

ETERNAL LIFE

John 10:27-30

Intro: All Christians should know that Christian doctrine, or teaching, is an essential prerequisite for Christian living. We must know what we believe before we can know how we are to live. The epistles of Paul are especially clear in emphasizing this fact. With Paul doctrine precedes practice, but doctrine never is an end in itself. It always leads to a change in us and a change in the way we live. It is because Christians are weak in their knowledge of the doctrines of Scripture, that they are weak in living the Christian life. “We walk by faith,” said Paul in 2 Cor. 5:7, but by faith in whom or in what? We walk by faith in God, by faith in Christ, by faith in the Holy Spirit. But how can we walk by faith in the Members of the Godhead if we don’t really know Them? And how can we know them? I don’t know of any other way than by learning about Them as They are revealed to us in Scripture. It is our knowledge of God that strengthens our faith in God. It is our knowledge of God that causes us to love Him. And it is our knowledge of God that convinces us that we can trust Him, and that we need to obey Him. So the very foundation of the Christian life is our understanding of Biblical truth.

Sinclair Ferguson said in his book, *Know Your Christian Life*, that “the conviction that Christian doctrine matters for Christian living is one of the most important *growth points* of the Christian life” (p. 1). The Apostle Peter made this very clear when he exhorted believers to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). In the Apostle Paul’s first prayer in his letter to the church at Ephesus, he began by telling them some of the many blessings that each one of them had in Christ. Verses 3 through 14 are all doctrinal. And then he proceeded to tell them how he was praying for them. And these were the requests that he was presenting to God for them:

- 15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,
- 16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;
- 17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:
- 18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

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19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,
20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:15-20).

All of this prayer has to do with what we need to know, what we need to understand. And this all comes before anything that he said about what we need to do. He would get to practical Christian living, but that is not where he started.

Having said all of this, it is a tragic commentary on the lives of many who call themselves Christians that they are not interested in doctrine. They just want practical teaching, or so they say. But those very same people are the ones who display very little understanding of what it means to be a Christian, nor do they really live according to the teaching of Scripture.

The Pharisees of our Lord's day were good examples of those who were concerned mainly about practical matters. In fact, over the years, the Jews were so strong on the practical that they added over six hundred additional rules by which they judged their fellow Israelites. And often their criticism of those that they taught had nothing to do with the revealed Word of God, but with those commandments of men which they had added to the revealed will of God. And so often their rules were in direct opposition with the Word of God. That was true in the way they sought to get around the commandment to honor their fathers and their mothers. Several times in Scripture we are warned about either adding to, or taking away from, what God has given us in His Word. And that applies just as much to doctrine as it does to practical teaching.

So the place to start is by reading the Bible. We will never know either the doctrines of Scripture, nor the practical instruction of Scripture, unless we are personally acquainted with what has been written. We all have had to learn it a little bit at a time. And we never learn all that there is to know. But we are to keep learning, reading it for ourselves, going to a church where it is taught, reading good books which can help us in our understanding of the truth.

Tonight I would like for us to think about "eternal life." And the text I have chosen is John 10:27-30. There are many passages which speak of eternal, or everlasting, life, especially in the Gospel of John. Last Sunday night we considered what it means that we are the children of God, and

how we become the children of God. We saw from John 1:11-13 that we become the children of God when we are born of God. (Quote John 1:11-13.) Then we moved on to the third chapter of John where we have recorded the message that our Lord had for Nicodemus who was a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews. He spoke to Nicodemus about being born *from above*. This was another way of saying that salvation is a work of God. It is obvious that Nicodemus did not understand what the Lord was talking about. His idea about a man's relationship to God was, first, that it was best if you were born of Jewish parents, and secondly that you would submit to the rules of the Jewish teachers. But he had not idea of a work of God by which we would born anew, changed inwardly as a mighty, sovereign act of Almighty God.

The need for a new birth, a birth from above, being born of God, points to the fact that spiritually man is dead. He is separated from God, under the judgment of God because of sin, utterly incapable of pleasing God, and really not even interested in pleasing God. With corrupted Judaism, as well as with corrupted teaching that claims to be Christian, we are to make our own way to God, and, in effect, become our own saviors by what we do. Long ago Solomon wrote twice in the book of Proverbs, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). So man's ways of getting right with God lead to eternal death, not to eternal life. Therefore, to follow any man's idea which is different from what we are taught in the Bible, is to guarantee that we will end up in eternal death.

In John 10, like so many other instances which are recorded in the Gospels, the Lord Jesus was embroiled in controversy with Jewish leaders. They wanted Him to tell them that He was the Christ, or the Messiah, so they could charge Him with blasphemy and have a reason for putting Him to death. They were not really interested in the truth. They just wanted to get rid of Him because He had been so well accepted by the people. The Lord pointed to the works that He had done as proof of His claim that God was His Father, and that He was God's Son. But they were not interested in that. Finally the Lord told them why they wanted to get rid of Him. And you have that in John 10:26: "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you." He did not say, "You are not of my sheep because you do not believe," but "ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep." I hope you see the difference. Believing does not make us sheep; we are sheep or we will not believe. And then the Lord went on to explain the truth to them – truth which they were

incapable of understanding, but truth which He gave them nevertheless.

This is an important point to which we need to pay attention. We don't know people like the Lord did. We don't know when the truth is going to take root in some person's heart so that they will turn to Christ. So we give the Word, trusting the Lord to use the Word as it pleases Him to use it.

In the verses before the Lord had spoken of Himself as "the door of the sheep," and also as "the good Shepherd." So they had been talking about sheep. At this point the Lord identified those who were His sheep.

I. THE LORD'S SHEEP (John 10:27).

Sheep are certainly one of the most defenseless of all animals. They need a shepherd to lead them, to feed them, to protect them. Both in the OT and in the NT this figure of speech is used to describe those who are the people of God. Psalm 23 is a good example of what I mean. King David was one of the Lord's sheep.

The Lord was telling the Jews how you can identify the Lord's sheep, and He said three things about them:

- 1) The Lord's sheep hear His voice. By this He meant that they are receptive to His teaching. They believe what He tells them.
- 2) The Lord knows them. In verse 3 of this chapter He mentioned that the shepherd knows the sheep by name.
- 3) They follow Him. They want to be with Him. They go where He wants them to go. They do what He wants them to do.

Now one who has some understanding of the doctrines of Scripture will recognize in what the Lord said in this verse that the Lord had claimed His sheep before they ever heard Him. This is the doctrine of election. And when the Lord had said earlier that He had come that His sheep might have life (v. 10), that He would give His life for the sheep (v. 11), and that He would lay down His life for the sheep (v. 15), we have another great doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of particular redemption.

Calling His people sheep, was just a figure of speech, but it did not indicate that we look like sheep, nor can you tell by his or her appearance that he or she is one of God's chosen sheep. You tell them by their response to the teaching of the Lord. Nicodemus gave some evidence that

he might be one of the Lord's sheep when he came to the Lord because he had become convinced that the God must be at least "with" the Lord because he knew that no man could do what the Lord had been doing unless God was at least "with" Him.

There have been many people who have been attracted to Christ, and they have started to follow Him, but unfortunately they have not continued to follow Him. True sheep may stumble once in a while, and even stray away for a time, but basically they start to follow, and they continue to follow – and they don't argue about it!

Now let us move on to verse 28 where we have:

II. WHAT THE LORD DOES FOR THE SHEEP (John 10:28).

Now He does many things for His sheep, as any Christian can tell you. He leads us, He feeds us, He protects us, He always cares for us. But what does He do for us first?

"I give unto them eternal life." Now if we have been reading the Gospel of John from the very first we know how He gives us "eternal life." He gives us "eternal life" by the new birth. And it is a gift. We don't deserve it. We can't earn it. It cannot be bought with money. It is free, a free gift. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). He gives us life, and we believe on His Name. We know that He is the Son of God. We know that He died to save us from our sins. And we give evidence that we are sheep who have been drawn to the Lord because we want to follow Him. Are we sheep before we are saved? Yes. But we are not saved until the Lord gives us life. And after we have life, then we will want to follow Him. Following Him means being obedient to His Word.

"Eternal life" is His life given to us. He gave His life for us on the Cross. He gives His life to us when He saves us. And since He gives us "eternal life," we should not be surprised that the Lord added, "and they shall never perish." Is it possible then to be saved, and then to be lost again? Does the Lord give His life to us, and then take it away? Don't build your doctrine on what you see in people. Build your doctrine of the teaching of Scripture. And the Lord Jesus Himself said, "And they shall never perish, neither shall any man (anyone) pluck them out of my hand." The figure of speech changes a little here, but the Lord was making a very, very

important point. Once He gives us life, it is our forever!

But this is not all that there is to salvation. In verse 29 we learn:

III. WHAT THE FATHER HAS DONE FOR THE SHEEP (John 10:29).

Will you note why you and I have come to Christ? The Father has given us to Christ. That expression is used several times in John's Gospel. Read John 17:1-2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 24. And then read John 6:37: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

The Father chose us in eternity past, gave us to His Son, His Son died for us, the Holy Spirit has drawn us to Christ as God's gift to His Son. The Son will never let us go. But that is not all. The Father Who is "greater than all" has given us to His Son, the Son keeps us, but the Father keeps us too, and no one is able to pluck us out of the Father's hand.

I looked up the verb "to pluck," and it means to take the Father by surprise and to suddenly take us away by force. The Devil might try this. And there are certain people who might try to take us away. But we are eternally safe in the hand of the Lord Jesus, and His hand is covered by the Father's hand. And the Lord has never lost even one of His sheep – and He never will!

And then the Lord gave:

IV. A FURTHER WORD OF ASSURANCE (John 10:30).

"I and my Father are One." He did not mean that They were just One Person. The doctrine of the Trinity protects us from making that mistake. He may have meant more than we can fully comprehend. But we know that what He did mean that He and the Father were totally united in guaranteeing that no one, and no thing, not even the sheep themselves, could ever get us out of Their hands.

Concl: Now in the light of these verses, let's not say, "Yes, but I know a person who once was saved, but now is lost." No, you don't! You may know someone who *professed* to be a Christian, but who turned away from the Lord, and never has come back. If so, then, like Judas

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Iscariot, that person was never saved. On the other hand, there are those who wander off for one reason or another, but if they truly know the Lord, the Lord will bring them back. But let us not for ourselves, or for anyone else, claim salvation unless that person is really following the Lord on a daily basis. Many profess, but not all possess. Make sure that you are one who possesses eternal life, and that you demonstrate your faith by wanting to live your life to please God.

What is it that assures us that this is the truth? Well, in the first place we believe that the Bible is the Word of God. And, secondly, we know that God is true, that He never lies, and that He has the power to do what our Lord said in this passage that He and the Father would do. So we bring doctrine to this passage, and the passage itself is all doctrine. We take our stand on the teaching of Scripture, and that is how we understand what it means to have “eternal life.”