

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN  
10:19-30

19. Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. 20. And many of them said, He has a devil and is mad. Why do ye listen to him? 21. Others said, These are not the words of one who has a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind? 22. Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter, 23. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. 24. Then the Jews surrounded him and said to him, How long do you keep us in doubt? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. 25. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. 26. But ye do not believe, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said to you. 27. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. 29. My Father, who gave *them* to 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.

19.--[*Therefore...division again, etc.*] This is the third time that we find our Lord's words causing a division, or schism, among His hearers. Each time it occurred at Jerusalem. At chap. 7:43 it was among "the people;" at 9:16, among the "Pharisees." Here it was among the "Jews," an expression in St. John's Gospel generally applied to our Lord's enemies among the Pharisees.

The special "sayings" which caused the division were probably our Lord's words about His Father, His claim to have power to lay down His life and take it again, and His proclamation of Himself as "the Good Shepherd." Words like these from a Galilean teacher of humble appearance were likely to offend the proud Pharisees of Jerusalem.

That our Lord would be a cause of division--a stone of stumbling to some, and set for the rise and fall of many in Israel--had been foretold by Isaiah 8:14 and by Simeon, Luke 2:34. Divisions among His hearers are therefore no proof that He was not the Messiah, and divisions among hearers of the Gospel in the present day are no argument against the truth of the Gospel. Even now the same Gospel is a savor of death to some and of life to others, calls forth love in some and hatred in others. The same fire which melts wax hardens clay.

20.--[*And many of them said, etc.*] This is the sort of profane remark which we can well imagine many unconverted hearers of our Lord making: "What! A humble Galilean like this man call Himself the only good Shepherd, and talk of having power to lay down His life and take it again, and of having a special commission from His Father in heaven. He must surely have a devil or be out of his senses. He must be mad. Why do you waste your time in listening to Him?" Thousands talk in this way now against Christ's servants. They would probably have talked in the same way against their

Master!

Let us note what blasphemous and slanderous things were said against our Lord. True Christians, and specially ministers, must never wonder if they are treated in the same manner.

21.--[*Others said, These are not, etc.*] Here we see that there were some among the Pharisees who took our Lord's part and were disposed to believe on Him. Such probably were Gamaliel, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea. They defend Him on the score both of His words and works. As to His words, they argue that no one of common sense could call such words as our Lord had just spoken the words of a man possessed with a devil. The devil and his agents do not desire to do good to man or to glorify God. The calm, solemn, loving, God-glorifying language just used was the very opposite to that which might be expected from a demoniac. As to His works, they argue that no devil, however powerful, could work such a miracle as to open the eyes of the blind. Some wonderful works the devil might do, but no such work as that of giving sight. It is worth noticing that the Jews held that to give sight to the blind was one of the special miracles which Messiah would work. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened" (Isa. 35:5).

The Greek word here rendered "words" is not the same as that rendered "sayings" in verse 19. Webster says it is a stronger expression and means "the whole transaction" as well as the things said. The word "blind" here in the Greek is plural and would be more accurately translated "of blind persons."

22.--[*Now it was the Feast of Dedication.*] This Jewish festival is one which is nowhere else mentioned in the Bible. It is, however, a matter of history, according to most commentators, that it was first appointed by Judas Maccabeus to commemorate the purging of the temple and the rebuilding of the altar after the Syrians were driven out. Its appointment is recorded in the Apocrypha in 1 Maccabees 4:52-59. The Apocryphal books are, no doubt, uninspired. But there is no reason to question the accuracy of their historical statements. The passage before us is often referred to as proving that our Lord recognized, and tacitly sanctioned, a man-made and man-appointed festival. "The Church has power to decree rites and ceremonies," and so long as it ordains nothing against God's Word, its appointments deserve respect. At any rate, our Lord did not denounce the Feast of Dedication or refuse to be present at it.

Chrysostom and others think that the Feast of Dedication was appointed to commemorate the rebuilding of the temple after the Babylonian captivity in Ezra's time (Ezra 6:16).

Some think that it was to commemorate the dedication of Solomon's temple (2 Chr. 7:9). There is, however, no warrant for this view.

Pearce remarks that John alone of all the evangelists records our Lord's attendance at four of the great feasts of the Jews: viz., passover (John 2:13), pentecost (5:1), tabernacles (7:2), and dedication here.

[*In Jerusalem.*] Many think that an interval of time comes in between this

verse and the preceding one. I doubt it. From chapter 7:2, where we are told it was the Feast of Tabernacles, the narrative runs on at first sight continuously; yet if we look at John 9:35, there must have been one break of time. If there was any interval before the verse we are now considering, I think it must have been very short. The following verses show that the discourse about "the sheep" must have been fresh in the minds of the Jews, as our Lord refers to it as a thing they could remember. He would hardly have done so if the interval had been very long. At any rate, I can see no proof that our Lord left Jerusalem between the discourse about "the sheep" and the verse before us.

[*It was winter.*] This shows that three months had passed since the miracle of healing the blind man, which was worked at the Feast of Tabernacles. That was about Michaelmas, by our reckoning. The season of winter is mentioned here to explain why our Lord walked under cover, "in a porch."

The mention of winter goes far to prove that the Feast of Dedication must have been appointed in commemoration of the work of Judas Maccabeus. Solomon's dedication was at Michaelmas, in the seventh month; Ezra's about Easter, in the first month.

23.--[*And Jesus walked.*] This must either mean that "it was the habit" of our Lord to walk, or else that "one day Jesus was walking." The latter seems the more likely sense.

[*In the temple.*] This means in the outer court, or area around the temple, which was a common place of resort for the Jews, and especially upon festivals. Here teachers expounded, and discussions on religious questions seem to have taken place. Here probably our Lord was found "among the doctors" hearing and asking questions when he was twelve years old (Luke 2:4-6).

[*In Solomon's porch.*] The word "porch" rather means what we should call a veranda, or colonnade. It was one of those long covered walks under a roof supported by columns, on one side at least, which the inhabitants of hot countries appear to find absolutely needful. Singularly enough, one sect of heathen philosophers at Athens was called "Stoics" from its meeting in a place called "Stoa," here rendered a porch; while another was called "Peripatetics" from its habit of "walking about" during its discussions, just as our Lord did in this verse. The cloisters of a cathedral or abbey, perhaps, are most like the building called a "porch" here.

Josephus says this porch was one of the buildings which remained partly undestroyed from Solomon's temple.

Tacitus expressly mentions it as one of the defenses of the temple at the siege of Jerusalem.

24.--[*Then the Jews...said to him.*] This would be more literally rendered "encircled Him," or surrounded Him in a circle.

[*How long do you keep us in doubt.*] This would be more literally rendered, "Until what time do You lift up our souls? How long do You keep us in a

state of suspense and excitement?"

Elsner thinks it means, "How long do You take away our life (as at verse eighteen), or kill us with doubt and perplexity?" Suicer, Schleusner, and Parkhurst, however, prefer "hold us in suspense." (See marginal reading in Luke 12:29).

[*If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.*] The Jews had no right to say they had not sufficient evidence that our Lord was the Christ. But nothing is more common with hardened and wicked men than to allege a lack of evidence and to pretend willingness to believe if only more evidence was supplied.

"Plainly" here does not mean in plain language and easily understood, but openly, boldly, unreservedly, and without mystery.

25.--[*Jesus answered...ye do not believe.*] To what does our Lord refer here? I believe He refers to what He had said in the fifth chapter before the Sanhedrim, and in the eighth chapter in the discourse beginning, "I am the Light," etc. The words would be more literally rendered, "I have told you, and ye do not believe."

Henry observes: "The Jews pretended that they only *doubted*, but Christ tells them that they did not believe. Skepticism in religion is no better than downright infidelity."

Hengstenberg thinks that "I have told you" especially refers to our Lord's recent proclamation of Himself as "the Good Shepherd." To a Jewish ear it would sound like a claim to be the Messiah.

[*The works...bear witness of me.*] Here, as in other places, our Lord appeals to His miracles as the grand proof that He was the Christ. (Compare 3:2, 5:36, 7:31, and 9:33,34; also Acts 2:22.) It is as though our Lord said, "The miracles I have done are more than sufficient proof that I am the Messiah. Nothing can account for them but the fact that I am the promised Messiah."

We should observe how our Lord says, "The works which I do in my Father's name;" that is, by my Father's commission and appointment, and as His Messenger. Here, as elsewhere, He carefully reminds the Jews that He does not act independently of His Father, but in entire harmony and unity with Him. His works were works which "the Father gave Him to finish."

We should observe how our Lord always and confidently appeals to the evidence of His miracles. Those who try to depreciate and sneer at miracles seem to forget how often they are brought forward as good witnesses in the Bible. This, in fact, is their great object and purpose. They were not so much meant to convert as to prove that He who did them was from God and deserved attention.

"Of Me" would be more literally rendered "concerning or about Me."

26.--[*But ye do not believe...not of my sheep.*] I doubt whether the word

"because" does not put a meaning on this verse which it hardly bears in the Greek. It should rather be, "Ye neither believe my words nor my works, FOR ye are not in the number of my sheep. If ye were my sheep, ye would believe; faith is one of their marks." Not being Christ's sheep was not the CAUSE of the unbelief of the Jews, but their unbelief was the EVIDENCE that they were not Christ's sheep.

Tyndale and others think that the full stop should be after the word "sheep," and that "as I said to you" should be taken with the following verse; but I see no necessity for this.

[*As I said to you.*] I think these words refer to two sayings of our Lord which He had used in speaking to the Jews. One is in chapter 8:47: "He who is of God hears God's words. Ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God." The other is at the third and fourth verses of this chapter: "The sheep hear His voice;" "the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice."

27.--[*My sheep hear my voice, etc.*] Having told the Pharisees that they were not His sheep, our Lord goes on to describe the character of those who were His sheep; that is, of His own true people and servants. This He does in a verse of singular richness and fullness. Every word is instructive.

Christ calls His people "sheep." He does so because they are in themselves singularly helpless and dependent on their Shepherd; because comparatively they are the most harmless and helpless of animals; because even at their best they are weak, foolish, and liable to go astray.

Chemnitius gives thirteen distinct reasons why believers are called sheep. They are too long to quote here, but will repay the examination of anyone who has access to his commentary.

He calls them "My sheep." They are His by God the Father's gift; His by redemption and purchase; His by calling and choosing; His by feeding, keeping, and preserving; and His by their own consent and will. They are His peculiar property.

He says, "They hear my voice." By this He means that they listen to His invitation when He calls them to repent, believe, and come to Him. This supposes that Christ first speaks, and then they hear. Grace begins the work. They, through grace, obey His calling and willingly do as He bids them. The ears of unconverted people are deaf to Christ's call, but true Christians hear and obey.

He says, "I know them." This means that He knows them with a special knowledge of approbation, complacency, love, and interest. (See the word "know" in Psalm 1:6, 31:8, and Amos 3:2.) Of course He knows the secrets of all men's hearts and all about all wicked people. But He knows with a peculiar knowledge those who are His people. The world knows them not, but Christ knows and care for them (1 John 3:1).

He says, "They follow Me." This means that His people, like sheep, obey, trust, and walk in the steps of their Divine Master. They follow Him in

holy obedience to His commandments; they follow Him in striving to copy His example; and they follow Him in trusting implicitly His providential leadings--going where He would have them go and taking cheerfully all He appoints for them.

It is almost needless to remark that this description belongs to none but true Christians. It did not belong to the Pharisees to whom our Lord spoke. It does not belong to multitudes of baptized people in our own day.

Luther says: "The sheep, though the most simple creature, is superior to all animals in this: that he soon hears his shepherd's voice and will follow no other. Also he is clever enough to hang entirely on his shepherd and to seek help from him alone. He cannot help himself, nor find pasture for himself, nor heal himself, nor guard against wolves, but depends wholly and solely on the help of another."

In the Greek of this verse, there is a nice distinction between the number of the verb "hear" and the verb "follow" which the English language cannot convey. It is as though our Lord had said, "My sheep are a body which *"hears"* my voice (in the singular), and of which the individual members *"follow"* Me (in the plural).

28.--[*And I give, etc.*] From the character of Christ's sheep the Good Shepherd goes on to describe their privileges. He gives to them eternal life, the precious gift of pardon and grace in this world and a life of glory in the world to come. He says, "I give," in the present tense. Eternal life is the present possession of every believer. He declares that they shall never perish or be lost unto all eternity, and that no one shall ever pluck them out of His hand.

We have here the divinity and dignity of our Lord Jesus Christ. None but one who was very God could say "I give eternal life." No Apostle ever said so.

We have here the perpetuity of grace in believers and the certainty that they shall never be cast away. How anyone can deny this doctrine, as the Arminians do, and say that a true believer may fall away and be lost in the face of this text, it is hard to understand. It is my own deliberate opinion that it would be almost impossible to imagine words in which a saint's "perseverance" could be more strongly asserted.

We have here a distinct promise that "no one"--man, angel, devil, or spirit--shall be able to tear from Christ His sheep. The Greek literally is not "any man," but "any person" or "any one."

The doctrine plainly taught in this text may be called "Calvinism" by some, and "of dangerous tendency" by others. The only question we ought to ask is whether it is scriptural. The simplest answer to that question is that the words of the text, in their plain and obvious meaning, cannot be honestly interpreted in any other way. To thrust in, as some enemies of perseverance do, the qualifying clause--"They shall never perish *so long as they continue my sheep*"--is adding to Scripture and taking unwarrantable liberties with Christ's words.

So, again, Whitby's interpretation, "They shall never perish through any defect on my part," though they may fall away by their own fault, is a sad instance of unfair handling of Scripture.

Let it only be remembered that the character of those who shall never perish is most distinctly and carefully laid down in this place. It is those who hear Christ's voice and follow Him, who alone are "sheep." It is "His sheep" and His sheep alone who shall never perish. The man who boasts that he shall never be cast away and never perish while he is living in sin, is a miserable self-deceiver. It is the perseverance of *saints*, and not of sinners and wicked people, that is promised here. Doubtless the doctrine of the text may be misused and abused, like every other good thing. But to the humble penitent believer, who puts his trust in Christ, it is one of the most glorious and comfortable truths of the Gospel. Those who dislike it would do well to study the 17th Article of the Church of England and Hooker's sermon on the "Perpetuity of Faith in the Elect."

Let it be noted that the last clause of the text plainly implies that many will try to pluck away Christians from Christ and draw them back to sin. To feel that something is always "plucking" and "pulling" at us must never surprise believers. There is a devil, and saints will always feel and find his presence.

Let it be noted that to *be* safe in Christ's hand, and so never to perish, is one thing; but to *feel* that we are safe is quite another. Many true believers *are* safe who do not realize and *feel* it.

Musculus observes that our Lord does not say in this verse that His sheep shall lose nothing in this world. They may lose property, liberty, and life for Christ's sake. But their souls cannot be lost. He also observes that all Christ's sheep are in Christ's hand. *His* hand holding them, and not *their* hand holding Him, is the true secret of their safety and perseverance.

The importance of the doctrine contained in this text cannot, in my judgment, be overrated. The Christian who does not hold it is a great loser. It is one of the grand elements of the good news of the Gospel. It is a safeguard against much unsound doctrine. Perseverance can never be reconciled with baptismal regeneration. The advocates of an extravagant view of baptismal grace, it may be observed, always have a special dislike to the doctrine of this text.

Hengstenberg wisely remarks: "It is cold consolation to say, 'If so long as they remain my sheep, they are secure and shall never perish.' The whole strength of our soul's desire is for a guarantee against *ourselves*. That there is such a guarantee is here assured to us."

29.--[*My Father who gave, etc.*] Our Lord here strengthens the mighty promise just made by declaring that His sheep are not His only but His Father's. His Father gave them to Him. "My Father," He declares, "is almighty, greater than all, the possessor of all power. No one is able to pluck *anything* out of my Father's hand, so that my sheep's safety is doubly secured." Let it be noted that the word "them" in the last clause of our

English version is not in the Greek.

It is probable that both in this verse and the preceding one there is a latent reference to the case of the man whom the Pharisees had lately "cast out" of the church, or excommunicated. Our Lord seems to say, "You may cut off and tear away from your outward church membership whom you will, but you can never pluck away any of my people from Me."

Let it be noted here that the Father is just as much interested in the safety of believers as the Son. To leave out of sight the Father's love in our zeal for the glory of Christ, is very poor theology.

Melancthon dwells on this promise in a passage of singular beauty. He specially dwells on it as a ground of comfort against the invasion of Europe by the Turks, the persecution of truth by so-called Christian princes, and the furious strifes and controversies of teachers of the Church. There is a Church which nothing can harm.

Calvin remarks: "Our salvation is certain because it is in the hand of God. Our faith is weak, and we are prone to waver. But God, who has taken us under His protection, is sufficiently powerful to scatter with a breath all the power of our adversaries. It is of great importance to turn our eyes to this."

Musculus observes that it is said the Father "gave" the sheep to Me, in the past tense. Believers were given to Christ before the foundation of the world.

30.--[*I and the Father are one.*] In order to explain how it is that the Father should take as much interest in the sheep as the Son, our Lord here declares in the plainest and most explicit terms the deep truth of the essential unity between Himself and His Father. Literally translated the sentence is, "I and my Father are one thing." By this, of course, He did not mean that His Father and He were one Person. This would overthrow the doctrine of the Trinity. But He did mean, "I and my eternal Father, though two distinct Persons, and not to be confounded, are yet one in essence, nature, dignity, power, will, and operation. Hence, in the matter of securing the safety of my sheep, what I do my Father does likewise. I do not act independently of Him."

This is one of those deep and mysterious texts which we must be content to receive and believe without attempting to pry too curiously into its contents. The cautious and exact words of the Athanasian Creed should be often remembered: "Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance. There is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost; but the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal."

Augustine remarks that this text alone overthrows both the doctrine of the Sabellians and the Arians. It silences the Sabellians, who say there is only one Person in the Godhead, by speaking of two distinct Persons. It silences the Arians, who say the Son is inferior to the Father, by saying that Father and Son are "one."

Let it be noted that the doctrine of this verse is precisely the same that our Lord had maintained on a former occasion (in the fifth chapter) before the Sanhedrim. There it was expounded fully; here it is briefly asserted. And the interpretation put on His meaning, in both cases by the Jews, was exactly the same. They regarded it as a claim to be regarded as "God."

The practical use of the text to a believer in Christ is far too much overlooked. It shows the entire childlike confidence with which such a one may look at the Father. "He who has the Son has the Father." The remark is only too true, that while some ignorantly talk of the Father as if there was no Christ crucified, others with no less ignorance talk of Christ crucified as if there was no God and Father of Christ, who loved the world!

Chrysostom observes: "That you may not suppose that Christ is weak and the sheep are in safety through the Father's power, He adds, 'I and the Father are one.' As though He had said, 'I did not assert that on account of the Father no man plucks them away, as though I were too weak to keep the sheep. For I and the Father are one.' He speaks here with reference to power, for concerning this was all His discourse; and if the power be the same, it is clear that the essence is also."

Ecolampadius remarks: "He does not say we are one in the masculine gender, that is, one person; but he says one in the neuter gender, that is, one in nature, power, and majesty. If you were to say one Person, you would take away both and leave neither Father nor Son."

Maldonatus quotes a saying of Augustine's, "that it is invariably found in Scripture that things called 'one' are things of the same nature."

It is fair to admit that Erasmus, Calvin, and a few others think the "oneness" here only means unity of consent and will. But the vast majority of commentators think otherwise, and the Jews evidently thought so also.