John 10:1-10 Commentary
New International Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Study Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the *International Bible Study Forum*.

(John 10:1) "Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.

Using what we might consider a parable, Jesus emphasized that He was declaring what was factually true about a spiritual reality. He was intentionally and directly applying to the Pharisees what they would not understand. They, along with almost all of the religious leaders in Israel, were either religious/spiritual sneak thieves or robbers who would use any means, even violence, to steal materially, psychologically, and spiritually from their followers. These people thought they were on their way to heaven and salvation because of their relationship to Abraham and Moses, and because of their laws, traditions, and religious beliefs, but they did not enter the way Jesus made available to everyone. The only way to salvation was through the gate, through Him, as God's gift of eternal life to all who would receive Him as Lord and Savior. John Bunyan in his Pilgrim's Progress illustrated this truth brilliantly and graphically as Christian met many people who had climbed into the way to salvation some other way and they never reached the Celestial City.

(John 10:2) The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.

In Jesus' illustration here, He is the gate, the door, or the way to be adopted into the family of God. Jesus is also the Shepherd or the Good Shepherd of the sheep. True shepherds of the sheep will lead their followers to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, because Jesus is their Shepherd and they are leading His sheep for and to Him. As "under shepherds," Christians always point people to Jesus the "Chief Shepherd" as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

(John 10:3) The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

God the Father may be understood as the gatekeeper who opens the gate for Jesus and His sheep. Jesus can also be understood as the gatekeeper who opens the gate for all the true shepherds who serve Him as Shepherd/King and care for His sheep according to His commands. God's sheep listen for the voice of Jesus, and they hear and follow the voice of Jesus and those He has appointed to shepherd His flock; such as, the disciples, apostles and those who truly followed them and the Scriptures as leaders in the Church throughout the centuries. The Good Shepherd and those serving as shepherds under Him care enough about their flock to know each sheep and call them by name in a personal relationship. God the Father and Jesus the Son know each of their sheep by name, and knowing that fact humbles, encourages, and gives joy to every Christian believer.

(John 10:4) When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

Those who are on the way of salvation follow Jesus daily, even as the sheep know and follow their shepherd to green pastures and quiet waters daily. He can walk ahead of them knowing they know Him and trust Him enough to follow Him wherever He leads. They know and love His voice, and they stay close enough to Him not to get lost or stray from the path. If they stray,

Jesus will find them and carry them back to the sheepfold (see Luke 15:1-7).

(John 10:5) But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

In keeping with what everyone knew in Jesus' day, the true followers of Jesus will never follow a strange God, prophet, priest, or other person who would lead them out of the way of salvation. They can compare the teachings of the Bible with the teachings of false leaders and religions, and they will run away and not be misled by false teaching and false teachers. The Bible is their sure and certain Guide as the infallible Word of God written. They judge all ideas and teachings by the Bible as their objective standard of truth, rather than believing and judging the Bible's teachings based on human ideas, philosophies, or other religious teachings.

(John 10:6) Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

If the Pharisees had understood Jesus' teachings, they probably would have tried to destroy Him sooner. Jesus will go on to teach His disciples for a little while longer, but He came to lay down His life for His sheep according to His Father's timing. He came to be the Gate and the Shepherd, and He would die rather than let any of His sheep be lost or unable to come to His Father through Him to be saved.

(John 10:7) Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

Jesus compares His followers to sheep to illustrate some of the qualities of His followers. Jesus wanted to emphasize His ability and willingness to care for His followers even though He would soon die as a sacrifice for their sins. The sheep in the sheepfold know the true God and recognize when someone has been sent to them from God. The sheep are protected in an enclosure, and the gate and enclosure protect the sheep from wild animals, thieves, and those that would harm the sheep. The enclosure and closed gate also protect the sheep from wandering away from the shepherd and getting

hurt. The sheep are often in this enclosure at night, when shepherds are not in the field with them. Jesus is the gate to the protective enclosure; so, He will not admit anyone into His sheepfold that He does not approve of being there. The sheepfold is the Kingdom of God or the true Church of Jesus Christ as defined and described in the Bible. Still, as Jesus taught earlier, we always need to keep aware and not follow a false teacher. The indwelling Holy Spirit will help us as we study the Bible and keep aware when hearing the ideas of others that do not and will not ring true in the ears of a true sheep of Jesus.

(John 10:8) All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them.

Prior to Jesus' coming and afterwards, some came to the Jews and claimed to be the Messiah. Throughout the Old Testament, we learn that some false prophets also came to the Jews and misled some of them, sometimes many of them. Jesus compared these false messiahs and prophets to thieves and bandits: liars who claimed to be sent from God. Those truly committed to following God according to the Scriptures (God's sheep) were not misled by these false messiahs and false prophets. God said of His sheep, "For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD—the remnant of Israel; they shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths. Then they will pasture and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid" (Zephaniah 3:12-13). After Jesus ascended into heaven, some came and claimed to be the Messiah. Because of the leadership of a false messiah, the Jews rebelled, and the Romans eventually destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. Even today, false prophets, false teachers, false messiahs, and false religions deceive some, but not those in the sheepfold of God (who may be temporarily confused until God enlightens them by the Holy Spirit using the truth of the Bible).

(John 10:9) I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture.

The sheep of God do not listen to or follow false prophets, false leaders, and false teachers. To come to God the Father and His sheepfold, the sheep of

God come to the gate, Jesus, who is the only gate into the sheepfold of God. He is the Savior of the sheep who enter God's sheepfold through Him. Those who truly seek the truth and the true God will find God and come to Jesus. God said, "When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the LORD" (Jeremiah 29:13-14). Jesus meets all the needs of God's sheep, and Jesus protects them in the sheepfold (the Kingdom of God).

(John 10:10) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

When we think of different people, groups, and religions that claim to represent God, we know of some that have become known for their killing and destroying. They steal the lives and possessions of those they kill and destroy. Jesus and the true Church of God do not do this evil to others: they love God and their neighbor. Jesus gives life. He gives abundant life. He came into the world to save people. We will know true Christians by their fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why do you think "thieves and bandits" is a good description of false messiahs, false prophets, false teachers, and false religious leaders?

2. As the sheep of God, what are some things we can do so we do not get tricked into listening to religious, spiritual, or psychological "thieves and bandits"?

3. What are some things God has done and does for His sheep to keep them safe?

4. Why does Jesus speak so pointedly of there being only one gate, only one flock of sheep, and only one good shepherd?

5. What does a thief do and what does Jesus do?

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