

Abstract

Matthew 10.16, which uses metaphorical statements known from Greek and Jewish literature, stands at the center of the second great discourse of the Gospel of Matthew (missionary speech) as a bridge between the first and second parts, which briefly summarizes its basic themes – Jesus' sending the disciples, their situation in a hostile world and features needed to fulfill this task in these conditions.

In my own translation, I decided to keep the words (omitted in some translations) that have an important function in the text – "behold" (as macrosyntactical signal, which focuses attention on new important theme), "I" (as emphasis on the person of a speaker who is at once a Shepherd, Sheep and Lamb) and "therefore" (as emphasis on necessity of these properties which follows from the facts mentioned in the previous sentence – both from their task and their position as disciples in a hostile world). I prefer the word "pure" for the translation of properties of doves, which (in my opinion) aptly expresses the importance of both textual variants without the negative connotations of the word "simple" (as naive or stupid).

Prudence is not only a way to avoid danger, but rather finding ways to fulfill the task. Purity means that the disciple is not adapt to this world (to be a wolf among wolves), but follow suit of his Shepherd, Sheep and Lamb.

In the history of interpretation, the first part of this verse was sometimes seen as a description of the situation in which the disciples will be found (danger and persecution), commentators have sometimes tried to interpret the sheep and wolves as certain groups of people, sometimes narrowed "wolves" to the Jewish nation, or rather the Jewish leaders, although a meaning of this picture is much broader according to the context.

The Church Fathers and medieval interpreters sometimes interpreted the characteristics of snakes and doves according to their ideas about these animals (allegorical and moral interpretation). Their properties were often seen as contradictory (the serpent was sometimes interpreted rather as subtle according to Genesis 3.1, the simplicity of the dove was sometimes interpreted as naivety or stupidity), so that interpreters saw their union as the balancing of opposites.

Their testimony about the paradoxical result of obedience of the disciples is a great encouragement for us – defenseless sheep are not eradicated by wolves, but rather wolves are transformed into sheep, the disciples wins by arms of love.