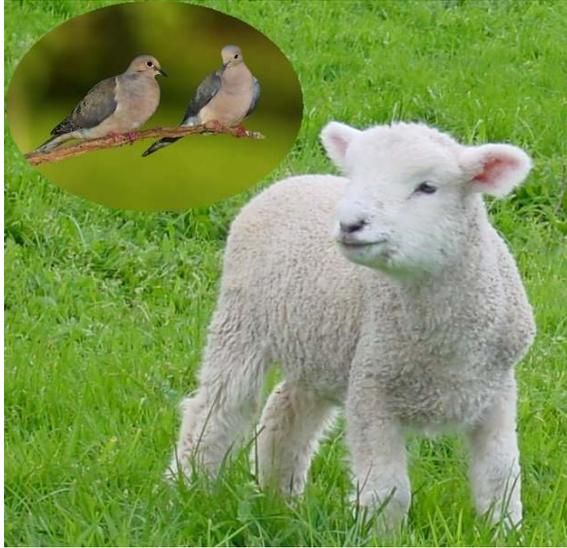


Sheep and Doves

Joseph Herrin (05-08-2011)



Matthew 10:16

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”

This post builds on the previous two. It will take a further look at the subject of non-resistance toward those who would do harm to the saints. In the Scripture above, how many positive animal types do you see, and how many negative? If you said, two and two, then I invite you to look again. There are actually three animals who are used as positive types for the disciples of Christ, and only one that is listed as a negative type.

You see it now, do you not? Christ compared His disciples to sheep, doves *and serpents*. There are character types specifically alluded to by each of these animals. Christ does not want His disciples to have every characteristic of these animals, for they each have their negative aspects. He has in mind certain and specific positive characteristics of each of these creatures.

When Christ speaks of sending His disciples out as sheep in the midst of wolves, He has in mind those characteristics of a sheep when it encounters a wolf. Sheep are in this instance innocent, helpless animals. Sheep are not known to fight with wolves. They are very ill prepared to do so. Sheep have no fangs, no claws. They do not have an aggressive, or combatant nature when facing wolves. Their main defense is to cry out, alerting the shepherd who cares for them, or to run.

As the sheep of Christ’s pasture, there are times when the people of God are exhorted to do either, or both, of these. The following Scripture exhorts the saints to not be anxious, but to let God know of their need. We are to cry out to Him in a time of need, maintaining our confidence in Him.

Philippians 4:6-7

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Yahshua.

To understand this attribute of a sheep trusting in the Great Shepherd, there is no better passage of Scripture to look at than the 23rd Psalm. David was a shepherd boy in his youth, and later he was chosen by God to shepherd the people of God. As a shepherd of sheep, David manifested the heart of Christ. David was watching over his father's flocks, even as Christ watches over His Father's flocks.

David recounts how he rescued his father's sheep from the mouths of a lion and a bear. He laid his life on the line to safeguard the sheep. Truly, they could trust in him. David was no mere hireling. Should danger appear, or some predator threaten them, all the sheep needed to do was raise their voice and the shepherd would be quick and ready to defend them. As Christians, we have such a Shepherd who cares for our souls.

John 10:11-15

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep."

Notice here that Christ describes an encounter between sheep and a wolf. What should the sheep do when the wolf comes? They should raise their voices, crying out to the Shepherd to help them. The Good Shepherd watches over us. He will most certainly attend to the voice of the sheep. He will not forsake them. Nothing can separate the disciples of Christ from His love.

Sheep may also at times be instructed by the shepherd to run. The Shepherd, aware that danger threatens the flocks may lead them to hastily depart one area to abide in another that is safer.

Matthew 10:23

When they persecute you in this city, flee to another."

Understand that what is being taught in these Scriptures, and through the example of the sheep, is not that the sheep should be driven by fear. No! The sheep will always expose themselves if they run in any direction that the Shepherd does not instruct them to run. Christ was both a sheep, and a shepherd. He is called "the Lamb of God." When He conducted His ministry upon the earth He was never driven by fear. At times He entered deliberately into areas where men were seeking His life, for it was the Father's will that He go there.

John 11:5-11

Now Yahshua loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?" Yahshua answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

As long as we are walking with God, we are walking in the light. Though we walk through dark places, if the Light of the World is our shepherd, we remain in the light. There is a correlation between the words of Christ above, and David's words in the 23rd Psalm.

Psalms 23:4-5

Yea, though I walk through *the valley of the shadow of death*, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...

Valleys and shadows can be dark places. As long as we are walking with the Shepherd, we need not fear for our lives. The Shepherd will never lead us to an experience that will prove harmful to us. True, we may be called to suffer physically. Many have already died as martyrs while following the Shepherd. Yet, they experienced no spiritual, or lasting harm. The grace of God was with them. They did not face their adversaries alone. The Shepherd stood with them. Paul gives such a testimony at one point of his life.

II Timothy 4:16-17

At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth.

We know that Paul was not always rescued from the lion's mouth. He suffered many things for Christ, yet he never suffered alone. So too will Christ, our Shepherd, strengthen us when we are called to stand and endure suffering for His name. There are times, however, when He will direct His sheep to flee to avoid suffering unnecessarily. Christ during His ministry heeded the guidance of the Spirit. There were times when the Spirit directed Yahshua away from harm. This began even before He was born.

Matthew 2:13

Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."

Matthew 2:19-23

Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was

reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee.

Christ remained sensitive to the leading of the Spirit in His adult years of ministry. He did not go to places where the Spirit warned Him not to travel.

John 7:1

After these things Yahshua was walking in Galilee, for He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him.

These then, are the characteristics of a sheep that the people of God are to emulate. They are to not fight with wolves. They are not to seek to defend themselves. They are to raise their voices when threatened, making their needs known to the Shepherd of their soul. They are also to heed the voice of the Shepherd and be careful to do all that He speaks to them. When He leads them through the valley of the shadow of death, they should follow, trusting in His rod and staff to protect them. When He leads them away from danger, they are also to follow.

After describing His disciples as sheep among wolves, Christ then compares His disciples to serpents. "Therefore, be wise as serpents..." The word serpent is derived from the same root as the English word "sapient," which means "wise." Notice that this is not the same as to be cunning as serpents. The serpent in the Garden of Eden was described as cunning. The word cunning denotes a wisdom that has been given over to selfish pursuit. The one who is cunning is wise in a distorted way. They have become devious, full of scheming. This is not the type of wisdom Christ wishes His disciples to employ.

I have encountered Christians who are full of scheming. Their minds are given over to devising plots to protect themselves in coming days of calamity and persecution. Giving one's mind over to devise schemes does not lead to peace. It leads away from peace, promoting a sense of foreboding and anxiety. The people of God are not to scheme. They are merely to follow the leading of the Shepherd when He urges them to move on. If the Spirit guided Joseph to protect Mary and Yahshua, will He not do the same with those who have been born of the seed of Christ?

The following passage contrasts the wisdom from God and the cunning of Satan.

James 3:13-17

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

The wisdom Christ desires for His saints to walk in is pure, peaceable, gentle, and full of mercy. There is no selfish motive behind it. Christ is the epitome of wisdom. He testified of Himself, "A greater than Solomon is here." This wisdom was pure, for Yahshua ever lived

to do the will of the Father. He never sought to please Himself. It is wisdom that the sons of God walk circumspectly among the people of this world. We are to walk wisely not only among those who have no profession of faith in God, but among those who do. It was the religious who claimed to follow the God of Abraham, who delivered the Son of God up to be crucified. The wisdom of Yahshua was observed as He answered the Jews who were scheming to entrap Him with their questions.

Luke 20:20-26

So they watched [for an opportunity to ensnare] Him, and sent spies who pretended to be upright (honest and sincere), that they might lay hold of something He might say, so as to turn Him over to the control and authority of the governor. They asked Him, "Teacher, we know that You speak and teach what is right, and that You show no partiality to anyone but teach the way of God honestly and in truth. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not?" But He recognized and understood their cunning and unscrupulousness and said to them, "Show Me a denarius (a coin)! Whose image and inscription does it have?" They answered, "Caesar's." He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." So they could not in the presence of the people take hold of anything He said to turn it against Him; but marveling at His reply, they were silent. [Amplified Bible]

This is the type of wisdom that Christ is encouraging His disciples to walk in. He does not want them to be unwise, acting naively toward the fallen, or religious, spirits that surround them. In the same passage that Christ speaks of being wise as serpents, He warns His disciples to "beware of men."

Matthew 10:16-17

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. *And beware of men*, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues..."

Serpents are wise in this area. Ever since the fall of man, serpents have learned to act wisely around men. Serpents understand that there is a natural enmity between man and serpents.

Genesis 3:14-15

So Yahweh God said to the serpent... "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Serpents have learned how to act wisely around mankind. They seek to not draw undue attention to themselves. They remain hidden when they are around those who might strike them. Christ, in exhorting His disciples to be wise as serpents, is instructing them to walk and speak prudently among men. He wants them to "beware of men," knowing that those who do not love truth, or fear God, will seek to tear and rend the people of God at every opportunity. There is a natural enmity between the children of the devil, and the children of God.

Matthew 7:6

"Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample

them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.”

When I first began the ministry to which Christ appointed me, I was quite naive. I did not walk in the wisdom of serpents. Even now, I am learning to walk more wisely. The last time I was summoned to the courts, I learned that other Christians who had taken an adversarial position against me were reading my blog postings to find any material they might possibly use against me. I have been aware for some time that my blogs continue to be read by men and women whose motive is nothing other than to find some charge to accuse me.

The Spirit of Christ has testified to me that He has called me to experience many things before my brothers and sisters are to experience the same. Yahweh provided a parable through the van He provided for me. Vehicles symbolize ministry. The van God gave me was an Explorer. It had a Pioneer stereo, and Pathfinder tires. The Spirit has testified to me that God has been leading me as an Explorer and Pioneer through many experiences that I might encourage His saints as they must follow a similar course. One thing God has been teaching me is to understand that I am sent out as a sheep among wolves and I need to act wisely as a serpent.

People of God, I do not want any man or woman to walk in fear. It is not the will of God that we be consumed with paranoia, or that we demonize all those around us. There are times when the Spirit will direct us to expose ourselves to misunderstanding and criticism. There are even times when He will lead us to speak words that will elicit the wrath and violence of men. We are to always be sensitive to the Spirit of Christ. We are to act wisely as serpents. We are to “beware of men” as we follow that course God has appointed to us.

There are days close at hand when these words I write will be very important for a remnant of God’s people. Consider carefully the words of Christ that follow in this same passage where the disciples of Christ are exhorted to be wise as serpents and to beware of men. Just a few verses further down, Christ says:

Matthew 10:21-22

“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name...”

People of God, I tell you plainly, the day is coming when the members of your own household will believe it to be the righteous thing to deliver you to the courts for punishment, imprisonment, and even death. Because the church has become apostate, having fallen away from the truth proclaimed by Christ, exchanging truth with lies, they will believe they are doing God a favor by putting the true disciples of Christ to death.

John 16:2-3

“They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them.”

Is it not apparent that this earth is growing increasingly dark? The blood of tens of millions

of babies cries out from the ground of America. The government is aggressively promoting homosexuality. Music and television has become perversely corrupted, spewing out rivers of filthy language, and obscene images, bringing spiritual death to millions. The church, in order to maintain its peaceful coexistence in the world, has been compromising more and more until there is almost no truth left in her. Soon, both the world, and an apostate church, will turn on the true disciples of Christ and deliver them up to persecution and death.

Christ says, "I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents, and *harmless as doves*." This last comparison to doves is easily understood. Christians are not to fight back against the darkness through fleshly means. They are not to engage in armed conflict. They are not to adopt the ways of a fallen world in order to protect themselves. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. The weapons of Christ's disciples are not guns and bullets. It is a great paradox, but the disciples of Christ conquer as they offer no resistance to those who would persecute them.

Romans 8:35-37

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

The people of God are to be innocent as lambs, yet not naive. They are to be wise as serpents, yet harmless as doves to those they encounter. This was ever the example of Christ and His disciples. Let it be our example as well.