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Another sharp division took place among the Jewish authorities because of these words. Many of them were saying, "He is possessed by a demon and has lost his mind. Why do you listen to him?" Others said, "These are not the words of someone possessed by a demon. A demon cannot cause the blind to see, can it?"

Then came the feast of the Dedication in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple area in Solomon's Portico. The Jewish religious leaders surrounded him and said, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus replied, "I told you and you do not believe. The deeds I do in my Father's name testify about me. But you refuse to believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; no one will snatch them from my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one can snatch them from my Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

We should notice, first, in this passage, what strifes and controversies our Lord occasioned when He was on earth. We read that "there was a division among the Jews for His sayings"--and that "many of them said He has a devil, and is mad," while others took an opposite view. It may seem strange, at first sight, that He who came to preach peace between God and man should be the cause of contention. But herein were His own words literally fulfilled--"I came not to send peace, but a sword." (Matt. 10:34.) The fault was not in Christ or His doctrine, but in the carnal mind of His Jewish hearers.

Let us never be surprised if we see the same thing in our own day. Human nature never changes. So long as the heart of man is without grace, so long we must expect to see it dislike the Gospel of Christ. Just as oil and water, acids and alkalies, cannot combine, so in the same way unconverted people cannot really like the people of God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God." (Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14 )

The servant of Christ must think it no strange thing if he goes through the same experience as his Master. He will often find his ways and opinions in religion the cause of strife in his own family. He will have to endure ridicule, harsh words, and petty persecution, from the children of this world. He may even discover that he is thought a fool or a madman on account of his Christianity. Let none of these things move him. The thought that he is a partaker of the afflictions of Christ ought to steel him against every trial. "If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household." (Matt. 10:25 )

One thing, at any rate, should never be forgotten. We must not allow ourselves to think the worse of religion because of the strifes and dissensions to which it gives rise. Whatever men may please to say, it is human nature, and not religion, which is to blame. We do not blame the glorious sun because its rays draw forth noxious vapors from the marsh. We must not find fault with the glorious Gospel, if it stirs up men's corruptions, and causes the "thoughts of many hearts to be revealed." (Luke 2:35.)

We should notice, secondly, the name which Christ gives to true Christians. He uses a figurative expression which, like all His language, is full of deep meaning. He calls them, "My sheep."

The word "sheep," no doubt, points to something in the character and ways of true Christians. It would be easy to show that weakness, helplessness, harmlessness, usefulness, are all points of resemblance between the sheep and the believer. But the leading idea in our Lord's mind was the entire dependence of the sheep upon its Shepherd. Just as sheep hear the voice of their own shepherd, and follow him, so do believers follow Christ. By faith they listen to His call. By faith they submit themselves to His guidance. By faith they lean on Him, and commit their souls implicitly to His direction. The ways of a shepherd and his sheep are a most useful illustration of the relation between Christ and the true Christian.

The expression, "My sheep," points to the close connection that exists between Christ and believers. They are His by gift from the Father, His by purchase, His by calling and choice, and His by their own consent and heart-submission. In the highest sense they are Christ's property; and just as a man feels a special interest in that which he has bought at a great price and made his own, so does the Lord Jesus feel a peculiar interest in His people.

Expressions like these should be carefully treasured up in the memories of true Christians. They will be found cheering and heart-strengthening in days of trial. The world may see no beauty in the ways of a godly man, and may often pour contempt on him. But he who knows that he is one of Christ's sheep has no cause to be

ashamed. He has within him a "well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14.)

We should notice, lastly, in this passage, the vast privileges which the Lord Jesus Christ bestows on true Christians. He uses words about them of singular richness and strength. "I know them. I give unto them eternal life. They shall never perish--neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." This sentence is like the cluster of grapes which came from Eshcol. A stronger form of speech perhaps can hardly be found in the whole range of the Bible.

Christ "knows" his people with a special knowledge of approbation, interest, and affection. By the world around them they are comparatively unknown, uncared for, or despised. But they are never forgotten or overlooked by Christ.

Christ "gives" his people "eternal life." He bestows on them freely a right and title to heaven, pardoning their many sins, and clothing them with a perfect righteousness. Money, and health, and worldly prosperity He often wisely withholds from them. But He never fails to give them grace, peace, and glory.

Christ declares that His people "shall never perish." Weak as they are they shall all be saved. Not one of them shall be lost and cast away--not one of them shall miss heaven. If they err, they shall be brought back; if they fall, they shall be raised. The enemies of their souls may be strong and mighty, but their Savior is mightier; and none shall pluck them out of their Savior's hands.

A promise like this deserves the closest attention. If words mean anything, it contains that great doctrine, the perseverance, or continuance in grace, of true believers. That doctrine is literally hated by worldly people. No doubt, like every other truth of Scripture, it is liable to be abused. But the words of Christ are too plain to be evaded. He has said it, and He will make it good--"My sheep shall never perish."

Whatever men may please to say against this doctrine, it is one which God's children ought to hold fast, and defend with all their might. To all who feel within them the workings of the Holy Spirit, it is a doctrine full of encouragement and consolation. Once inside the ark, they shall never be cast out. Once converted and joined to Christ, they shall never be cut off from His mystical body. Hypocrites and false professors shall doubtless make shipwreck forever, unless they repent. But true "sheep" shall never be confounded. Christ has said it, and Christ cannot lie--"they shall never perish."

Would we get the benefit of this glorious promise? Let us take care that we belong to Christ's flock. Let us hear His voice and follow Him. The man who, under a real sense of sin, flees to Christ and trusts in Him, is one of those who shall never be plucked out of Christ's hand.