DP 230) “By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” This means to draw close to the Lord in our hearts and to follow Him in our outward life; it reminds us of the familiar benediction: “The Lord keep our going out and our coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.” Those who would be true shepherds are, like the Lord, ready to give their life for the sheep, to sacrifice selfish desires when they threaten heavenly innocence. But the hireling, he who does good only for what he can get out of it, deserts the sheep in time of danger, cares for them only while it is obviously to his advantage to do so. The “other sheep . . . which are not of this fold” refer to those whose minds must be satisfied, who are pictured in the advent stories by the Wise Men from the East who saw the star (AC 3969). This whole chapter, like the twenty-third Psalm, is one of the most universally known and loved in the Word, because, whether we understand it or not, it appeals to the innocent states which the Lord has stored up in everyone from infancy, and which are the first to recognize Him.

The Pharisees were not of the Lord’s sheep. They were evil shepherds and hirelings. When they questioned Him, it was not for the sake of learning the truth, but to draw from Him statements which they could condemn. So He often answered them in such a way as to point out their insincerity and if possible to make them judge their own conduct and motives. In one conversation He asked them to study and judge the works which He had done, and challenged them to find fault with His works. But He also declared plainly His oneness with the Father. Although this is exactly what they had asked Him to say, they immediately accused

Him of blasphemy “because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.” People today who do not wish to accept the Lord’s teachings as divine truth pretend to investigate His claim, but like the Pharisees they have their minds made up to start with, and as soon as they come upon a direct statement of His deity they say, “Impossible; no man could make such a claim; this must be a fiction of the apostles.” They refuse, as the Pharisees did, to consider His works as evidence of the source of His power. They are not of His sheep; that is, they do not have in their hearts the humility and the innocent and trustful affection which open the mind to His voice. Here again we have the lesson that belief is primarily of the will. “My sheep hear my voice.” Those who really desire the Lord’s guidance can find ample proof of His claim, but those who wish to guide themselves cannot be convinced by any type of proof.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Heaven and Hell, nn. 276-280: “What innocence is and its nature few in the world know, and those who are in evil know nothing about it. It is, indeed, visible to the eyes, as seen in the face, speech, and movements, particularly of children; and yet what innocence is, and especially that it is that in which heaven is stored up in man is unknown. In making this known let us proceed in order, and consider first the innocence of childhood, then the innocence of wisdom, and lastly the state of heaven in regard to innocence. The innocence of childhood or of children is not genuine innocence, for it is innocence not in internal form but only in external form. Nevertheless one may learn from it what innocence is, since it shines forth from the face of children and from some of their movements and from their first speech, and affects those about them. . . . I have been told from heaven that children are especially under the Lord’s auspices, and that they receive influx from the inmost heaven, where there is a state of innocence; that this influx passes through their interiors, and that in its passing through, their interiors are affected solely by the innocence; and for this reason innocence is shown in their faces and in some of their movements and becomes evident. . . . The innocence of wisdom is genuine innocence, because it is internal, for it belongs to the mind itself, that is, to the will itself and from that to the understanding. This is why it is said in heaven that innocence has its abode in wisdom, and that an angel has just so much of innocence as he has of wisdom. This is confirmed by the fact that

those who are in a state of innocence attribute nothing of good to themselves, but regard all things as received and ascribe them to the Lord; that they wish to be led by Him and not by themselves; that they love everything that is good and find delight in everything that is true, because they know and perceive that loving what is good, that is, willing and doing it, is loving the Lord, and loving truth is loving the neighbor; that they live contented with their own, whether it be little or much, because they know that they receive just as much as is good for them . . . Neither are they anxious about the future . . . As innocence consists in being led by the Lord and not by self, so all who are in heaven are in innocence; for all who are there love to be led by the Lord, knowing that to lead themselves is to be led by what is their own, and what is one's own is loving oneself.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What does the Lord call Himself in this lesson? *Good Shepherd*
- P. What does He say a true shepherd does? *calls his sheep by name*
- P. What does He say about the sheep? *they know His voice*
- J. What does He say about those who came before Him? *thieves and robbers*
- P. What else does He call Himself, besides Shepherd? *door of fold*
- J. How is He the door? *through Him we enter heaven*
- J. What does He say about the hireling? *cares nothing for the sheep*
- J. What does He say about other sheep He has? *not of this fold*
- J. What did some of the Jews ask Him to tell them? *are you the Christ?*
- J. What did He point to as witness that He came from God? *His works*
- J. Why did He say they would not believe Him? *not His sheep*
- J. What did He say about Himself and the Father? *I and Father are one*
- J. What did they then accuse Him of? *blasphemy*
- P. What other very familiar Bible passage calls the Lord a Shepherd?
twenty-third Psalm
- I. What do (1) lambs, and (2) sheep represent? *(1) the quality of innocence out of which grows (2) the quality of genuine goodness in the life*
- S. What is innocence, spiritually understood? *the acknowledgment that all goodness and wisdom are from the Lord; thus the willingness to be led by the Lord (literally, harmlessness)*