

At first, the Jewish community welcomed Paul & Barnabas & invited them to address their congregation. However, when Paul & Barnabas started talking about salvation including the Gentiles, they felt that their unique relationship with God was threatened. They thought that **God & Salvation** belonged **solely** to them. If **Gentiles** were saved, then what would happen to their own privileged position as **God's Chosen People**? To stop this radical idea, they plotted violence against those who preached about Jesus. Actually, they were jealous, which is a form of **anger**, anger at a **real** or **perceived** threat to something one considers their own.

In his Gospel, St. John says that everyone is responsible to listen to Jesus, enter into an intimate relationship with him, and follow him. As a people of faith, we have a responsibility to make sure that our lives are faithful to the teaching of Jesus. There's no room for self-interest or jealousy, because the **voice of Jesus** invites everyone without exception. Jesus defines "his sheep" as anyone who hears his voice, anyone known by him—a way of say they're in an intimate relationship with Jesus.

Three things are necessary for one to belong to the flock of Jesus. First, we must **hear his voice**, which implies an openness to hear something **different** from the usual voices of the world. Second, Jesus must **know the sheep**, which is **to know them** from the heart. This indicates **intimacy & relationship**. Third, the sheep must **follow Jesus**, as a result of listening & being in a relationship with him. How do we know if we're hearing God's voice or our own? If what we hear divides & separates, it's from the dark side or evil spirit. If what we hear **unites & brings together**, it's from God. God is love. The essence of love is unity. Love unites.

We have to make a choice to follow Jesus. A relationship cannot be forced. It is a **gift** from God that requires an open heart. We are free to respond Yes or No. How? It takes effort. It's just like developing a friendship. We spend time together, we talk, get to know that person. God loves each of us in a different way. There's a particular relationship for our different personalities. When I go into His presence, God says, "Oh, here's Chuck....He'll take a while **talking** before he sits still & **listens**." Yes, it's true. I find it difficult to schedule time to pray & difficult to block out everything & concentrate.

Remember, God does not go where He is **not** invited. Our response to God is the measure of our willingness to belong to God beyond any personal desires of our own, beyond political power, material gain, control of others, and beyond recognition & prestige. These are the things that will **prevent us** from being able to **receive** the gift of faith which God offers to each of us. Do we open our hearts to be committed to God, or do we close our hearts because we are focused on our own agenda, our own power & control?

My brothers & sisters, the result of believing in Jesus & following him is the ultimate gift of **joy & eternal life**. Christ, the Son of God is our Shepherd. He has laid down his life for **us**, his sheep. He says the sheep know his voice & that they follow him. We have a simple way to determine the **truth & sincerity** of our faith. Do we know His voice, does He know us, & do we follow Him?