

## THE PURPOSE OF ONE MAN'S BLINDNESS

*"It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him."* —JOHN 9:3

There is not always a direct connection between suffering and personal sin, as Jesus' statement to the apostles asserts. At another time Christ instructed that neither those Galileans killed by Pilate nor those who died as the tower of Siloam fell (Luke 13:1–5) suffered because they were worse sinners than others, as His listeners had arrogantly assumed. Instead, our Lord pointed to those events as a warning that all sinners face death, and when it arrives they will perish unless they repent and trust Him.

Like Job, the real reason the blind man suffered his affliction was "so that the works of God might be displayed in him." In his commentary on John's gospel, F. F. Bruce gives this insight:

This does not mean that God deliberately caused the [man] to be born blind in order that, after many years, his glory should be displayed in the removal of the blindness; to think so would again be an aspersion on the character of God. It does mean that God overruled the disaster of the [man's] blindness so that, when [he] grew to manhood, he might, by recovering his sight, see the glory of God in the face of Christ, and others, seeing this work of God, might turn to the true Light.

### ASK YOURSELF

In looking for reasons and answers to your suffering, where does your mind usually run? Are most of your conclusions biblical, or are they shaped more by your feelings and others' opinions? How could you foresee God receiving glory from the situations you're facing right now?

## JESUS' PRIORITY

*"We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world."*

—JOHN 9:4–5

Jesus' top priority was clearly to "work the works of Him who sent Me." Whereas the apostles wanted to look back and analyze why and how the man was born blind, the Lord looked ahead and eagerly desired to place God's power on display for the man's benefit. (Jesus' use of "we" includes the apostles and all Spirit-empowered believers in the divine mission.)

The phrase "as long as it is day" implies further urgency regarding ministry. It refers to the few months Jesus had left with the apostles on earth. After that the darkness of His departure (cf. John 12:35) would overtake them and they'd be unable to minister again until Pentecost.

During His earthly ministry, our Lord was most certainly "the Light of the world." And after His death He did not stop being that Light, because the apostles by His power continued His ministry (Matt. 28:18–20).

Christ's instructions to the apostles apply to all believers. They should serve God with a sense of urgency, "making the most of [their] time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16). The Puritan Richard Baxter wrote, "I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men."

## ASK YOURSELF

What keeps you from sensing an urgency to live with deep conviction for Christ? What keeps you from making His priorities the same ones that drive your own daily schedule? Which of these hindrances to full surrender could stand to be completely eliminated from your life?

## JESUS' POWER OVER BLINDNESS

*When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam"...  
So he went away and washed, and came back seeing. —JOHN 9:6–7*

Jesus had previously used His saliva to heal a deaf and mute man (Mark 7:33) and a blind man (8:23); but here is the only time He made clay with His saliva. Ancient interpreters have said making clay symbolizes Christ's creating a new, functioning pair of eyes to replace the blind ones (cf. Gen. 2:7). But Leon Morris wisely comments, "Jesus performed His miracles with a sovereign hand and He cannot be limited by rules of procedure. He cured how He willed."

As well as representing water sent into the pool from the Gihon spring, "Siloam" symbolized the blessings God sent to Israel. Here it is the Father's ultimate blessing to the nation: Jesus Christ, God's Sent One (Mark 9:37; Luke 4:18; John 12:44–45, 49).

The blind man obediently heeded Jesus' command and washed in the pool, which gave him sight. His response represents the obedience of true saving faith (Rom. 16:26; Heb. 5:9), which the man would soon demonstrate. This healing is also a living parable, showing Christ's ministry as the Light shining into a spiritually dark world (see John 1:5).

### ASK YOURSELF

Have you put limits on God's activity, expecting Him to work only in certain ways? What do you run the risk of missing when you try to erect fences and boundaries around God's plans for your life?

How do you keep a careful, biblical mind-set without leaking over into rigid legalism?

## PERPLEXITY OVER THE LARGER MEANING

*Therefore the neighbors, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, "Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?" . . . So they were saying to him, "How then were your eyes opened?"* —JOHN 9:8, 10

The blind man's healing caused sensation and much confusion for the people. Some had to ask if it was really that man, whereas others were certain it was. But other skeptical people found it easier to believe in mistaken identity than in a miraculous healing.

The man himself tried to eliminate the people's confusion by briefly summarizing that Jesus placed saliva-moistened clay on his eyes, told him to wash at Siloam, after which he received his sight. This prompted the people to wonder where such an amazing miracle worker was; however, the man could not tell them, being unable to recognize Him (see vv. 11–12).

Our Lord's healing of this blind man wonderfully illustrates the salvation process. The man born blind would not have received sight (Rom. 8:7) had Jesus not reached out to him. And in salvation, God's Spirit must reach out and draw spiritually blind sinners to redemption (John 6:44, 65). Just as the man was healed only when he obeyed Jesus' order to wash at Siloam, so also God saves sinners only when they sincerely embrace the truth of the gospel (Rom. 1:5; cf. 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17).

### ASK YOURSELF

Who in your life continues to show many of the telltale signs of spiritual blindness, unable to see truth when it's staring them in the face?

Commit to praying steadfastly for them throughout this coming year, asking God to open their eyes of faith so they can see what they've been missing.

## UNBELIEF IS INCONSISTENT

*Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, “This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.” But others were saying, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And there was a division among them.*

—JOHN 9:16

The Pharisees’ statement, “This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath,” reveals their biased approach to the situation. They thought Jesus had broken the Sabbath, not because He had violated scriptural regulations but because He had ignored their extrabiblical legalisms.

Why did Jesus deliberately irritate the Jewish leaders by violating their Sabbath rules? Primarily He did so because of His divine authority as Lord of the Sabbath (Luke 6:5). Second, He wanted to show how unnecessary and burdensome such man-centered regulations were on the people. All the legalistic, trivial rules had perverted God’s design for a weekly day of rest and gratitude to God. By contrast, Jesus noted, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

It seemed obvious to the sabbatarian Pharisees that Jesus could not be Messiah if He did not strictly keep their kind of Sabbath (cf. Deut. 13:1–5). Other Jews, however, were not as easily convinced, countering the first group’s logic with reasoning of their own: since Jesus opened blind eyes as only God can do, He must be from God. But there was still a division among the Jews (cf. John 7:40–43), revealing unbelief’s faithless inconsistency.

## ASK YOURSELF

How can you tell when a staunch stance for righteousness is more about controlling other people than defending God’s Word? What are some of our other reasons and rationales for holding arbitrary standards over others’ heads, equating compliance with our rules as Christian character?

## UNBELIEF IS STUBBORN

*The Jews then did not believe it of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight, and questioned them. —JOHN 9:17–19a*

There was no doubt that Jesus had miraculously healed the blind man—he was the physical proof standing before the Pharisees. But they stubbornly refused to accept the evidence and purposely remained unconvinced of the truth. The Jews thus were like that “perverse generation, sons in whom is no faithfulness” (Deut. 32:20).

That the stubborn Pharisees would ask the man again what he thought of Jesus reveals their continued confusion and unbelieving scorn toward the beggar. The man’s confident identification of Jesus, “He is a prophet,” proves he believed the reality that the spiritually blind Pharisees refused to: Christ was sent from God.

The Jews essentially wanted the man to join them in their unbelief of Jesus’ claims. They urged him to disingenuously “Give glory to God” (John 9:24) but not to Jesus, who was in fact God’s Son and Himself worthy of glory. Such an incomplete confession would equal agreement with the Jewish leaders’ obstinate conviction that Jesus was a sinner and not empowered by God (cf. 8:52), but such an attitude merely showed the stubbornness of unbelief.

## ASK YOURSELF

How often are you accused of stubbornness—if not in unbelief, perhaps in other areas of life? Even if you don’t see a stubborn streak in yourself, what of value could you likely learn from this rebuke?

## UNBELIEF IS IRRATIONAL

*They reviled him and said, “You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from.” —JOHN 9:28–29*

The healed man was undoubtedly frustrated by the Pharisees’ irrational bias and repeated interrogation of him. Thus he “answered them, ‘I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again?’” (v. 27). Realizing their animosity toward Jesus, the formerly blind man sardonically asked the Jews if their repetitive questions concerning our Lord meant that they wanted to learn more and therefore also “become His disciples.”

To the Pharisees, the man’s courageous response was insolent, and they angrily and piously answered him by retreating to the safety of their alleged loyalty to Moses. After all, they asserted, “God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from.” The healed man’s next rejoinder completely exposed the Pharisees’ lack of faith: “Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes.” Christ did what only God’s power would enable someone to do—He healed the man’s congenital blindness and created eyes with vision—yet the Jewish leaders professed ignorance of His origin. Such irrational rejection of the obvious evidence has occurred ever since sinners have heard the gospel and still clung to their unbelief.

## ASK YOURSELF

One of the grandest qualities of Christian virtue is being able to admit when you’re wrong. Are there areas of life that you continue to defend, even when you know you’re standing on shaky ground? What shape could your surrender from that position take?

## UNBELIEF IS INSOLENT

*They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?"  
So they put him out. —JOHN 9:34*

They couldn't refute the healed man's logic about Jesus and His healing and, furious that he would lecture to them, therefore the Pharisees insolently piled personal abuse on him. They attacked him disdainfully and sarcastically implied that as one born blind, he or his parents must have committed some horrendous sin. Ironically, now through their insolent words they finally admitted that the man who received sight had indeed been born blind. But this admission did not prevent them from excommunicating him from the synagogue.

We learn from this account, as from other places in the Gospels, that when hardened doubters investigate Jesus' miracles or other supernatural biblical events, they reach only one conclusion. Unless the Holy Spirit opens their eyes, they deny the truth no matter what the evidence. Here the man healed of blindness was living proof of our Lord's divine power, yet the Pharisees tried to deny the undeniable and refute the irrefutable. As Paul later wrote to the Corinthians, "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor. 2:14; cf. John 6:44).

## ASK YOURSELF

What are some of the most common sources for a person's doubts and hardenings? Is there much to be gained by getting to know someone well who persists in unbelief, seeing if you can detect the sources of their confusion and blindness? How have you seen a hard heart opened?



## SPIRITUAL SIGHT COMES FROM GOD

*Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said,  
“Do you believe in the Son of Man?” —JOHN 9:35*

Just as the Lord Jesus did in bestowing physical sight to the blind beggar, He seized the initiative in opening the man’s spiritual eyes. Rejected by the religious leaders, the man was sought out by the Savior.

If God did not sovereignly reach out to sinners, no one would be saved. Paul summarizes such total inability: “There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one” (Rom. 3:10–12; cf. John 6:44, 65; 15:16). Even as the physically blind cannot restore their own sight, neither can the spiritually dead be reborn by their own strength (cf. John 1:12–13; 6:37).

When Jesus found the man, He asked the question “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” using the personal pronoun “you” to stress the man’s need to respond. Our Lord confronted the healed man with his crucial need to trust the Messiah as his personal Lord and Savior. And the answer he wants everyone to give is a sincere and unqualified “Yes,” which entails repenting of sin, accepting God’s forgiveness, and resting by faith in His everlasting redemption.

### ASK YOURSELF

How attuned are you to the spiritual needs in those you encounter on a regular basis? What are some of the things you would likely pick up if you were predisposed to listening for hunger and thirst in the hearts of your friends, your family members, even total strangers?

## SPIRITUAL SIGHT RESPONDS IN FAITH

*He answered, “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?”* —JOHN 9:36

**T**he healed man already considered the Lord as sent from God, and he had experienced directly His healing power. Now he implicitly trusted Jesus to lead him to the One in whom he was to place his faith. This clearly illustrates that salvation, though divinely initiated, never occurs apart from a faith response.

Early in His ministry Christ had declared that lost sinners must “repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). The best known gospel verse promises us “that whoever believes in [Jesus] shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16; cf. 1:12; 5:24; 6:40). In His Bread of Life discourse, our Lord affirmed, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life” (6:47; cf. Acts 10:43). When the jailor at Philippi asked Paul and Silas, “‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household’” (Acts 16:30–31).

What happened at Antioch applies to the healed man: “When the Gentiles heard [see Isa. 49:6], they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). God sovereignly chooses those who will be awakened, empowered, and enabled to respond in faith (cf. Eph. 2:8–9).

## ASK YOURSELF

How have you responded to the Lord in faith—not merely in receiving His gift of salvation but also in appropriating His authority in your life, or in making a certain decision, or in choosing an unpopular path? Are you continuing to sense the necessity of faith as a requirement for daily life?

## SPIRITUAL SIGHT BELIEVES IN JESUS CHRIST

*Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him.*

—JOHN 9:37–38

Jesus presented Himself to the man as the object of saving faith, just as He did earlier to the people at Capernaum: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:29; cf. 3:36; 6:40; 11:25–26).

The Holy Spirit opened his heart to the gospel ("Lord, I believe") and revealed Jesus' true identity to him. He who was blind from birth exemplified this divine principle: "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself" (7:17).

As the Spirit dispelled the final vestiges of spiritual darkness from the man's heart, he clearly wanted to worship Jesus. Spurgeon summarizes that moment:

Then, further, *he acted as a believer*: for "he worshipped him." This proves how his faith had grown. I should like to ask you who are the people of God when you are happiest. . . . My happiest moments are when I am worshipping God, really adoring the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . It is the nearest approach to what it will be in heaven, where, day without night, they offer perpetual adoration unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. Hence, what a memorable moment it was for this man when he worshipped Christ! (emphasis in original)

### ASK YOURSELF

What do you miss by not turning your thoughts more often to praise and thanksgiving of God? How has worship produced some of the most exciting experiences and seasons of your life?

## SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS RECEIVES JUDGMENT

*And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." —JOHN 9:39*

Although Christ came to save, not to condemn (Luke 19:10; John 12:47), sinners who reject His gospel condemn themselves and place themselves under judgment (John 3:18, 36). To reject the Lord's peace is to receive His punishment; to reject His grace is to receive His justice; to reject His mercy is to receive His wrath; to reject His love is to receive His righteous anger. Spiritual sight comes only to those who confess their spiritual blindness and their need for the Light of the world. But contrariwise, sinners outside of the Savior who think their own sight is enough deceive themselves and remain spiritually blind.

The danger for those who think their carnal sight is sufficient is that their rejection of Jesus and refusal to embrace His gospel is irreversible, and their spiritual blindness may well become permanent. In other words, they can find themselves divinely fixed in their position (cf. Ex. 8:15; 10:1; Isa. 6:10; Acts 28:26–27; Rom. 11:8–10). Many of the Pharisees reached that point when they rejected the Father's light of His Son (Matt. 12:24–32). And that is a most precarious spiritual posture for any needy sinner to take.

### ASK YOURSELF

What are some of the implications in your own life of this principle: that decisions build on each other, making future changes and corrections even harder to make? What are some of the slippages you need to catch early, while you can, while they're still small enough to tackle?

## SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS REJECTS THE NEED OF SIGHT

*Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, “We are not blind too, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin.” —JOHN 9:40–41a*

Could Jesus really be saying the Pharisees were spiritually blind like the masses who didn't know the Law (John 7:49)? As the elite religious leaders of the Jews, they were certain they did not lack spiritual perception. But the reality was they were blind to spiritual truth and refused to admit it. In so doing they simply intensified the darkened condition of their hearts and increased their hatred for the true Messiah.

Our Lord's answer to the Pharisees probably surprised them because they were expecting a more direct reply to their question. Nonetheless, Jesus' point for the leaders was that if they would only confess their spiritual blindness and thus admit their need for Him, the true Light, they “would have no sin.” Instead, it would be divinely forgiven (Ps. 32:5; 1 John 1:9).

As John Calvin comments, “[Christ] only means that the disease may easily be cured, when it is truly felt; because, when a *blind* man is desirous to obtain deliverance, God is ready to assist him; but they who, insensible to their diseases, despise the grace of God, are incurable.” Many, like the Pharisees, have stubbornly refused to admit their spiritual blindness and therefore doomed themselves to eternal darkness.

### ASK YOURSELF

What was Jesus' reason for so often answering questions with another question, or (in this case) with a response that took the matter deeper than expected? When people ask you questions about the Christian faith, what might they really be asking? When is a straight answer not always best?

## SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS RESULTS IN DOOM

*“But since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”* —JOHN 9:41b

The always-damning sin of unbelief is in view here. Jesus’ pronouncement that the Pharisees’ “sin remains” (cf. Heb. 6:4–6; 10:29–31) conveys a sense of finality. It parallels His confirmation of others in their willful unbelief: “Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit” (Matt. 15:13–14). The sobering words, “Let them alone,” show that the Father sometimes directly judges unrepentant sinners by abandoning them, or even hardening them in their unbelief (cf. Rom. 1:18, 24, 26, 28).

As the sovereign Redeemer (Rev. 19:16), Christ is the divine determiner of a sinner’s destiny. Simeon prophesied in the presence of the infant Jesus, “Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34). People who follow the healed man’s example, confess their spiritual blindness, and turn to the Light “will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life” (John 8:12). But those who follow the Pharisees’ pattern and persist in the darkness (3:19) will likely stay in that spiritual gloom (12:35; 1 John 2:11), absent any saving sight (Matt. 6:23). The first group will spend eternity in heaven (Rev. 22:5); the others will spend it in hell (Matt. 8:12; 25:30).

### ASK YOURSELF

Since God alone possesses knowledge about who will “walk in darkness” and who will receive the “Light of life,” how are we to treat the various individuals in our path who do not now profess Christ as Savior and Lord? How can we unwisely let this doctrine lead us into unconcern?

## JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD, PART 1

*“He who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”* —JOHN 10:2–3

Perhaps Jesus’ most precious title is that of Shepherd. Centuries before Messiah came, Micah prophesied that He would “arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God” (Mic. 5:4; cf. Ezek. 34:23; Matt. 2:6 [quoting Mic. 5:2]).

The New Testament also portrays Jesus as the Shepherd. Peter describes Him as the Shepherd of believers’ souls (1 Peter 2:25) and as the Chief Shepherd of the church (5:4). But here Christ most vividly depicts Himself as the Shepherd of His flock. And this presentation flows directly from Jesus’ dealings with the blind man, the Pharisees, and all who witnessed what occurred.

Because He’s the Good Shepherd, the sheep hear Jesus’ voice when He calls them out of Israel and into His messianic fold. The imagery pictures the human response to the divine call of salvation (John 6:44, 65; Rom. 8:28–30). The Lord “calls his own sheep by name” because they *are* His. Their names were divinely “written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain” (Rev. 13:8), and the Father has sovereignly given them to the Son (John 6:37).

### ASK YOURSELF

As you meditate on Jesus as Shepherd, what are some blessings that come to mind? How has He proven Himself the Good Shepherd in your life? How could you express this to someone as both an encouragement to them and a gift of worship to God?

## JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD, PART 2

*“When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.”* —JOHN 10:4–5

The reason the Good Shepherd’s sheep follow Him is “because they know his voice”—and true saints will not abandon Christ, the Good Shepherd, to follow false shepherds, “the voice of strangers.” John expresses this truth, in part, in his first letter:

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. (1 John 2:20–24; cf. 4:1–6)

Those who belong to the Good Shepherd never leave Him to follow false shepherds who deny the truth and seek to lead saints astray.

### ASK YOURSELF

Can you identify the false shepherds who parade in our culture today? What do they pretend to offer those who follow them? Which of their appeals and attractions are the easiest for you to be tempted by? How do we keep ourselves reminded that theirs is the voice of “strangers”?



## JESUS IS THE ONLY DOOR

*So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you,  
I am the door of the sheep.” —JOHN 10:7*

In this metaphor, Jesus is the only door through which the sheep can enter God’s fold and enjoy the blessing of His pasture. Only through Him can sinners approach God and receive the salvation He provides (see John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5).

Christ’s declaration, “All who came before Me are thieves and robbers” (v. 8) excludes Israel’s true spiritual leaders prior to Him—Moses, Samuel, David, Nehemiah, the prophets, and others. He is referring to false shepherds—Israel’s wicked rulers, corrupt priests, and false prophets. But again, true believers “did not hear them” or go astray because of them.

Jesus then repeats the truth, “I am the door,” and adds the certain promise, “If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved” (v. 9). The sheep of the Good Shepherd experience God’s love, forgiveness, and salvation. They never need to fear any spiritual harm, and they will discover satisfying pasture from their Lord (cf. Ps. 23:1–3) and His Word (cf. Acts 20:32).

The contrast between the false shepherds and the Good Shepherd is striking: the false ones come to ruin the sheep, but the Good Shepherd comes “that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (v. 10). The unparalleled gift of eternal life far exceeds all other expectations (cf. Rom. 8:32).

### ASK YOURSELF

What does abundant life look, sound, and feel like? How does a person know when he or she is experiencing it? What are the gaps and hindrances standing between you and the full enjoyment of all that the Lord Jesus has promised to provide you? What will you do today in light of this?

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD DIES FOR THE SHEEP

*“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”*

—JOHN 10:11

The expression “good shepherd” sets Jesus the Good Shepherd completely apart from all other kinds of shepherds. He has the noble character (cf. 1 Tim. 3:7; 1 Peter 4:10) that identifies Him as the perfect Shepherd, preeminent above all pretenders.

A faithful shepherd will be willing to give up his life to protect the flock. (In the first-century Middle East, robbers and wild animals were a constant threat; see 1 Sam. 17:34; Isa. 31:4.) But the Good Shepherd went far beyond a mere willingness to risk His life for the sheep, or even actually putting it at risk; He in fact sacrificed His life for them (John 6:51; 18:14). Jesus died for His sheep because His Father chose them to become part of the divine flock (cf. Rom. 5:6, 8; 2 Cor. 5:14–15; 1 Peter 3:18). This beautifully illustrates the doctrine of election: His atoning death provided propitiation for the sins of all who believe, as the Holy Spirit called and regenerated them, and the Father chose them.

What a comfort for Christians that their Shepherd has savingly died for them, in contrast to the hired hands and wolves of Jesus’ illustration—mercenaries doing ministry not for the love of people and the truth but for money (Titus 1:10–11; 1 Peter 5:2).

### ASK YOURSELF

We’ve known for so long of Jesus’ dying for us that the full impact of His saving act can easily be lost in familiarity. But think of the love required for you to actually sacrifice your own life that another might live. How do you begin to worship Him for what He suffered in your place?

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD LOVES AND UNITES THE SHEEP

*“I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.”*

—JOHN 10:16

Jesus uses “know” (John 10:14) to denote the sacrificial love relationship He has with His own. God said of Israel, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2 NKJV). He was aware of other nations, but He had a unique love relationship with His people. One day the Lord will in judgment send away unbelievers because He doesn’t know them—He has no love relationship with them (Matt. 7:23). Christians are forever caught up in the strong and intimate affection shared between the Father and the Son (John 15:10; 17:25–26).

The “other sheep” are the Gentiles whom Jesus calls to salvation (Isa. 49:6; Rom. 1:16). Believing Jews and Gentiles “will become one flock with one shepherd.” Because Jews and Gentiles had a mutual animosity for one another, such unity was a revolutionary concept:

In Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity . . . so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace. (Eph. 2:13–15)

Because they both know the Shepherd, believing Jews and Gentiles enjoy true unity.

### ASK YOURSELF

How open and adept are you at experiencing unity with your other brothers and sisters in Christ? What could you do to enhance your desire for it and your practice of it?

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD COMPLIES WITH THE FATHER'S WILL

*“For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. . . . This commandment I received from My Father.”*

—JOHN 10:17, 18*b*

Because it's impossible to love God without obeying Him (John 15:9; 1 John 5:3), the key attitudes of love and obedience are inseparably linked. God loves the Shepherd because the Shepherd willingly died for the sheep, the sinners God chose in eternity past and gave to the Son in time. Jesus manifested His love for the Father “by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8). No one took Christ's life from Him—He surrendered it by His own initiative. Our Lord told Pontius Pilate, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11). What transpired with the Savior's death and resurrection above all reveals His compliance with and loving obedience to the will of His Father. And by the power of His resurrection, He will raise all believers to everlasting glory (6:39–40, 44).

In spite of the Jews' biases, Jesus' words and deeds prompted many witnesses to say, “These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?” (10:21). Like the healed blind man, they concluded that Jesus' works proved He was indeed the Good Shepherd sent from God (cf. 7:31).

### ASK YOURSELF

In what areas of your life has obedience been the hardest to maintain? In identifying these sins, what do they seem to provide that your relationship with God does not? How could developing a deeper love for God weaken your desire to get your needs met in sinful, insufficient ways?