

"I Am The Good Shepherd"

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."
John 10:11

God, in His infinite wisdom, provided the scriptures for mankind written in a language perfectly suited for the message of redemption. The Koine Greek, which fell out of use in the centuries after the New Testament era, was a wonderfully precise and vivid language. It is certainly worth the Bible student's time to carefully investigate key Greek phrases in the scriptures. For this reason, this article will examine the words used in John 10:11. As you will see, the words used in the original language denotes its vividness and depth.

The Greek Interlinear indicates a somewhat unusual construction with the adjective "good" following after the noun "shepherd." Dana and Mantey state that "when the article is repeated with an adjective which follows the noun, it distributes the emphasis equally between the adjective and noun, and causes the adjective to function as an appositive" (p. 152). An appositive functions as a term which renames the noun. Therefore, Dana and Mantey correctly say "the real idiomatic force of this construction is, 'I am the shepherd -- or, more particularly defined -- the good one'" (p. 152).

A similar construction is used in Matthew 17:5 where God declares, "*This is my beloved son ...*" and in Hebrews 13:20 where the writer states that Jesus is the "*great shepherd of the sheep ...*" In John 10:11, Matthew 17:5 and Hebrews 13:20, the word "good" or "great" describes the character of Jesus in relation to a shepherd and the Son. He is not simply the shepherd, but He is the good shepherd. He is not simply God's Son, but He is God's beloved Son.

Rienecker gives the definition of *kalos* or "good" as "good, beautiful, in the sense of an ideal or model of perfection" (p. 242). A. T. Robertson says that "kalos calls attention to the beauty in character and service" (p. 178). Thayer states that "kalos is joined to the names of men designed by their office, competent, able, such as one ought to be" (p. 322).

In 1 Timothy 4:6, Paul uses *kalos* to describe a minister of the Lord Jesus and in 1 Peter 4:10, Peter uses *kalos* to describe a steward who "faithfully administers God's grace in its various forms." The International Critical Commentary adds that the phrase means "simply the good shepherd, one who tends His flock perfectly, without any failure of foresight or tenderness, of courage or unselfishness" (p. 357).

Young's Concordance indicates that *kalos* occurs 74 times in the New Testament and is used in a variety of ways. In Luke 21:5, the word is used in the sense of "beautiful" or "handsome." Paul uses this word in Romans 7:16 to describe the law as ready to produce good. He uses the word in the letter to Timothy to show that elders desire a noble work and that we are to fight the noble fight of faith. In John 2:10, *kalos* is used to mean superior wine which had been let until the end of the wedding feast. Finally, in Hebrews 6:5, the word is used to mean the comforting word of God.

According to Vine and Thayer, a synonym for *kalos* is *agathos*. *Agathos* means that which is "good in its character or constitution, is beneficial in its effect" while *kalos* denotes that which is "intrinsically good." These two words appear in close proximity to one another three times in the New Testament and demonstrate their subtle differences. In Luke 8:15, an "honest" or *kalos* heart will have an attitude which is right towards God; while the "good" or *agathos* heart will act beneficially towards his neighbor. In Romans 7:18, Paul says that in him nothing is capable of doing "good" or *agathos*; therefore, he lacks the ability to do "good" or *kalos*. Finally, in 1 Thessalonians 5:15, Paul instructs Christians to follow after what is "beneficial" or *agathos*, while in vs. 21, he tells the saints to hold fast to that which is "good" or *kalos*.

This verse serves as a wonderful reminder of the dedication of Christ. He was not only the one who shepherds over us, but He was one who was willing to lay down His life for us. The concept of a divine shepherd goes back to the Old Testament (e.g., Psalm 23:1-6; Jeremiah 23:1-3; Ezekiel 34:12, 15). To the disciples the figure would have been specially apt since shepherding was one of the major occupations in Palestine. It involved both a protective concern and a sacrificial attitude. This latter is expressed in the words "*the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*" This phrase, unique to the writings of John, means a voluntary sacrificial death (10:11, 17, 18; 13:37-38; 15:13; 1 John 3:16). The good shepherd stands ready to sacrifice His total self for the sake of the sheep.

Society has a tendency to proclaim and revere many heroes. These may include athletic stars or famous actors, but the real heroes are those who are willing to risk their lives in order to save someone else. This was the resolve of Jesus. He tells His disciples that He is the good shepherd because He is will to do anything to save them. He proved His point when He died on the cross.

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