

Living with Sheep and Goats

Our Christian churches of these end times have a lot of weaknesses that have accumulated across the centuries. One of them is that we don't seem to know who we really are anymore. We have heard about sheep and goats. Jesus talked about them in Matthew 25. But a lot of good Christian folks really are not sure who the sheep and goats are. We know that these words refer to human beings but how does a sheep get to be a sheep, and how does a goat get to be a goat? Can a goat turn into a sheep, and vice versa? What do you think? Christians are not at all agreed about this.

This much we know. Matthew pointed out that when the Lord comes back to this earth, He will separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep will come into His eternal inheritance, and the goats will go into everlasting punishment. We could call the sheep "believers" and goats "unbelievers," but that has problems. Or we could call them Christians and non-Christians. Or we could call them "elect" and "non-elect". Or we could call them a lot of other names. Jesus used very simple language. He just called them sheep and goats.

But Jesus used the sheep and goat names simply to designate a difference between the children of God and the children of the devil. In John 10:27, he said, "My sheep hear my voice." These are God's kids, and He communicates with them. He said to others however, "You are of your father the devil"..."He that is of God hears God's words. You therefore hear them not because you are not of God" This is in John 8: 44 and 47.

How much plainer can one get? These are the two kinds of people who share this world together. In the book of Revelation, the children of God are repeatedly called "people, kindreds, tongues, and nations." The goats are called "They that dwell upon the earth." God's designations are clear if we look for them.

Sometimes Christians get so saintly that they want to totally separate themselves from people who they think may be goats or at least are not as "Christian" as they themselves are. But this is not possible to do. The goats are with us, and sometimes they look so much like sheep that we think they are truly one of "us." And sometimes a sheep gets so muddied and bedraggled that we are sure he has to be a goat, but we may be wrong. Even angels are not always sure about just who is who. We know this from the parable of the wheat and tares in Matthew 13. This is not to say that we should not ever make any judgments, but we should be very careful in doing it.

The four gospels in the Bible tell us a lot about sheep and goats, but not always by these particular names. The Pharisees, for example, give us a great study. They were really very good, upright people, but Jesus called some of them children of the devil. They strove for righteousness and acceptance, and they really worked hard at it.

Now we know that we children of God have forgiveness through Jesus Christ and are that we are partakers of His righteousness. This knowledge comes to us in a practical sense through our faith. But the goats don't have that assurance, so they seek for acceptance in other ways. They strive to keep

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social requirements so as to have the approval of their peers. Some of them even seek it in churches, and find it there. They can even learn to talk Christian talk, and become very good at it. Maybe some of them even preach.

Is this a good or bad thing? And what does God expect from goats anyway? Some folks would say that He wants them all to decide to believe on Jesus so they can turn into sheep, but the Bible does not indicate that ever happens. When Jesus talked to the goats He never offered anything to them but judgment and the wrath of God, certainly not eternal life. Check out Matthew 23 and Acts 17. He simply confronted them as they were. What a wasted opportunity to evangelize, some would think.

The popular radio preacher, John McArthur, has written a book that takes a radical step away from traditional Christianity. He tries to show that God does not expect or require morality from human beings. All He requires is spirituality, and that the goal of the church is to make people spiritual, not moral. Well, this throws out the Ten Commandments. And it promotes the idea that there are no such things as goats at all, only sheep and potential sheep. Actually, this is what most Christians have come to believe in our modern, humanistic times - that God wants every human being to become a sheep and go to heaven. But goats are still goats, and Jesus gave them no quarter when he confronted them time and again.

When we take the Bible as a whole, the picture becomes clearer than when we just use the New Testament alone. The fact is that God expects to be recognized and honored by all people all over the whole world, whether they be sheep or goats. In fact, the prophets declare there would be times when all people would honor the God of heaven. Can goats do that? Surely they can. They know who God is (Romans 1:20) whether they admit it or not, and they owe Him proper recognition just as they would any king or president.

And God has methods for making that happen. When Jesus and the Father come back to this earth, the Bible indicates that every knee shall bow to them. Does this include the knees of goats? Certainly it does. God can be honored by more than just those people who are related to Him by new birth. Yes, his honor is upheld even by sending some people to hell. A good study on this subject starts in Romans 9 where it says that God is willing that some should perish.

- Loren Wilson (This article may be copied freely.)