

John 10:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.

Analysis

But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you— Jesus gives the ultimate explanation for their unbelief: they are not His sheep. The causal "because" (ὅτι/hoti) indicates the root problem isn't insufficient evidence but spiritual identity. The phrase "ye are not of my sheep" (οὐκ ἐστὲ ἐκ τῶν προβάτων τῶν ἐμῶν/ouk este ek tōn probatōn tōn emōn) uses ἐκ (ek, "out of" or "from"), suggesting source or origin. They don't belong to Christ's flock; therefore they cannot recognize His voice.

This statement is profoundly theological, touching on election and divine sovereignty in salvation. Jesus doesn't say "You're not my sheep because you don't believe," but rather "You don't believe because you're not my sheep." The identity precedes the response. Christ's sheep hear His voice (verse 27) and believe; those who are not His sheep cannot believe, no matter the evidence.

The phrase "as I said unto you" references the earlier discourse (especially verses 3-5, 14-16) where Jesus explained that His sheep hear and recognize His voice while strangers flee from voices they don't recognize. The current unbelief of the Jewish leaders fulfills Jesus's earlier teaching—they prove themselves not to be among His sheep by their refusal to hear.

This verse confronts all human-centered soteriology. Belief isn't ultimately a product of human will, wisdom, or effort, but of divine election and regeneration. The sheep don't choose the shepherd; the shepherd chooses the sheep (John

15:16). This doesn't eliminate human responsibility—they are culpable for unbelief—but it locates the ultimate cause of salvation in God's sovereign grace, not human decision.

Historical Context

Jesus's statement would have scandalized His Jewish audience. They presumed covenant membership through Abrahamic descent, Torah observance, and temple participation. Jesus declares that true covenant membership—being His sheep—is determined not by ethnicity or religious performance but by divine election and spiritual regeneration (John 1:12-13, 3:3-8).

This teaching anticipates Paul's argument in Romans 9-11 that "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Romans 9:6). Physical descent from Abraham doesn't guarantee salvation. God's sovereign choice determines who belongs to the flock. This was offensive to Jewish pride but foundational to understanding salvation as grace, not merit.

The early church wrestled with this mystery: why do some believe the gospel while others reject it? Augustine's debates with Pelagius centered on this question. Reformed theology emphasizes that salvation is entirely of grace—God chooses, calls, regenerates, and preserves His elect. Arminian theology seeks to preserve human free will while acknowledging God's initiative. Both traditions grapple with the tension Jesus presents here: His sheep believe because they are His sheep.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus's statement that 'you don't believe because you're not my sheep' challenge the notion that salvation is ultimately up to human decision?

2. What is the relationship between divine sovereignty in election and human responsibility in unbelief?
3. How can we hold together the truth that God chooses His sheep and the truth that humans are accountable for rejecting Christ?

Interlinear Text

ἀλλ'	ὁμεῖς	οὐ	πιστεύετε	οὐ	γὰρ	ἐστὲ	ἐκ	τῶν
But	ye	not	believe	not	because	ye are	of	G3588
G235	G5210	G3756	G4100	G3756	G1063	G2075	G1537	

προβάτων	τῶν	ἐμῶν	καθὼς	εἶπον	ὕμῃν
sheep	G3588	my	as	I said	unto you
G4263		G1699	G2531	G2036	G5213

Additional Cross-References

John 8:47 (Parallel theme): He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.

John 10:27 (Parallel theme): My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

1 John 4:6 (Parallel theme): We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

John 6:37 (Parallel theme): All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

John 6:65 (Parallel theme): And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

John 10:4 (Parallel theme): And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.