

Misapplied Scripture: John 10:27

By Andrew Olson

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me - John 10:27 NASB

Today's Christians tend to be very familiar with many verses in the Bible, including this verse, but do they understand it correctly? In this article, we will show how many Christians fail to understand John 10:27 and get led astray by making a very simple mistake - failing to consider the verse's context.

A popular teaching today, especially among the Charismatic movement, is the idea that we must learn as Christians to hear the voice of God so that we can follow as He leads us in our Christian lives. Those who teach this doctrine are of the belief that God speaks to us all personally in order to direct us and to carry out His plan for our lives. John 10:27 is often cited as the proof text to show that not only does the Lord speak to us; but also, as His followers, we can hear and will listen.

The question is, is that what John 10:27 teaches? If it is, we should find further support of this doctrine within the context of John chapter 10. However, it is our contention that John chapter 10 tells a much different story.

Conservative Christians will agree that unless the context demands otherwise, a given passage of scripture should be taken literally. A good place to start in understanding this passage would be to investigate whether it should be read literally or if it would be better understood figuratively. It is our contention that the latter would be the proper understanding, as we will show.

First, let's look at the verse itself. Here Jesus says, "*My **sheep** hear My **voice***" (emphasis ours.) Does anyone understand the word 'sheep' to be literal? Probably not. So if 'sheep' is figurative language, why would 'voice' be literal?

Furthermore, John 10:27 is a continuation of the ideas of verse 3 which says, "*To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*" In past discussions with followers of the "follow God's voice" teaching, we have been criticized for taking this passage figuratively. However, John goes on in verse 6 to say "*This **figure of speech** Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them!*" (emphasis ours) which proves beyond a reasonable doubt that the author (John) not only intended the passage to be read figuratively, but he also understood that some would not understand what was being said.

Additional problems arise from the text if it is used to support the teaching that we must learn to discern God's voice in order to receive guidance for our lives. Part of the teaching is the concept that God's voice must be learned. If a Christian believes that he has heard from God regarding a decision that he needs to make and things don't work out, then the person did not actually hear from God. It is chalked up as part of the learning process. However, John 10:5 presents a scriptural problem for that teaching. It says: "*They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.*" Notice that it doesn't say "*They will learn not to follow a stranger...*" but rather "*They will **never** follow a stranger...*"

So we have shown that this passage does not teach that God speak to us to direct us in our lives, but just what does John chapter 10 teach? We hold that John 10 is an explanation by our Lord of the call of the Gospel. The sheepfold was a common pen for the sheep of any flock. All a shepherd need do to draw out his flock was to stand at the door and call for them. They would recognize his voice and come to him.

In the previous chapter, John explained that despite performing the miracle of bringing sight to a blind man, the Pharisaical leadership rejected the claims of Jesus, namely that He is the Son of God. In chapter 10, John goes on to explain that to those who are His will follow Him, implying that those who are not His will not follow Him.

In the 17th chapter of Acts, verse 11, Luke explained that the Bereans were diligent, and searched the scriptures themselves to see if the things that the Apostle Paul taught were true. It should be common practice among Christians to examine the scriptures themselves to see if the things they are being taught are Truth. It is our admonition that the reader not take our word for it, but read John chapter 10 and see if what we say is true.