

Our Security In Christ

“My Sheep Know My Voice”

Researched, Compiled, and Formatted By Tom Stephens

The following article is the Eighth in a series of Discussions on the subject of “Our Security In Christ”.

What does John 10: 1—5; and 27—29 reveal to the Christian concerning his security in Christ?

*1. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2) But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3) To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: **and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.** 4) And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, **and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.** 5) **And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.** (John 10: 1—5).*

*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.* (John 10:27—30).*

Who are the ones that Jesus said would NEVER perish? Jesus did not say, “I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish,” instead, He said, “I give unto THEM eternal life; and THEY shall never perish.”

Now who are the ones to whom the words “them” and “they” refer? In verse 27 we find that Jesus makes this reference to those that “hear” but not only hear, but “follow”. No one has a Bible right to claim the promise, “shall never perish,” unless he is *hearing the Master's voice* and *following Him*. Everyone will admit that the backslider does not “hear His voice,” and does not “follow” Him. Therefore, THE BACKSLIDER nor THE CARNAL, SIN LOVING CHRISTIAN HAS NO RIGHT AT ALL TO CLAIM THIS PROMISE.

The only “eternal” security the Bible teaches is to the believers who CONTINUALLY REMAIN in the Lord Jesus Christ. That a man may be in Him AND NOT REMAIN, Jesus made clear when He said, “*If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*” (John 15:6). The everlasting life that a Christian possesses is IN THE SON.” 1 John 5:11). Therefore, as long as we abide IN THE SON we have ETERNAL LIFE and “shall NEVER PERISH”. Thank God

The Apostle Paul stated in 2nd Timothy 2:15—19, 15) “*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* 16) *But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.* 17) *And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus;* 18) *Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.* 19) ***Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity***”.

“. . .In The Path Of Righteousness For His Name’s Sake”

There are many willful, wayward, indifferent, self-interested Christians who cannot be classified as followers of Christ. There are relatively few diligent disciples who forsake all to follow the Master.

Jesus never made light of the cost involved in following Him. In fact He made it painfully clear it was a rugged life of rigid self-denial. It entailed a whole new set of attitudes. It was not the natural, normal way a person would ordinarily live and this is what made the price so prohibitive to most people.

In brief, seven fresh attitudes have to be acquired. They are the equivalent of progressive forward movements onto new ground with God. If one follows them they will discover fresh pasturage; new, abundant life; and increased health, wholesomeness and holiness, in their walk with God. Nothing will please Him more and most certainly no other activity on our part will or can result in as great benefit to other lives around us.

1. *Instead of loving myself most I am willing to love Christ best and others more than myself.* Now love in a scriptural sense is not a soft, sentimental emotion. It is a deliberate act of my will. It means that I am willing to lay down my life, lay myself out, put myself out on behalf of another. This is precisely what God did for us in Christ. "Hereby perceive [understand] we have the love of God, because he laid down his life for us" (I John 3:16).

The moment I deliberately do something definite either for God or others that costs me something, I am expressing love. Love is "self-lessness". . . .Most of us know little of living like this or being "led" in this right way. But once a person discovers the delight of doing something for others, he has started through the gate being led into one of God's green pastures.

2. *Instead of being one of the crowd I am willing to be singled out, set apart from the gang.* Most of us, like sheep, are pretty gregarious. We want to belong. We don't want to be different in a deep, distinctive way, though we may wish to be different in minor details that appeal to our selfish egos.

But Christ pointed out that only a few would find His way acceptable. And to be marked as one of His would mean a certain amount of criticism and sarcasm from a cynical society. Many of us don't want this. Just as He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, so we may be. Instead of adding to the sorrows and sadness of society we may be called on to help bear some of the burdens of others, to enter into the suffering of others. Are we ready to do this?

3. *Instead of insisting on my rights I am willing to forego them in favor of others.* Basically this is what the Master meant by denying one's self. It is not easy, nor normal, nor natural to do this. Even in the loving atmosphere of the home, self-assertion is pretty evident and the powerful exercise of individual rights is always apparent.

But the person who is willing to pocket his pride, to take a back seat, to play second fiddle without a feeling of being abused or put upon has gone a long way onto new ground with God.

There is a tremendous emancipation from "self" in this attitude. One is set free from the shackles of personal pride. It's pretty hard to hurt such a person. He who has no sense of self-importance cannot be offended or deflated. Somehow such people enjoy a wholesome outlook of carefree abandon that makes their Christian lives contagious with contentment and gaiety.

4. *Instead of being "boss" I am willing to be at the bottom of the heap.* Or to use sheep terminology, instead of being "Top Ram" I'm willing to be a "tail-ender."

When the desire for self-assertion and self-pleasing gives way to the desire for simply pleasing God and others, much of the fret and strain is drained away from daily living.

A hallmark of the serene soul is the absence of "drive," at least, "drive" for self-determination. The person who is prepared to put his personal life and personal affairs in the Master's hands for His management and direction has found the place of rest in fresh fields each day. These are the ones who find time and energy to please others.

5. *Instead of finding fault with life and always asking "Why?" I am willing to accept every circumstance of life in an attitude of gratitude.* Human beings, being what they are, somehow feel entitled to question the reasons for everything that happens to them. In many instances life itself becomes a continuous criticism and dissection of one's circumstances and acquaintances. We look for someone or something on which to pin the blame for our misfortunes. We are often quick to forget our blessings, slow to forget our misfortunes.

But if one really believes his affairs are in God's hands, every event, no matter whether joyous or tragic, will be taken as part of God's plan. To know beyond doubt that He does all for our welfare is to be led into a wide area of peace and quietness and strength for every situation.

6. *Instead of exercising and asserting my will, I learn to cooperate with His wishes and comply with His will.* It must be noted that *all the steps outlined here involve the will*. The saints from earliest times have repeatedly pointed out that nine-tenths of religion, of Christianity, of becoming a true follower, a dedicated disciple, lies in the will.

When a man or woman allows his will to be crossed out, canceling the *great I* in their decisions, then indeed the Cross has been applied to that life. This is the meaning of taking up one's cross daily—to go to one's own death—no longer my will in the matter but His will be done.

7. *Instead of choosing my own way I am willing to choose to follow in Christ's way: simply to do what He asks me to do.* This basically is simple, straightforward obedience. It means I just do what He asks me to do. I go where He invites me to go. I say what He instructs me to say. I act and re-act in the manner He maintains is in my own best interest as well as for His reputation (if I'm His follower).

Most of us possess a formidable amount of factual information on what the Master expects of us. Precious few have either the will, intention or determination to act on it and comply with His instructions. But the person who decides to do what God asks him has moved onto fresh ground which will do both him and others a world of good. Besides, it will please the Good Shepherd no end.

God wants us all to move on with Him. He wants us to walk with Him. He wants it not only for our welfare but for the benefit of others as well as His own dear reputation.

Perhaps there are those who think He expects too much of us. Maybe they feel the demands are too drastic. Some may even consider His call impossible to carry out.

It would be if we had to depend on self-determination, or self-discipline to succeed. But if we are in earnest about wanting to do His will, and to be led, He makes this possible by His own gracious Spirit who is given to those who obey (Acts 5:32). For it is He who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

“Yea, Though I Walk Through The Valley. . .”

From a shepherd's point of view this statement marks the halfway stage in the 23rd Psalm. It is as though up to this point the sheep has been boasting to its unfortunate neighbor across the fence about the excellent care it received from its owner on the "home" ranch throughout the winter and spring.

Now it turns to address the shepherd directly. The personal pronouns I and Thou enter the conversation. It becomes a most intimate discourse of deep affection.

This is natural and normal. The long treks into the high country with their summer range begin here. Left behind are the neglected sheep on the other side of the fence. Their owner knows nothing of the hill country—the mountain meadows to which these sheep will be led. Their summer will be spent in the close companionship and solitary care of the good shepherd.

Both in Palestine and on our western sheep ranches, this division of the year is common practice. Most of the efficient shepherds endeavor to take their flocks onto distant summer ranges during summer. This often entails long "drives." The sheep move along slowly, feeding as they go, gradually working their way up the mountains behind the receding snow. By late summer they are well up on the remote alpine meadows above the timberline.

With the approach of autumn, early snow settles on the highest ridges, relentlessly forcing the flock to withdraw back down to lower elevations. Finally, toward the end of the year as fall passes, the sheep are driven home to the ranch headquarters where they will spend the winter. It is this segment of the yearly operations that is described in the last half of the poem.

During this time the flock is entirely alone with the shepherd. They are in intimate contact with him and under his most personal attention day and night. That is why these last verses are couched in such intimate first-person language. And it is well to remember that all of this is done against a dramatic background of wild mountains, rushing rivers, alpine meadows and high rangelands.

David, the psalmist, of course, knew this type of terrain firsthand. When Samuel was sent of God to anoint him king over Israel, he was not at home with his brothers on the "home" ranch. Instead he was high up on the hills tending his father's flock. They had to send for him to come home. It is no wonder he could write so clearly and concisely of the relationship between a sheep and its owner.

He knew from firsthand experience about the difficulties and dangers, as well as the delights, of the treks into high country. Again and again he had gone up into the summer range with his sheep. He knew this wild but wonderful country like the palm of his own strong hand. Never did he take his flock where he had not already been before. Always he went ahead to look over the country with care.

All the dangers of rampaging rivers in flood; avalanches; rock slides; poisonous plants; the ravages of predators that raid the flock or the awesome storms of sleet and hail and snow were familiar to him. He had handled his sheep and managed them with care under all these adverse conditions. Nothing took him by surprise. He was fully prepared to safeguard his flock and tend them with skill under every circumstance.

All of this is brought out in the beautiful simplicity of the last verses. Here is a grandeur, a quietness, an assurance that sets the soul at rest. "I will not fear, for thou art with me ..."—with me in every situation, in every dark trial, in every dismal disappointment, in every distressing dilemma.

In the Christian life we often speak of wanting "to move onto higher ground with God." How we long to live above the lowlands of life. We want to get beyond the common crowd, to enter a more intimate walk with God. We speak of mountaintop experiences and we envy those who have ascended the heights and entered into this more sublime sort of life.

Often we get an erroneous idea about how this takes place. It is as though we imagined we could be "air lifted" onto higher ground. On the rough trail of the Christian life this is not so. As with ordinary sheep

management, so with God's people, one only gains higher ground by climbing up through the valleys. Every mountain has its valleys. Its sides are scarred by deep ravines and gulches and draws. And the best route to the top is always along these valleys.

Any sheepman familiar with the high country knows this. He leads his flock gently, but persistently up the paths that wind through the dark valleys. It should be noticed that the verse states, "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.*" It does not say I die there, or stop there—but rather "*I walk through.*"

It is customary to use this verse as a consolation to those who are passing through the dark valley of death. But even here, for the child of God, death is not an end but merely the door into a higher and more exalted life of intimate contact with Christ. Death is but the dark valley opening out into an eternity of delight with God. It is not something to fear, but an experience through which one passes on the path to a more perfect life.

The Good Shepherd knows this. It is one reason why He has told us, "*Lo, I am with you alway*"— yes, even in the valley of death. What a comfort and what a cheer.

I was keenly aware of this consolation when my wife went to "higher ground." For two years we had walked through the dark valley of death watching her beautiful body being destroyed by cancer. As death approached I sat by her bed, her hand in mine Gently we "passed" through the valley of death. Both of us were quietly aware of Christ's presence. No fear—we were just *going on to higher ground.*

For those of us who remain on earth, there is still a life to live here and now. There are still valleys to walk through during our remaining days. These need not be "dead end" streets. The disappointments, the frustrations, the discouragements, the dilemmas, the dark, difficult days, though they be shadowed valleys, need not be disasters. They can be the road to higher ground in our walk with God.

After all, when we pause to think about it a moment, we must realize that even our modern mountain highways follow the valleys to reach the summit of the passes they traverse Similarly the ways of God lead upward through the valleys of our lives.

Again and again I remind myself, "O God, this seems terribly tough, but I know for a fact that in the end it will prove to be the easiest and gentlest way to get me onto higher ground." Then when I thank Him for the difficult things, the dark days, I discover that He is there with me in my distress. At that point my panic, my fear, my misgivings give way to calm and quiet confidence in His care. Somehow, in a serene quiet way I am assured all will turn out well for my best because He is with me in the valley and things are under His control.

To come to this conviction in the Christian life is to have entered into an attitude of quiet acceptance of every adversity. It is to have moved onto higher ground with God. Knowing Him in this new and intimate manner makes life much more bearable than before.

There is a second reason why sheep are taken to the mountain tops by way of the valleys. Not only is this the way of the *gentlest grades*, but also it is the *well-watered* route. Here one finds refreshing water all along the way. There are rivers, streams, springs and quiet pools in the deep defiles.

During the summer months long drives can be hot and tiresome. The flocks experience intense thirst. How glad they are for the frequent watering places along the valley route where they can be refreshed.

I recall one year when an enormous flock of over 10,000 sheep was being taken through our country en route to their summer range. The owners came asking permission to water their sheep at the river that

flowed by our ranch. Their thirsty flocks literally ran to the water's edge to quench their burning thirst under the blazing summer sun. Only in our valley was there water for their parched flesh. How glad we were to share the water with them.

As Christians we will sooner or later discover that it is in the valleys of our lives that we find refreshment from God Himself. It is not until we have walked with Him through some very deep troubles that we discover He can lead us to find our refreshment in Him right there in the midst of our difficulty. We are thrilled beyond words when there comes restoration to our souls and spirits from His own gracious Spirit.

During my wife's illness and after her death I could not get over the strength, solace and serene outlook imparted to me virtually hour after hour by the presence of God's gracious Spirit Himself.

It was as if I was being repeatedly refreshed and restored despite the most desperate circumstances all around me. Unless one has actually gone through such an experience it may seem difficult to believe. In fact there are those who claim they could not face such a situation. But for the man or woman who walks with God through these valleys, such real and actual refreshment is available.

The corollary to this is that only those who have been through such dark valleys can console, comfort or encourage others in similar situations. Often we pray or sing the hymn requesting God to make us an inspiration to someone else. We want, instinctively, to be a channel of blessing to other lives. The simple fact is that just as water can only flow in a ditch or channel or valley—so in the Christian's career, the life of God can only flow in blessing through the valleys that have been carved and cut into our own lives by excruciating experiences.

For example, the one best able to comfort another in bereavement is the person who himself has lost a loved one. The one who can best minister to a broken heart is one who has known a broken heart.

Most of us do not want valleys in our lives. We shrink from them with a sense of fear and foreboding. Yet in spite of our worst misgivings God can bring great benefit and lasting benediction to others through those valleys. Let us not always try to avoid the dark things, the distressing days. They may well prove to be the way of greatest refreshment to ourselves and those around us.

A third reason why the rancher chooses to take his flock into the high country by way of the valleys is that this is generally where the richest feed and best forage is to be found along the route.

The flock is moved along gently—they are not hurried. There are lambs along which have never been this way before. The shepherd wants to be sure there will not only be water but also the best grazing available for the ewes and their lambs. Generally the choicest meadows are in these valleys along the stream banks. Here the sheep can feed as they move toward the high country.

Naturally these grassy glades are often on the floor of steep-walled canyons and gulches. There may be towering cliffs above them on either side. The valley floor itself may be in dark shadow with the sun seldom reaching the bottom except for a few hours around noon.

The shepherd knows from past experience that predators like coyotes, bears, wolves or cougars can take cover in these broken cliffs and from their vantage point prey on his flock. He knows these valleys can be subject to sudden storms and flash floods that send walls of water rampaging down the slopes. There could be rock slides, mud or snow avalanches and a dozen other natural disasters that would destroy or injure his sheep. But in spite of such hazards he also knows that this is still the best way to take his flock to the high country. He spares himself no pains or trouble or time to keep an eye out for any danger that might develop.

One of the most terrible threats is the sudden chilling storms of sleet, rain and snow that can sweep down through the valleys from the mountain peaks. If sheep become soaked and chilled with a freezing rain, the exposure can kill them in a very short time. They are thin-skinned creatures, easily susceptible to colds, pneumonia and other respiratory complications.

I recall one storm I went through in the foothills of the Rockies in early summer. The morning had been bright and clear. Suddenly around noon enormous dark, black, forbidding clouds began to sweep down over the hills from the north. A chilling wind accompanied the approaching storm. The sky grew blacker by the hour. Suddenly in mid afternoon long streamers of rain and sleet began to sweep across the valley. I ran to take shelter in a clump of stunted, wind-blown spruce. The rain soaked me through. As it fell it cooled the whole country. The rain turned to sleet, then to commingled snow and hail. In a short time the whole mountain slope (in mid July!) was white and frozen. Ominous darkness shrouded the whole scene. The sheep sensed the storm approaching. Perhaps the flock would have perished if they had not raced away to find shelter in the steep cliffs at the edge of the canyon.

But in these valleys was where the grass grew best and it was the route to the high country.

Our Shepherd knows all of this when He leads us through the valleys with Himself. He knows where we can find strength and sustenance and gentle grazing despite every threat of disaster about us.

It is a most reassuring and reinforcing experience to the child of God to discover that there is, even in the dark valley, a source of strength and courage to be found in God. It is when he can look back over life and see how the Shepherd's hand has guided and sustained him in the darkest hours that renewed faith is engendered.

I know of nothing which so stimulates my faith in my Heavenly Father as to look back and reflect on His faithfulness to me in every crisis and every chilling circumstance of life. Over and over He has proved His care and concern for my welfare. Again and again I have been conscious of the Good Shepherd's guidance through dark days and deep valleys.

All of this multiplies my confidence in Christ. It is this spiritual, as well as emotional and mental exposure to the storms and adversities of life that puts stamina into my very being. Because He has led me through without fear before, He can do it again, and again, and again. In this knowledge fear fades and tranquility of heart and mind takes its place.

Let come what may. Storms may break about me, predators may attack, the rivers of reverses may threaten to inundate me. But because He is in the situation with me, I shall not fear.

To live thus is to have taken some very long treks toward the high country of holy, calm, healthy living with God.

Only the Christian who learns to live this way is able to encourage and inspire the weaker ones around him. Too many of us are shaken up, frightened and panicked by the storms of life. We claim to have confidence in Christ but when the first dark shadows sweep over us and the path we tread looks gloomy we go into a deep slump of despair. Sometimes we just feel like lying down to die. This is not as it should be.

The person with a powerful confidence in Christ; the one who has proved by past experience that God is with him in adversity; the one who walks through life's dark valleys without fear, his head held high, is the one who in turn is a tower of strength and a source of inspiration to his companions.

There are going to be some valleys in life for all of us. The Good Shepherd Himself assured us that "in this world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The basic question is not whether we have many or few valleys. It is not whether those valleys are dark or merely dim with shadows. The question is how do I react to them? How do I go through them? How do I cope with the calamities that come my way?

With Christ I face them calmly.

With His gracious Spirit to guide me I face them fearlessly.

I know of a surety that only through them can I possibly travel on to higher ground with God. In this way not only shall I be blessed but in turn I will become a benediction to others around me who may live in fear.

Do you *hear His voice* and *follow after Him* in obedience—or do you walk in your *own* spirit?

Blessings
Tom Stephens

www.christsbondservants.org

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