

"²² And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. ²³ And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. ²⁴ Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. ²⁵ Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. ²⁶ But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: ²⁸ And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, which gave *them* 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. ³¹ Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him." (John 10:22-31)

If you are familiar with John 10, you know that the chapter begins with the famous parable of the Good Shepherd. Israel is compared to a sheepfold with Jesus as both the door to the fold, and to the Good Shepherd, who comes to the door and calls His sheep. I would like to consider several things about verses 22-31 which we just read, a conversation which took place between Jesus and the rulers of the people as Jesus walked in Solomon's Porch of the temple shortly after His teachings on the Good Shepherd. 1. The context of 22-31 in terms of the parable; 2. The doctrine of Perseverance; 3. The contrast between Perseverance and certain deficient views of it.

I. The Context of John 10:22-31.

- A. In the Middle East shepherds did not drive the sheep with dogs, but trained them to follow their shepherds. The shepherd would lead them and the sheep would follow.
- B. Each village had a community fold, consisting of four walls, no roof, with a opening or "door" in one side. A porter was hired to sleep across the opening to guard the sheep. True shepherds would come to the door of the fold and would not try to climb up some other way. Anyone who tried to scale the wall was up to no good.
- C. Each morning the shepherds would come to the door and be allowed to enter by the guard. Each one would call his own sheep by name; they would arise and follow the shepherd out to pasture.
- D. There was a close bond between the shepherd and his sheep. He would defend them from danger and lead them to pasture and bring them back to the fold at night. Hirelings would not care for the sheep but would run away if a wolf or lions or thieves and robbers came. The Good Shepherd would give His life for the sheep, for his motivation was care for the sheep, not wages, or protecting his own skin.
- E. Christ said that the Good Shepherd would lead His sheep from that fold, bring other sheep that were not of that fold, and there would be one fold and one shepherd, speaking of the church and Himself. He concludes by saying: "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. ¹⁵ As the Father knoweth me, even so know I 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 doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. ¹⁸ No man taketh 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 have I received of my Father." John 10:14-18
- F. His words created quite a stir, causing division among the people. Some said He was devil possessed; others asked, "But he doesn't talk like someone possessed of a devil. Besides, could a devil open the eyes of the blind?" So they confronted Him as He walked on Solomon's Porch.

II. The Doctrine of Perseverance. John 10:23-31. This confrontation again led to a threat against His life, as they took up stones to stone him. But let us look at the words.

- A. Their unbelief revealed that they were not of His sheep.
 1. They insisted on more proof of His identity, which showed an evil heart of unbelief. Jesus confronts this unbelief directly.
 2. They had more than ample proof that He was the One promised by the prophets. Their problem was not with the proof, but with their unwillingness to see the proof.
 3. They had His words and His works. Vs. 25. These words and works bore witness of the truth, for they were the words and works of His Father. If they had known God, they would have known Jesus.
 4. They were not the Lord's Sheep. This was the reason they did not believe. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. The figure of the parable: all the sheep lie asleep in the fold. One by one, they hear the voice of the shepherd and they know the voice of the shepherd. It is His voice that distinguishes between the sheep.
 5. God's sheep hear the voice of Christ; other sheep do not.
- B. He speaks of the benefits of hearing the voice of Christ. None of these things are the reason they heard; but are benefits of being His sheep, benefits they could not have in their unbelief.

1. His sheep hear His voice. It is a familiar and comforting voice. It does not agitate them and disturb them.
 2. He knows His sheep. When you get to heaven and meet the Lord Jesus, He will NOT say to you, "Oh, this is a surprise. I didn't know you were coming." Nor will He say, "Depart from me, I never knew you."
 3. His sheep follow Him. There is trust, for they know that He will lead them out into green pastures beside the still waters. He will protect them from enemies and they shall never perish.
 4. His sheep have eternal life as the gift of God to them. Only Jesus can give this eternal life from the Father.
- C. This security and perseverance of which He speaks is the gift of the Triune God.
1. "Hand" speaks of skill and power. You and I are secure in the hands of God.
 - a. Because of the power and skill of the Father, who works all things after the counsel of His Own will, determining that all things work together for good to them that love Him and are called according to His purpose.
 - b. Because of the power and skill of the Son, who performed all things necessary to remove our guilt and sin that we might be called the sons of God. We are therefore assured that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 2. Because of the power and skill of the Holy Spirit, which binds together the work of the Father and the Son, because He is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, so that they agree in One. Here is the work of the triune God: We hear His voice and we follow the Lord Jesus and are secure in the sovereign hand of omnipotence. There is one hand: and it is the Holy Spirit, the hand of the Father and of the Son, as we saw when we considered Psalm 36:24 "The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand." "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Paul tells us in Romans 8
- D. This promise and assurance is that all of those who belong to Christ will safely attain unto the resurrection from the dead. They will therefore know the glory of Christ and enter into the gates of the Heavenly Kingdom. Not one of them will be lost. This is spoken of many places in Scripture: the power of God to keep His people in the way of righteousness until the last day. Here are a few of these passages:
1. 2Ti 1:12 For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.
 2. Phil. 1: 3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, 5 For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; 6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.
 3. Php 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.
 4. 1 Peter 1: 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
 5. Joh 17:11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. [Jesus' prayers are always answered; he was always heard of His Father.]
 6. Many, many others could be cited.
 7. This is the doctrine as stated by the Canons of Dort: The Fifth Head of Doctrine, Article 6: But God, who is rich in mercy, according to His unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from His own people even in their grievous falls; nor suffers them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin unto death or against the Holy Spirit; nor does He permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction.

III. The Contrast Between this biblical doctrine and deficient views of it.

- A. The Reformed do NOT teach that Christians should take a free and easy attitude toward sin and evil.
1. The Father has predestined us to be conformed to Jesus Christ. We are to give diligence to make our calling and election sure: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." (2Pe 1:10)
 2. We follow the voice of Christ, who died for our sins. We are not our own, but are to seek holiness and godliness in all that we do. We are to abstain from every form of evil, no matter what mask it wears, for

we are the sheep of Christ and do not follow the seductions of other voices. His sheep flee from other voices.

3. The Holy Spirit works His own work in our lives, if we belong to Christ. These are the works of the new man: Eph. 5: 8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: 9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) 10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.
4. So we are called to holiness and goodness and peace.

B. But neither do the Reformed teach that the Lord's Sheep live sinless and perfect lives.

1. In this world, there is a struggle in the souls of the sheep between that which belongs to Christ and that which belongs to Adam; between the spirit and the flesh, as Galatians 5: Ga 5:17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.
2. Because of the struggle, there is discontent in the hearts of the sheep; hence, we must keep close to Christ.
3. We are to put off the old and put on the new and there are temptations and snares on every side.
4. The doctrine of the preservation of the saints is not one that promises security for us no matter how far we stray from Christ and His word; it IS the promise that the Triune God will so work in us that we will know the voice of our Shepherd and He will bring us back into the way so that we cannot ultimately fall away, and be overcome by death and hell and ruin.
5. 1John says that a seed, newness of life, remains in all the righteous so that they cannot sin unto death. God will not let go His omnipotent hand, but the Holy Spirit will follow us even to death, to deliver us from its power because of Jesus Christ our Lord.

"²⁸ And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, which gave *them* 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.