

ONE SHEPHERD - ONE FLOCK

“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” (John 10:16)

When Jacob arrived in Padam Aram he saw a well with three flocks of sheep lying near by (Gen. 29:2). Soon Rachel showed up with her father’s sheep for she was a shepherdess (Gen. 29:9). Now there were four shepherds, and four flocks. There were, of course, no fences or corrals to keep the flocks apart. Fences were not necessary for each flock followed its own shepherd.

When Jesus spoke the words of our text the world was divided into two groups, Jews and gentiles. It was the plan of God to break down all the barriers separating these two so there would only be one Shepherd and one flock. By the time Paul wrote to the Ephesians it had happened. The dividing wall of hostility between Jews and gentiles had been destroyed (Eph. 2:14). Now there was only one Shepherd and one flock.

Now, however, let us “fast forward” 1,900 years. Instead of one flock, David Barrett in the 2001 revision of The World Christian Encyclopedia, states that there are 33,820 Christian denominations. How can this be?

Jesus said: **“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink,” (John 7:37)** Now, however, instead of four flocks waiting to drink, there are thousands. This can only be possible when the sheep follow some shepherd other than Jesus. Jesus said: **“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27).** Just as Rachel could call her father’s sheep and they would follow her, Jesus calls His sheep and they follow Him.

Paul explained how this can help to identify those sheep who belong to Jesus. He said: **“No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval” (1 Cor 11:19)** The word translated as “differences” is “haireisis” which means “heresy”. Heresies show who is approved in a very simple way. The true sheep follow Jesus and the heretic follows someone else. How simple! How profound!

Paul clearly illustrates this truth in his own life. For years he was an integral part of the Jewish establishment. He studied under Gamaliel and advanced in Judaism beyond many of his own age (Gal. 1:14). His Jewish credentials were impeccable! His conversion, however, required a radical change in his thinking (Phil. 3:1 - 14). That change was so dramatic, that it was like death to his old way of life (Gal. 2:20). Paul heard the voice of the Good Shepherd and decided to follow Him. This meant considering his earthly credentials as rubbish (Phil. 3:8). He made this clear by stating: **“If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (Gal 1:10)**

Unfortunately, some love the praise of men, more than the praise of God. John wrote: **“Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.” (John 12:42-43)** For all such people it is sobering to realize that Jesus said: **“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.” (Luke 9:26-27)**

Because the sheep of God are at different distances from the Shepherd, and at different stages of maturity, their understanding of the Shepherd’s voice is sometimes different. We do not pass judgment on these disputable matters, however, as long as our weak brothers do what they do as “unto the Lord” (Rom. 14:1 - 8). Remember! God wants only One Shepherd and one flock!