

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
10:10-18

10. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly. 11. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. 12. But he who is a hireling, and not the shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. 13. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. 14. I am the good shepherd and know my *sheep*, and am known by my own. 15. As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16. 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. 17. Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again. 18. No man takes 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 I have received from my Father.

10.--[*The thief...destroy.*] In this passage our Lord entirely drops the figure of "the door" and presents Himself under a new aspect, as "the Shepherd." And the first thing He does is to show the amazing difference between Himself and the false teachers who bore rule among the Jews. He had already told the Pharisees that they were no better than "thieves and robbers." He now contrasts their objects with His own. A thief does not come to the fold to do good to the flock but harm, for his own selfish advantage and for the injury of the sheep. Just so the Pharisees only became teachers of the Jewish Church for their own advantage and interest and taught doctrine which was only calculated to ruin and destroy souls.

A. Clarke observes: "How can worldly-minded hirelings, fox-hunting, card--playing priests, read these words without trembling to the center of their souls!"

Bickersteth suggests that "the thief in the singular number may remind us of the prince of darkness, the great chief robber and thief of souls."

[*I am come...life...abundantly.*] Our Lord here puts in strong contrast with the false teachers of the Jews His own purpose and object in coming into the world. He drops the figure of "the door" and says plainly and distinctly, stating it in the widest broadest way, that as a personal Savior He came that men might have life. The thief came to take life; He came to give it. He came that the way to eternal life might be laid open, the life of justification purchased by His blood, the life of sanctification provided by the grace of His Spirit. He came to buy this life by His sacrifice on the cross. He came to proclaim this life and offer it to a lost world. To bring life and hope to a lost, dead, perishing world was the grand object of His incarnation. The ministry of

the Pharisees was death, but that of Christ was life. The word "they" before "might have" must be taken generally here for "men." There is nothing else to which it can apply.

But this was not all. Our Lord came that men who had life already "might have it more abundantly." That is, that they might see the way of life more clearly and have no uncertainty about the way of justification before God; and that they might feel the possession of life more sensibly and have more conscious enjoyment of pardon, peace, and acceptance. This seems to me by far the simplest view of the text. Of course, there were millions in the world who before Christ came knew nothing of life for their souls. To them Christ's coming brought "life." But there were also many believing Jews who had life already when Christ came, and were walking in the steps of Abraham. To them Christ's coming brought "life more abundantly." It enlarged their vision and increased their comfort. So Paul tells Titus that "Christ's appearing brought life and immortality to light." (2 Tim. i.10.)

Most commentators do not admit the comparative idea in "more abundantly," but interpret it as simply meaning the abundance of grace and mercy which Christ brings into the world, as Rom. v.20,21. This is true, but I venture to think it is not all the truth.

Chemnitius, following Augustine, thinks that "more abundantly" may refer to the life of glory hereafter, which saints will have after the life of faith here. But I cannot see this.

11.--[*I am the Good Shepherd.*] Here our Lord declares that He Himself is the great Head Shepherd of God's people, of whom all ministers--even the best--are only faint imitators. It is as if He said: "I am towards all who believe in Me, what a good shepherd is to his sheep--careful, watchful, and loving." The article in the Greek is twice used to increase the emphasis: "I am the Shepherd, the good or excellent One." In the second verse of the chapter, before the word "Shepherd" in the Greek, we may remember there is no article at all.

It is probable that the name "shepherd," in Jewish ears, would convey much more clearly than it does in ours a claim to be regarded as the Messiah or Shepherd of souls. (See Gen. xlix.24, Psalm xxiii, Ezek. xxxiv.)

[*The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.*] Our Lord here shows the distinguishing mark of a good shepherd. Such a one will lay down his life for his sheep, to save, protect, and defend them. He will die rather than lose one. He will peril his life, like David attacking the lion and the bear, rather than let one be taken from him. "All this," our Lord implies, "I have come to do for my spiritual sheep. I have come to shed my life-blood to save their souls; to die that they may live." The word "gives" here should have been translated "lays down." It is so rendered in the 15th verse.

Flacius observes how our Lord here, as elsewhere, always brings round His discourse to His own atoning death.

Hengstenberg observes: "This expression, 'laying down the soul or life' for anyone, does not occur anywhere else independently in the New Testament. It is never found in profane writers. It must be referred back to the Old Testament, and specially to Isa. liii.10 where it is said of Messiah, 'He shall make, or place, His soul an offering for sin.'"

Tittman says: "Those who maintain that Christ died only to confirm the truth of His doctrine, or to confirm the certainty of the promises of pardon and acceptance with God, are under a mistake. The death of Christ was not necessary for either of those purposes. The truth of His doctrine and the certainty of His promises must be established by other evidence. Neither does our Lord say that He laid down His life for His *doctrines*, but for His sheep."

12,13.--[*But he who is a hireling, etc.*] Our Lord in these two verses illustrates the subject He has taken up by showing the wide difference between a mere hired shepherd and one who feels a special interest in his sheep, because they are his own. A mere hired servant who has not spent his money in buying the sheep, but only takes charge of a flock for pay and cares little so long as he gets his money--such a one, as a general rule, will make no sacrifice and run no risk for the sheep. If he sees a wolf coming, he will not meet him and fight but will run away and leave the flock to be scattered and devoured. He acts in this way because his whole heart is not in his work. He feeds the flock for money and not for love, for what he can get by it and not because he really cares for the sheep. Of course, the picture must be taken as *generally* true. We cannot suppose our Lord meant that no paid servant was trustworthy. Jacob was a hired shepherd, yet trustworthy. But doubtless His Jewish hearers knew many such "hirelings" as He here describes. The picture of a faithless shepherd in Ezekiel xxxiv would also occur to those who were familiar with Old Testament Scripture.

It is worth remembering that St. Paul specially warns the Ephesian elders, in Acts 20, that "grievous wolves" would enter in among them, not sparing the flock. Our Lord also in the Sermon on the Mount compares false prophets to "ravening wolves." (Matt. vii.15.)

Musculus observes how great a misfortune it is to Christ's sheep when they are deserted by ministers and left without regular means of grace. It has a scattering weakening effect. The best of ministers are poor weak creatures. But churches cannot keep together, as a rule, without pastors; the wolf scatters them. The ministry, no doubt, may be overvalued; but it may also be undervalued.

We cannot doubt that the latent thought of our Lord's language here was as follows. The Pharisees and other false teachers were no better than hired shepherds. They cared for nothing but themselves and their own honor or profit. They cared nothing for souls. They were willing to have the name and profession of shepherds, but they had no heart in their work. They had neither will nor power to protect their hearers against any assault which that wolf, the devil, might make against them. Hence the Jews, when our Lord came on earth, were without help for their souls, fainting, and scattered like sheep without a shepherd, a prey to every device of the

devil.

Let it be noted that the great secret of a useful and Christlike ministry is to love men's souls. He who is a minister merely to get a living, or to have an honorable position, is "the hireling" of these verses. The true pastor's first care is for his sheep. The false pastor's first thought is for himself.

Our Lord's strong language about the false teachers of the Jews ends here. Those who think that unsound ministers ought never to be exposed and held up to notice, and men ought never to be warned against them, would do well to study this passage. No class of character throughout our Lord's ministry seems to call forth such severe denunciation as that of false pastors. The reason is obvious. Other men ruin themselves alone; false pastors ruin their flocks as well as themselves. To flatter all ordained men and say they never should be called unsound and dangerous guides, is the surest way to injure the Church and offend Christ.

Chrysostom, Theophylact, and most commentators think that the "wolf" here means the devil, even as he is called elsewhere a roaring lion, a serpent, and a dragon.

Lampe, on the other hand, thinks that the wolf signifies the same as the thief and robber, and that it must mean the false prophet, the wolf in sheep's clothing. (See Zeph. iii.3 and Matt. vii.15.)

In interpreting this whole passage, we must be careful not to strain it too far. Our Lord did not mean that in no case is flight from danger lawful in a pastor. He Himself says elsewhere, "When they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another." (Matt. x.23.) So Paul left Damascus by stealth to escape the Jews. (Acts. ix.25.)

Calvin remarks: "Ought we to reckon that man a hireling who for any reasons whatever shrinks from encountering the wolves? This was anciently debated as a practical question, when tyrants raged cruelly against the Church. Tertullian and others were, in my opinion, too rigid on this point. I prefer greatly the moderation of Augustine, who allows pastors to flee on certain conditions."

No unbending rule can be laid down. Each case must be decided by circumstances. There are times when, like St. Paul or Jewell, a man may see it a duty to flee and await better days; and times when, like Hooper, he may feel called to decline flight and to die with his sheep. Barnabas and Paul were specially commended to the Church at Antioch (Acts xv.25) as those who had "hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus." St. Paul tells the Ephesian elders, "I count not my life dear unto myself so that I may finish my course with joy." (Acts xx.24.) Again he says, "I am ready to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts xxi.13.)

14.--[*I am the Good Shepherd.*] These words are repeated to show the importance of the office our Lord fills as the Good Shepherd, and to bring into stronger light the wide difference between Him and the Pharisees.

[*And know my sheep, and am known by my own.*] These words express the close and intimate union there is between Christ and all His believing people, a union understood fully by those alone who feel it, but to the world foolishness. Our Lord, like a good earthly shepherd, knows every one of His people--knows them with a special knowledge of love and approval; knows where they dwell and all about them, their weaknesses, trials, and temptations; and knows exactly what each one needs from day to day. His people, on the other hand, know Him with the knowledge of faith and confidence, and feel in Him a loving trust of which an unbeliever can form no idea. They know Him as their own sure Friend and Savior and rest on the knowledge. The devils know that Christ is a Savior. The sheep know and feel that He is *their* Savior.

I fancy the fullness of this verse would be far more plain to Jews accustomed to Oriental shepherds and their flocks, to the care of a good shepherd and the confidence of a flock, than it is to us in this Northern climate. At any rate, it teaches indirectly the duty of every Christlike pastor to be personally acquainted with all his people, just as a good shepherd knows each one of his sheep.

Musculus points out the strong contrast between "I know my sheep" and the solemn saying to the virgins "I know you not," and to the false professors "I never knew you" in Matt. xxv.7 and vii.23.

Besser remarks that "I am known of mine" is a sharp rebuke to those doubters who in voluntary humility refuse to be sure of their salvation.

15.--[*As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father.*] I believe this sentence ought to be read in close connection with the last verse, and without any full stop between. There is nothing in the Greek against this view. The sense would then be: "I know my sheep and am known of mine, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father." The meaning will then be that the mutual knowledge of Christ and His sheep is like the mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son--a knowledge so high, so deep, so intimate, so ineffable, that no words can fully convey it. The full nature of that knowledge which the First Person of the Trinity has of the Second and the Second has of the First, is something far beyond finite man's understanding. It is, in short, a deep mystery. Yet the mutual knowledge and communion of Christ and believers is something so deep and wonderful that it can only be compared, though at a vast distance, to that which exists between the Father and the Son.

To understand this knowledge a little, we should read carefully the language used in Proverbs viii.22-30.

[*And I lay down my life for the sheep.*] Our Lord, to show how truly He is the Good Shepherd, declares that like a good shepherd He not only knows all His sheep, but lays down His life for them. By using the present tense He seems to say, "I am doing it. I am just about to do it. I came into the world to do it." This can only refer to His own atoning death on the cross, the great propitiation He was about to make by shedding His life blood. It was the highest proof of love. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John xv.13.)

Taken alone and by itself, this sentence undoubtedly contains the doctrine of particular redemption. It declares that Christ "lays down His life for the sheep." That He does so in a special sense I think none can deny. The "sheep" alone, or true believers, obtain any saving benefit from His death. But to argue from this text that in no sense and in no way did Christ die for any beside His "sheep" is to say what seems to me to contradict Scripture. The plain truth is that the extent of redemption is not the leading subject of this verse. Our Lord is saying what He does for His sheep; He loves them so that He dies for them. But it does not follow that we are to conclude that His death was not meant to influence and affect the position of all mankind. I venture to refer the reader to my own notes, in this commentary, on John i.28; iii.16, and vi.32 for a full discussion of the subject.

Both here and in the 11th verse, I do not think the Greek word translated "for" should be pressed too far, as if it necessarily implied the doctrine of substitution or the vicariousness of Christ's death. That doctrine is a blessed and glorious truth, and is taught plainly and unmistakably elsewhere. Here, however, we are reading parabolic figurative language, and I doubt whether it is quite fair to explain it as meaning more than "on account of" or "in behalf of" the sheep. Of course it comes to the same thing at last. If the Shepherd did not die, the sheep would die. But I do not quite think "vicariousness," at any rate, is the primary idea of the sentence.

I fully agree with Parkhurst, at the same time, that the Greek expression for "dying for anyone" in Rom. v.6-8 never has any signification other than that of "rescuing the life of another at the expense of our own."

16.--[*And other sheep...this fold.*] In this sentence our Lord declares plainly the approaching conversion of the Gentiles. The sheep He specially died for were not merely the few believing Jews, but the elect Gentiles also. They are the "other sheep;" "this fold" means the Jewish Church. It reads as though He would show the real measure and size of His flock. It was one much larger than the Jewish nation, of which the scribes and Pharisees were so proud.

Let it be noted here that our Lord uses the present tense. The heathen sheep were as yet heathen and not brought in; yet He says, "I have them." They were already given to Him in the eternal counsels, and foreknown from the beginning of the world. So it was with the Corinthians before their conversion: "I have much people in this city." (Acts xviii.10.)

Augustine remarks: "They were yet without, among the Gentiles, predestinated, not yet gathered in. These He knew who had predestinated them. He knew who had come to redeem them with the shedding of His own blood. He saw them who did not yet see Him. He knew them who yet believed not in Him."

[*Them also I must bring.*] Our Lord here declares that it is necessary for Him, in order to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament and to carry out the great purpose of His coming, to bring in and add to His flock other believers beside the Jewish sheep. "It is part of my work, office, and

mission to gather them out from the heathen by the preaching of my Apostles."

The prediction here made was contrary to Jewish prejudices. The Jews thought they alone were God's flock and favored people. Even the Apostles afterwards were slow to remember these words.

Hutcheson observes: "Christ Himself is chief in bringing in His elect, whatever instruments He employs; and He is at pains to seek them and gain their consent, as being bound in the covenant of redemption to present all that are given Him blameless before the Father." Saints are "the called of Jesus Christ." (Rom. i.6.)

[*They shall hear my voice.*] This is a prophecy and a promise combined. It was a prophecy that the elect among the heathen, however unlikely it might appear, would hear Christ's voice speaking to them in the Gospel preached; and hearing, would believe and obey. It was a promise that would encourage His Apostles to preach to the heathen: "They will listen, and be converted, and follow Me." It is a saying that was wonderfully forgotten by the Apostles afterwards. They were backward to bring in the other sheep after their Master left the world. It is a sentence that should nerve and cheer the missionary. Christ has said it: "The sheep who are scattered among the heathen will hear."

The text "He who hears you hears Me" (Luke x.16), is the Divine explanation of the expression "hear my voice."

[*And there shall be one fold and one shepherd.*] This sentence contains one word which ought to have been differently translated. It ought to be, as Tyndale renders it, "one *flock* and one shepherd." There is an evident difference. Christ's universal Church is a mighty company of which the members may be found in many different visible churches, or ecclesiastical "folds;" but it composes only one "flock." There is only One Holy Catholic Church" which is the blessed company of all faithful people; but there are many various visible churches.

The sentence is true of all believers now. Though differing in various points, such as government or ceremonies, true believers are all sheep of one flock, and all look up to one Savior and Shepherd. It will be more completely fulfilled at Christ's second coming. Then shall be exhibited to the world one glorious Church under one glorious Head. In the view of this promise, unity with all true Christians should be sought and striven for by every true sheep.

Gualter remarks that there never has been, or can be, more than one Holy Catholic Church, and unless we belong to it we cannot be saved. And he warns us against the pernicious error that all men shall get to heaven if sincere, whether they belong to the Holy Catholic Church or not.

Chemnitius observes that we must be careful not to make this one Church either too narrow or too broad. We make it too narrow when, like the Jews and the Papists, we exclude any believer who does not belong to our particular fold. We make it too broad when we include every professing

Christian, whether he hears Christ's voice or not. It is a flock of "sheep."

In every other place in the New Testament the word here wrongly translated "fold" is rendered "flock." (Matt. xxvi.31, Luke ii.8, 1 Cor. ix.7.) The word "fold" before us is evidently an oversight of our translators.

17.--[*Therefore does my Father love me, etc.*] This is a deep and mysterious verse, like all verses which speak of the relation between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity. We must be content to admire and believe what we cannot fully understand. When, as in John v.20 and here, our Lord speaks of "the Father loving the Son," we must remember that He is using language borrowed from earthly affection to express the mind of one Person of the Trinity towards another, and accordingly we must interpret it reverently. Yet we may surely gather from this verse that our Lord's coming into this world to lay down His life for the sheep by dying on the cross, and to take it again for their justification by rising again from the dead, was a transaction viewed with infinite complacency and approbation by God the Father. "I am about to die, and after death to rise again. My so doing, however strange it may seem to you Pharisees, is the very thing which my Father in heaven approves, and for which He specially loves Me." It is like the Father's words "In whom I am well pleased," and St. Paul's "Wherefore God has highly exalted Him" (Matt. iii.17, Phil. ii.29), and Isaiah's "I will divide Him a portion with the great, because He has poured out His soul unto death" (Is. liii.12).

Our Lord, by mentioning His resurrection, seems to remind His hearers that in one respect He was different from the best of shepherds. They might lay down their lives; but then there would be an end of them. He meant to lay down His life, but after that to take it again. He would not only die for His people but also rise again.

Guise thinks the true meaning is: "I cheerfully lay down my life for the expiation of my sheep's offenses, in order that I may rise again for their justification."

Let it be noted here that there is no part of Christ's work for His people that God the Father is said to regard with such special complacency as His dying for them. No wonder that ministers ought to make Christ crucified the principal subject of their teaching.

Gualter thinks these words were specially meant to prevent the offense of the ignominious death of Christ on the cross. That death, whatever the Jews might think, was part of Christ's plan and commission, and one reason why the Father loved Him.

Brentius thinks that there is here a reference to the story of Abraham offering Isaac, when the words were used, "Because thou hast done this thing, and not withheld thy son, therefore blessing I will bless thee." (Gen. xxii.)

Hengstenberg remarks that the Father's love "was the very opposite of that wrath of God, of which the Jews regarded Christ's death as a proof and

sign." They thought that God had forsaken Him and given Him up to be crucified in displeasure, when in reality God was well pleased.

18.--[*No man takes...of myself.*] In this sentence our Lord teaches that His own death was entirely voluntary. An earthly shepherd may die for his flock, but against his own will. The great Shepherd of believers made His soul an offering for sin of His own free will. He was not obliged or compelled to do it by superior force. No one could have taken away His life had He not been willing to lay it down; but He laid it down "of Himself" because He had covenanted to offer Himself as a propitiation for our sins. His own love to sinners, and not the power of the Jews or Pontius Pilate's soldiers, was the cause of His death.

The word "I" is inserted emphatically in the Greek. "I myself" lay down my life "of myself."

Henry observes: "Christ could, when He pleased, slip the knot of union between body and soul, and without any act of violence done to Himself could disengage them from each other. Having voluntarily taken up a body, He could voluntarily lay it down again. This appeared when He cried with a loud voice and 'gave up' the ghost."

[*I have power...down...take it again.*] Our Lord here amplifies His last statement and magnifies His own Divine nature by declaring that He has full power to lay down His life when He pleases and to take it again when He pleases. This last point deserves special notice. Our Lord teaches that His resurrection, as well as His death, was in His own power. When our Lord rose again, He was not passive and raised by the power of another only, but rose by His own Divine power. It is noteworthy that the resurrection of our Lord in some places is attributed to His Father's act (as Acts ii.24-32), once, at least, to the Holy Spirit (as 1 Pet. iii.18), and here and in John ii.19 to Christ Himself. All leads to the same great conclusion--that the resurrection of our Lord, as well as every part of His mediatorial work, was an act in which all three Persons of the Trinity concurred and cooperated.

Hutcheson observes that if Christ had power to take life again when He pleased, "so He can put a period to the sufferings of His own when He pleases, without any help of their crooked ways."

[*This...received from my Father.*] Chrysostom, and most other commentators, apply these words strictly to the great work which our Lord has just declared He had power to do: viz., to lay down His life and to take it again. "This is part of the commission I received from my Father on coming into the world, and one of the works He gave Me to do."

No doubt this is good exposition and good divinity. Yet I am rather inclined to think that our Lord's words refer to the whole doctrine which He had just been declaring to the Jews: viz., His office as a Shepherd, His being the true Shepherd, His laying down His life for the sheep and taking it again, His having other sheep who were to be brought into the fold, His final purpose to exhibit to the world one flock and one Shepherd. Of all this truth He says, "I received this doctrine in charge from my Father to

proclaim to the world, and I now declare it to you Pharisees." I suspect that both here and elsewhere the word "commandment" has a wide, deep meaning and points to that solemn and mysterious truth--the entire unity of the Father and the Son in the work of redemption--to which John frequently refers: "I am in the Father, and the Father in Me. The *words* that I speak to you, I speak not of myself, but the Father who dwells in Me, He does the works." (John xiv.10.) "The Father gave Me a commandment what I should speak." (John xii.49.) Our Lord's object in these often repeated expressions seems to be to keep the Jews in mind that He was not a mere human Prophet, but one who was God as well as man, and in whom, both speaking and working, the Father always dwelt.

When our Lord speaks of "receiving a commandment," we must take care that we do not suppose the expression implies any inferiority of the Second Person of the Trinity to the First. We must reverently remember the everlasting covenant between Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the salvation of man, and interpret "commandment" as meaning a part of the charge or commission with which the Second Person, Christ, was sent into the world--to carry out the purposes of the Eternal Trinity.