

The Sheep and the Goats

Read Matthew 25:31-46 aloud, then reread this passage:

- 35 for I did hunger, and ye gave me to eat; I did thirst, and ye gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and ye received me;
36 naked, and ye put around me; I was infirm, and ye looked after me; in prison I was, and ye came unto me.
37 ‘Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see thee hungering, and we nourished? or thirsting, and we gave to drink?
38 and when did we see thee a stranger, and we received? or naked, and we put around?
39 and when did we see thee infirm, or in prison, and we came unto thee?
40 ‘And the king answering, shall say to them, Verily I say to you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* to one of these my brethren—the least—to me ye did *it*.

I have read this passage so many times, believing that there was a separation of the sheep and the goats based on their actions or behavior. It could sound like the Lord is saying, if you fed me and clothed me and gave me a drink by doing these things for others, then you are a sheep and you get to be blessed in my Father’s kingdom. But when I read this passage this week, I saw for the first time that God’s division of sheep and goats is not based on what each one DID, but based on WHO they are/ what NATURE they have.

There is a division between natures- sheep or goat. Sheep do sheep-like things, not to try to be sheep, but BECAUSE they are sheep. Goats do goat-like things BECAUSE that is their nature. These people described in Matthew did what they did BECAUSE of who they were, NOT in order to try to BE something. So when we read this, we should not be thinking to ourselves, ‘Oh, if I want to be called a sheep, I better feed and clothe and care for others.’ Rather, as we know and understand the new nature we have been given, the nature of Christ, we will find that we will behave according to that new nature.

Who are these sheep? Those of us belonging to Christ are His, and it is “Not I, but Christ who lives.” BECAUSE His Life is in us, we come to desire to show love for those who are His. And other believers are not just His, but they are HIM- part of who Jesus is, His Body. That’s why Jesus said, “When you did it to these, you did it to Me.” We, as Christians, are “of His flesh and of His bone.”

Do you remember the story of Saul, on the road to Damascus (Acts 9)? He is traveling when suddenly he sees a bright light and hears a voice, “Why are you persecuting Me?” Saul says, “Who are you?” and the voice says, “I am Jesus, who you are persecuting.” Saul had been persecuting Christians, but Jesus calls out to him and says that Saul is persecuting Him. “Inasmuch as ye did *it* to one of these my brethren—the least—to me ye did *it*.”

I don’t have to threaten you, or even teach you to take care of your body- to keep it warm, fed, safe. Your body WANTS to eat, get warm, avoid fire or other injury. Because you and your body are one, you can’t help but care for it. Because we have been

made one in Christ- one head, one body, many members- His desire is to care for His Body and He does that using His members. Your hands put socks on your feet to keep them warm without complaining, “Why do *I* have to put the socks on the feet?” One hand doesn’t fight the other because one hand gets to do more than the other. It is silly to think of our body fighting itself.

Our body doesn’t even notice when it is taking care of itself. Imagine your hand saying, “Did you notice what a good job I’ve been doing of feeding the mouth? I always get the food in, and hardly ever drop it. Aren’t I doing such a good job?” What did we read in Matthew? “Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, **when** did we see thee hungering, and we nourished? or thirsting, and we gave to drink?...” They did not do these things to be noticed or to feel good about themselves. They didn’t even realize what they were doing, because it was done by the nature of Him living in them.

This is the way Christ’s Body works. Sheep acting like sheep BECAUSE they are sheep. We do not need to try to do things to be sheep- “to be like Christ.” We are His and He lives in us. We need only to know the One who lives, to submit to Christ our head.

Follow-up Activity

Idea 1: Have children draw a picture to illustrate the parable of sheep and goats.

Idea 2: Play charades, where the activities being acted out belong to a particular “nature”, i.e. flapping wings to show a bird. We can guess the charade because we understand that certain animals behave in certain ways.

Extension

Can we behave in ways that contradict the nature of Christ within us? Yes, it’s like a person with cerebral palsy, where the members do not follow the desires of the head. What is the problem? It is a malfunction. It is not as it should be. The body is not “holding the head,” but acting independently of the head. It needs to abide in the light, submit to the head.

Can you tell by looking (at actions, etc) whether a person is motivated by Christ’s life? No. We can do good things with wrong motivations. The Bible tells us that we can’t even know our own hearts. We are **not** told to look for Jesus in others. We cannot know what is in people’s hearts. Their actions may be a “malfunction”- acting separately from Christ the Head, or they may be Christ. It is not for us to judge. Actions are not the PROOF.