

SHEPHERDS, HIRELINGS, SHEEP

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Lessons: John 10

Let's talk about a "good shepherd"—and then let's say a few words about sheep.

The good shepherd is very different from a "hireling". And what is a hireling? Well, you can tell something about him by what he does. When he is supposed to be protecting the sheep and a wolf comes along, he leaves the sheep and runs away. (*John 10: 12.*)

What does his running away show? It shows that he doesn't care for the sheep. A hireling is someone who does not care. "The hireling flees because he is an hireling, and cares not for the sheep." (verse 13.) The hireling flees because he is an hireling, and does not care about the sheep.

To "hire" someone is to pay them money to do something. It is good to be hired to do something, but it is really sad if someone is only a hireling and does not *care*. The Writings give us examples of this. Imagine having the job of taking care of a baby or a child. You probably know something about doing that. But imagine not caring one little bit for the child you take care of, but *only* caring for the money you want. The example the Writings give is of someone who takes care of the child, but when the parents are gone, they have no kindness for the child, and they even laugh when the child cries.

This is said in *True Christian Religion* 441, where other examples are given like this one. "They are like shepherds who care for sheep merely for hire, and if the hire is not given when they wish it, they drive the sheep with their crook from the pasture to the desert." These are people who think of nothing but rewards. If they have done some good things in this world, they feel that when they die they can demand heaven. But when they demand heaven, the question is, did they really *care* in this world? Did they really have love? And if they did not really care, they are sent away angry. "Such are meant in the Word by hirelings" (*True Christian Religion* 441).

We can't miss the lesson here. It is not telling us that rewards are wrong. Rewards and pay are fine. It is telling us that if you really want to live a true life in this world or in the next, be someone who *cares*. If you are given a job cleaning something up, don't just do the quickest job you can, guessing that things you didn't do might not be noticed. Do the job with care. Be like a workman who is fixing someone else's car, but he fixes it every bit as carefully

as he would his own car. When you learn to live life with that kind of care, you learn real living.

Stop and think: what the Lord says here about a shepherd is telling something about the way He feels about us. He is the good shepherd. He doesn't take care of us merely because He has to. He really loves us. He really cares.

Now what about sheep? We are compared to sheep who know the Lord's voice and follow Him. You probably know that a sheep corresponds to innocence.

What is innocence? First, think of it as something that you can see and something you can be touched by. You probably use the word "cute" when you are touched by the way a little child looks or speaks. We are told that innocence can be seen in the eyes and face, speech and movements, particularly of little children" (*Heaven and Hell* 276).

Notice the word "affects" in the following description. Innocence "shines forth from the face of children and from some of their movements and from their fist speech and *affects* those about them" (*Heaven and Hell* 277). This means it does something to people. It makes them smile or gives them a warm feeling. Sometimes it can even bring tears to the eyes.

So innocence is something good that you can notice and which does something to you. But it is more than that. It is that something in each of us in which heaven is stored up. (*Heaven and Hell* 276.) Each one of us must have something of this quality, and that is why the Lord said that unless we become as little children, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

Innocence, then, is heaven's dwelling place with us, but it is so helpful to have a definition of it that we can work with. It is a "willingness to be led by the Lord." In that short phrase you have the quality of innocence. Cherish that quality of being willing to be led by the Lord.

The Lord was speaking of innocence when He spoke of sheep, and He said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (verse 27).

Note: An excellent song to use in connection with this chapter is the one by Lori S. Odhner, "I am the Door for the Sheep to come in."

Family Talk

*Lori and John Odhner's Songs from the Word are available on tape and in a binder of sheet music from the General Church Book Center, Cairncrest, P.O. Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009
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