

**GOD'S
POWERFUL VOICE**

Hearing & Responding
to Him

Robert A. Tucker

“God’s Powerful Voice: Hearing & Responding to Him”

© 2003 by Robert A. Tucker

Front Cover Design:

Front cover image by Wesley Dotzert

© 2014 by Zion Fellowship, Inc.

All Rights Reserved

All Scripture quotations in this book are taken from the

King James Version Bible unless otherwise stated.

Reprinted in the United States of America

ISBN 1-890381-65-9

For more information, please contact:

Zion Christian Publishers

A *Zion Fellowship*® Ministry

P.O. Box 70

Waverly, New York 14892

Phone: 607-565-2801

Toll free: 1-877-768-7466

Fax: 607-565-3329

www.zcpublishers.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Editorial team: Anne McDougall, and Leslie Sigsby.

We wish to extend our thanks to these dear ones for without their many hours of invaluable assistance, this book would not have been possible. We are truly grateful for their diligence, creativity, and excellence in the compilation of this book for the glory of God.

PREFACE

“The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty” Psalms 29:3-4.

God understands the frailty of mankind and his inability to keep the commandments of God in his own strength. Throughout scripture, He speaks of the importance that man hears the voice of God. His voice empowers those that hear what He is saying, enabling them to fulfill what He has spoken. Many, as Israel of old, prefer to live only by law handed down to them by one who hears God’s voice. However, the power to do what He is asking comes in personally hearing His voice.

“And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers” John 10:4-5.

Many are following the voice of strangers in these days. May we have our hearts attuned to His voice and respond fully to Him.

“Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it” Song of Solomon 8:13.

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Let Me Hear Your Voice.....	11
Introduction.....	11
God's Desire For Fellowship	12

CHAPTER 2

A Central Issue	15
Israel's Example	15
The High Calling Of God	16
When God Speaks, Man Lives.....	18
Why Should We Die?	20
Let Not God Speak To Us.....	21
A Law That Is Suited To Everyone?.....	23
An Ongoing Issue.....	23

CHAPTER 3

A Preliminary Test.....	29
The Importance Of Obedience In Little Things.....	29
God Requires Obedience In Little Things	31
Doers Of The Word	33

CHAPTER 4

Notable Examples	35
Adam And Eve.....	35
Abraham.....	36
Moses.....	40
The Bride Of Christ.....	41
The Priests	43
The New Testament Church.....	46
Present Day Christians.....	48

CHAPTER 5

Getting To Know God's Voice	51
A Learning Process	51
That Still, Small Voice.....	54
God's Means Of Speaking	56

CHAPTER 6

Checks And Balances.....	63
Which Is God's Voice?	63
Check It Out	66
A Humble, Patient Heart.....	81
Accepting God's Message /Vessel	85

CHAPTER 7

The Foundation For Faith.....	87
The Necessity Of Faith.....	87
Misconceptions About Faith	90
Habakkuk Lays The Foundation.....	91
Receive The Rhema.....	92
Obedience To The Logos	96
Believe The Rhema	98
Why People Do Not Believe	100
Confessing What God Declares	107
The Obedience Of Faith.....	112
Patient Waiting With Prayer.....	114
The Complete Process Of Faith	121

CHAPTER 8

Growing Faith	123
God Intends Faith To Grow In Us	123
How Does It Grow?	124
What Kind Of Heart Response?	126
Rebekah And The Thirsty Camels.....	128
The Pharisee And The Sinner Woman	129
Adding To Our Faith	130

CHAPTER 9

Faith In Balance.....	133
Faith, Hope, And Love.....	133
Hope Contrasted With Faith.....	134
The Process Of Building Hope.....	136
Hope Through Experience With God.....	137
Holding To Hope So That Hope Can Hold Us.....	140
Jeremiah.....	141
Being Made Hope For Others.....	143
Faith Governed By Love.....	145
Faith, Hope, And Love.....	148

CHAPTER 10

Hearing God's Voice -

The Foundation For True Righteousness.....	151
God's Righteousness And Self-righteousness.....	152
Imputed Righteousness.....	153
Imparted Righteousness.....	155
Righteousness By Faith.....	155
Faith And The Law.....	158

CHAPTER 11

The Foundation Of Wisdom.....	163
The Importance Of Wisdom.....	163
Defining Wisdom.....	165
Receiving Wisdom.....	167
Solomon And Wisdom.....	169
Joseph.....	170
Life Governed By Wisdom.....	171
Two Sources Of Wisdom.....	174
Nehemiah And The Restorers.....	177
The Character of Godly Wisdom.....	180
The House That Stands.....	188
Moses' Request.....	190

CHAPTER 12

Cause Me To Hear It.....	193
A Scriptural Theme.....	193
Open The Door.....	196

CHAPTER 1

Let Me Hear Your Voice Is It Important?

Introduction

In 1980 I made my first overseas trip to the Philippine Islands. Because I was an inexperienced traveler, I made reservations for departure but not for the return flight. Upon arrival in Manila, I tried to secure a return reservation for two weeks later. The airline informed me that they had a seat available in several months. They added my name to a standby list, leaving me unsure of my return date. Feeling a bit depressed about the situation, I phoned my wife, Angeline, to explain to her the situation. I asked her to pray that I would be able to obtain a flight as a stand-by passenger.

Two weeks later when I was waiting standby, Angeline was concerned about my return home and experienced a restless night. Before 6 a.m. she was praying, asking the Lord for comfort, and whether or not I was to be on my way home that day. The Holy Spirit prompted her to read her Bible. At that point she did not feel like doing so, but she understood that God knows best. Her devotional study that day began in Isaiah 6. As she read along, these words stood out in the text: *“with two he flew”*(verse 2). She then felt the peace of God and a confidence that I was on the way home.

In Manila before 6 p.m. (which was 6 a.m. at home in the USA) I boarded the airplane, but my traveling companions

were not yet on board. They had taken a side trip to Hong Kong. They arrived immediately prior to departure and *"with two he flew"* just as God had spoken to my wife. What a specific word God gave to my wife to comfort her! He delights to communicate with His people.

God's Desire for Fellowship

God created us for His pleasure, for fellowship and communion with Him. What an awesome thought that God wants to speak directly to us and cause us to know His voice! Scripture begins with God meeting daily in the garden with Adam and Eve. *"And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day"* (Genesis 3:8). It seems that God came on a regular basis to spend time with them in fellowship.

The last book of the Bible displays the heart and desire of God to communicate with man and cause us to hear His voice. *"Behold I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me"* (Revelation 3:20). What an invitation when one considers that God created and reigns over the universe! When considering this, King David declared, *"What is man, that thou art mindful of him?"* (Psalms 8:4). God is searching throughout the earth for those who will respond to His voice and desire fellowship with Him. As we shall see in this study, the scriptures contain numerous invitations to hear God's voice.

Why is it so important to hear God's voice? Does it really matter that we have direct communication with Him? How can one know God's voice distinctly from all the other voices in the world? How can one be certain that it is really

God speaking? How are such subjects as faith, hope, good works, righteousness, and wisdom related to hearing God's voice? This is an exciting study that will provide answers to these and other questions you may have concerning this subject. Open your heart to the Lord as we journey through this book and see if you hear His voice calling to you. May you declare with the writer of The Song of Solomon, "*the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it*" (8:13).

CHAPTER 2

A Central Issue

Israel's Example

When writing to the Corinthian church, Paul admonishes them to consider Israel's example in the wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan. He points out their failures and warns the church not to make the same mistakes, as did Israel.

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are

come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall (1 Corinthians 10: 1-12).

Israel's journey through the wilderness was wrought with many failures. Certain failures are more significant than others. Sometimes one can discern key reasons for escalating problems that follow. This was certainly true for Israel at this time. Let's look at one of the key reasons that the first generation was not able to enter into the promise but rather died in the wilderness.

The High Calling of God

Israel made their journey out of Egypt beginning on the night of Passover. They passed through the Red Sea and came to Mt. Sinai fifty days later. God had brought them there and prepared them so He could speak to them. This is what He spoke to them initially.

And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel (Exodus 19:3-6).

God declared to them that He would make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation if they would respond in two ways—obey His voice and keep His covenant. What a

promise! In Exodus 20 God gave them that covenant—the Ten Commandments. God spoke to them from Mt. Sinai amid tremendous manifestations of power.

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was (Exodus 20:18-21).

The people were extremely frightened at all that was happening. Moses tried to still the people and explain to them what was taking place. God was not seeking to scare them. He wanted to give them the fear of the Lord that would help preserve and keep them from sinning. *“By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil”* (Proverbs 16:6). God was encouraging Israel not to fear the natural phenomena or His consuming fire that burned in their spirits. He wanted them to fear the Lord and have respect for Him more than anything else. Jesus spoke similarly to His disciples. *“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Matthew 10:28).

A recounting of this incident in the book of Deuteronomy gives us a fuller, more complete picture of this incident. We see that Israel rejected hearing from God.

The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire, I stood between the LORD and

you at that time, to show you the word of the LORD: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount...These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me. And it came to pass, when ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire,) that ye came near unto me, even all the heads of your tribes, and your elders; And ye said, Behold, the LORD our God hath showed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth. Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? Go thou near, and hear all that the LORD our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it (Deuteronomy 5:4-5; 22-27).

When God Speaks, Man Lives

Israel's first response to Moses was that when God speaks, life springs forth in man. This truth is confirmed by a number of scriptures which demonstrate the power of God which is released when He speaks. Life gushes forth as the words of His mouth flow.

The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars; yea, the LORD breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn. The voice of the LORD divideth the flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shaketh the wilderness; the LORD shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. “The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory (Psalms 29:3-9).

When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens; and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth: he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures (Jeremiah 51:16).

The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live (John 5:25).

When God speaks, power exudes from His voice and things begin to happen! Even the dead are moved at His speaking! Jesus also declared, “*the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life*” (John 6:63). When the officers came with Judas to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked whom they were seeking. They replied that they had come for Jesus of Nazareth. When He declared, “*I AM,*” so much power came with His voice that they fell backward to the ground (John 18:3-6).

Israel declared that day at Mt. Sinai that they saw and understood the power resident in the voice of God and the life flowing to man when He spoke. Oh, that they had remained faithful to that understanding! All the power they needed to keep the covenant was available to them if they would have obeyed His voice.

Why Should We Die?

Israel's response did not end there, however. They realized another truth also. *"Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any more, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?"* (Deuteronomy 5:25-26). This statement compared to the previous seems contradictory. However, they understood exactly what they were saying. Yes, the life of God was quickening their spirits, but the fire in the voice of God was bringing death to the carnal man, the flesh. They recognized the life that came when God spoke, but they were more concerned about the fire of God that brought death to the works of the flesh. An incident in my earlier years may serve to illustrate this and further our understanding.

When I entered high school, I had the opportunity to play football. Even after my playing days were over, I enjoyed watching a football game, so much so that I would breathe hard with excitement as I tried to help my favorite team while sitting in my armchair. One day I was watching a football game on television. Suddenly and softly, the Lord spoke to me to turn the television off and not watch the game any more.

I was completely stunned and thought that God might be joking with me. God does not joke about such things! He reassured me that He was speaking to me and that I was to obey Him. I chafed under God's directive, feeling that there was nothing sinful about football and that I had a right to enjoy myself once in a while. God persisted and I surrendered to the will of God.

Several weeks later when another football game was taking place, I thought to myself that the Lord probably would not mind if I turned on the television just long enough to see what the score was. The Lord spoke in no uncertain terms that He did indeed mind if I turned it on. I further submitted to His will. The fire in the voice of God was bringing death to my flesh. How painful it was as the power of the voice of God did its work in me!

I had been seeking the Lord about some other problems in my life at that time. This situation of being cut off from football seemed to be a separate issue, but as the fire from God's voice burned in me, I began to see that there was a direct correlation between the two. As time passed, God was able to show me that the situation with football was only the tip of the iceberg and that He was answering my prayer concerning what I thought were other issues. He used the cut-off from football to begin a new work in my heart and to bring about changes in my life. His voice brought death to carnal areas of my life, but His voice also brought new life in my spirit. The Holy Spirit was able to do a work that brought freedom in other areas of my life as I responded to God's voice.

Let Not God Speak to Us

Israel's perceptions of their situation at Mt. Sinai were correct. The two apparently opposing statements are both true—God speaks with man and he lives, and God speaks with man and he dies. Now we will examine Israel's response in the matter. *"And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die"* (Exodus 20:19). Israel requested that Moses find out what God was saying and then come to tell them and they would do it. Unfortunately, Israel

chose to reject hearing God's voice, so that they might avoid the death that accompanies it.

Perhaps without realizing it they were also rejecting the life that is resident in God's voice, which would have given them the power to overcome and be victorious in the tests that lay ahead. The ability to perform what God speaks to us must come from Him. God was grieved when they responded this way because He knew that they did not have the power within themselves to keep His commandments. *"O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!"* (Deuteronomy 5:29). God wants us to keep His commandments because they are good and right, and produce that which is best for us.

*God intended
man to receive
the power
to keep His
commandments
when they
heard His
voice.*

Israel rejected hearing God's voice and chose to live by law and not relationship. This necessitated God giving them numerous laws and spelling things out in detail. This was not His original intent. After the Ten Commandments were given, God said this: *"These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more"* (Deuteronomy 5:22). Israel made the decision that forced God to give them numerous laws, which they did not have the power to keep. There is no fault with the law. *"Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good"* (Romans 7:12). The problem is not with the law but rather with man's powerlessness to keep it. God intended man to receive the power to keep His commandments when they heard His voice!

A Law That Is Suited to Everyone?

In our local church we have no laws, or I should say we once had no laws. Our thought was that if everyone would hear God's voice and obey Him, laws would not be necessary, which is true. However, every leader faces the same problem – people do not always respond the way they should. So, we make laws when necessary, trying to do what is best for everyone.

No law can be tailor-made to perfectly fit everyone. It seems to me that this is why God wanted Israel (and, by the way, us also) to obey His voice. He established a foundation of the Ten Commandments and intended each man to hear His voice speaking a customized message that was suited to them as an individual. We each have many variables in our mindset, motives, and personality. That which is a problem for me may not be a problem for another. God's voice, speaking specifically and individually, pinpoints our exact need and sets us free from those things that hold us back from God's best.

An Ongoing Issue

The heart of man has not changed much since the days when Israel was roaming the wilderness. God has not changed at all – He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Neither has the basic issue between God and man been altered. God still desires to prepare kings and priests unto God, who will keep His covenant and hear His voice. Throughout the Bible one can hear the heart cry of God, longing for those who will respond to His voice when He speaks.

The book of Hebrews portrays a theme showing Jesus as the better way and the prize to be obtained. One of the primary

messages along the way to obtaining God's highest is this subject of hearing His voice. *"To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts"* (Hebrews 3:7-8,15; 4:7). This quote from Psalms 95:7 is repeated here in Hebrews three times, as the heart of God is crying out for those that are willing to hear His voice no matter what the consequences to the flesh. Those who seek after the high calling of God in Christ Jesus will respond to that powerful voice which gives man the ability to fulfill the will of God.

As the writer of Hebrews declares, Israel could not obtain the promises and enter into rest because they were unwilling to hear the voice of God. His point is that we will not enter into that holy rest unless we respond to God's voice. This matter of refusing to hear God speaking to us from heaven remains a critical, central issue today. Our refusal will preempt our entry into God's highest and divert us to some dwelling place short of the intended goal.

One can sense how important a matter this is to God as He repeats this message through many scriptural passages. As you read these verses, notice that God often makes the distinction between obeying the law and obeying His voice.

I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 8:19-20).

And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of

the LORD thy God. Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee (Deuteronomy 28:2, 45).

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward (Jeremiah 7:23-24).

They have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein (Jeremiah 9:13).

And say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, Which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey my

voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and I will be your God (Jeremiah 11:3-4).

I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice (Jeremiah 22:21).

God had spoken in Deuteronomy 28 and 29 of a number of curses that would come upon them if they did not obey the voice of the Lord when they went in to possess the land. However, He also promised them that if they would return to the Lord and obey His voice once again, He would begin to restore His blessings upon them.

And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul...And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day. And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers: (Deuteronomy 30:2, 8-9).

The prophet Daniel believed this promise. Israel had experienced the curses God said would come if they turned away from Him. The Assyrians and Babylonians had taken Israel captive. Now Daniel began to understand that it was time for the Jews to be restored back to Judah. As he was praying and repenting in behalf of the nation, he states one of the reasons they were taken captive:

Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him (Daniel 9:10-11).

Daniel recognized this as one of the primary reasons that Israel did not fulfill the purpose of God and remain faithful to Him. They did not have the power that comes with God's voice to carry them through to obedience. Without His grace and power, they were doomed to failure. That choice was decided at Mount Sinai when they rejected hearing His voice.

These are only a few of the numerous examples God provides identifying Israel's problem. I am making such a point of this because it becomes obvious that this is the primary reason that Israel failed. We will also fail if we do not take heed and learn from their example.

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:25-29).

We can easily rationalize that matters are different for us than they were for Israel. Most of us will never see Mt. Sinai. The manifestations that they witnessed and experienced are not common today. Yet God leads His people in similar ways. Our responses can be similar also. The language used in the previous verses describes a scene like that Israel faced. We must recognize the fact that we will be tested as they were.

If we are to realize all that God desires for us, we must develop an intimate relationship with Him and hear His voice. We must not fear the fact that our God is a consuming fire, as did Israel. Only then will we obtain the power that flows through His voice as He speaks to us. Only then will we experience the power to fulfill His covenant with us. Only then will we know the fulfillment that He desires with us and for us.

CHAPTER 3

A Preliminary Test

The Importance of Obedience in Little Things

As we noted earlier in I Corinthians 10:1-11, Paul admonishes us to consider Israel's example as God brought them out of Egypt through the wilderness. Prior to the incident at Mt. Sinai when they rejected hearing God's voice, God gave them a very important, simple test. They failed to discern the significance of the test, but we must understand its importance if we are to press on for God's best in our lives.

*And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, **that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.** And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily (Exodus 16:3-5).*

And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD

hath given you to eat. This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents. And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating. And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning. Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was wroth with them. And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating: and when the sun waxed hot, it melted (Exodus 16:15-21).

Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none. And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the LORD said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the LORD hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day (Exodus 16:26-30).

God raised up Moses to deliver Israel, a disjointed nation of slaves, out of Egypt. He was to prepare them as a mighty army of God that would drive out the wicked inhabitants from Canaan and receive it for an inheritance. First, God had to test them to see if they would obey what He said to them. Every army must learn to obey orders without question. God stated at the beginning that this was a test, *“that I may prove them,*

whether they will walk in my law, or no.” The instructions were simple enough that anyone could follow them. See if you can easily understand what God had instructed.

An omer of manna was to be gathered for each person each day for the first five days of the week. On the sixth day two omers were to be gathered for each person. The seventh day was a day (or Sabbath) of rest when no manna was available. These instructions were very clear and quite simple to understand and follow.

However, Israel was not obedient to these simple instructions from God. Some of the people gathered more than God had spoken and others gathered less. Yet, when they arrived home, it had all equaled out and they each had the same. The difference was that some were obedient and others were not. Some apparently were afraid there would not be any manna available the next day and tried to save some over until morning. In the morning it was full of worms and had to be thrown out. Again one can see the issue of disobedience. Others tried to gather on the Sabbath. They were concerned only with the supply and forgot the test. The test was the real issue. Had they been faithful in simple steps of obedience they would have qualified for much more. *“Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities” (Luke 19:17).* More was at stake than they perceived. Their disobedience in little things became a pattern so that when the day came to enter the land of Canaan at Kadesh-barnea, they were disobedient and failed when the big opportunity came.

God Requires Obedience in Little Things

Notice that God began with a small test in something so simple that anyone could have obeyed Him. I have noticed that, at

times, Christians avoid a total commitment to the Lord fearing that He may require something that they are unable to do. God is not like that. He wisely puts before us tests that are simple. As we pass that test, He graduates us to more difficult ones. Each new level of gained response strengthens our obedience and qualifies us for the next level of test. He does not require anything of us that He will not provide the grace, or power, to perform.

However, if we do not respect God and instead take lightly what He speaks to us, we will disobey Him in the small matters and not be prepared when the big opportunities present themselves. God describes the time when our big opportunity comes as *the day of visitation*. As we allow God to prepare us for it, He intends it to be a great blessing to us. Notice how Job describes it, “*Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit*” (Job 10:12). We will anticipate our time of visitation with joy if we have allowed the Holy Spirit to prepare us with obedience in little things.

Because Israel failed to respond to God in gathering manna, they were not prepared on the day of their visitation at Kadesh-barnea and could not enter into their inheritance (Numbers 13—14). They died in the wilderness instead. Jesus spoke to a later generation these words:

Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon

another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation (Luke 19:42-44).

A time that God had intended to be a blessing became a curse. How the heart of God must sorrow when we refuse what He speaks to us and we disobey! He sees what lies ahead for us. The small, seemingly insignificant disobediences become paramount. May we learn from the mistakes of others and respond in the day of small things before the big day of our visitation arrives. *“For who hath despised the day of small things?” (Zechariah 4:10).*

Doers of the Word

Some Christians hear what God is saying but fail to follow through. They act as though what God said was unimportant. Perhaps they do not want to do what God said. When God speaks about hearing His voice, He expects us to respond in obedience.

“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (James 1:22-25).

When I was a child, my father would speak to me as I was leaving the room. At times I did not want to do as he said, so I walked on out of the room as though I did not hear what he had spoken to me. He saw through my actions and never allowed me to get away with it. Many Christians respond in the same way to our heavenly Father. They walk away

as though He had not spoken. *“And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not” (Ezekiel 33:32).*

How important it is that we learn to hear Him and follow through with obedience! *“The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back” (Isaiah 50:5).*

CHAPTER 4

Notable Examples

Adam and Eve

God was accustomed to meeting daily in the garden to fellowship with Adam and Eve. He set a boundary for them. They could eat of all the trees of the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When Satan, through the serpent, approached Eve seeking to deceive her, he immediately began to challenge what God had spoken to her (Genesis 3:1). Then he sought to reason away and, through logic, destroy what God had commanded. Eve was deceived and submitted to Satan's lie.

So that he would not be separated from her, Adam knowingly disobeyed what God had commanded him. God, being Omniscient, certainly knew what they had done; yet He showed up for their daily visit, as was His custom.

And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself (Genesis 3:8-10).

Nothing had changed in God's response to them, but their response to God had changed dramatically. Because of their disobedience, they were now afraid of God's voice and hid

themselves. That Voice, which had ministered such strength, comfort, and satisfaction to them, now became strange and frightening to them. How must the heart of God have grieved over them! He had created them so that He could have fellowship with them.

“And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake” (Genesis 3:17). Adam chose to respond to his wife’s voice rather than the voice of God. What sorrow and death resulted from this decision! More than 2500 years later, King Saul would disqualify himself by responding to the voice of the people rather than the voice of the Lord (1 Samuel 15:24). What a mistake to reject the voice of the Lord in favor of another voice.

Thank God He did not give up on man! He continues to this day to pursue a relationship with those who love Him and desire Him.

Abraham

Abraham was called the Friend of God (James 2:23). Part of the reason that he was God’s friend was because he heard and responded to God’s voice. Because of this, God was able to fulfill the promises that He gave to Abraham. *“And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:18).* Years later when speaking to Isaac, God made reference to Abraham’s obedience to the voice of the Lord.

Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these

countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws (Genesis 26:3-5).

God reconfirmed to Isaac the fact that it was Abraham's obedience to God's voice that allowed Him to fulfill the promises, which He had spoken to Abraham. God often gives promises to people that are never realized because they do not act upon what He has spoken.

Abraham's actions were not something born out of his own ideas. He had heard what God had spoken to him and was doing as God had said. Sometimes Christians get an idea and then say that God spoke to them. I have seen so many create such terrible situations for themselves and others by doing so. A man named Jephthah illustrates this concept.

He was born in Israel during the time of the judges when Israel was backsliding and facing ongoing oppression from her enemies round about. During one of these attacks by the Ammonites, Jephthah was asked to be the captain of the army to go against them. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him to fulfill the purpose of God and bring deliverance to Israel. He had been provided everything that he needed to do the job and win the victory. Then he did a most unusual thing. He made a foolish vow to the Lord. God had not spoken anything to him about making a vow, but nevertheless he did so.

And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,

Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering. So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands...And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back (Judges 11:30-32, 34-35).

Apparently, in the emotion of the moment and excitement of having the Spirit of the Lord upon him, Jephthah made a very foolish move. He had not been provoked by God to do so, but he made this unnecessary vow. Why should he do this when God had not spoken it? What was he seeking to gain? He sacrificed his daughter without any provocation from God.

We observe a similar situation in the life of Abraham. The difference here, however, is that Abraham was acting in response to the voice of the Lord.

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of (Genesis 22:1-2).

This time it is God who initiates the idea, not Abraham. It would seem that the outcome will be the same, but the outcome is in

God's hands because He spoke to Abraham. Abraham had not concocted the idea out of his own thinking or emotions, as did Jephthah. We must note here the difference in the outcome.

And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen (Genesis 22:7-14).

God spoke to Abraham because He had a purpose and a plan. Abraham was not trying to make something happen like Jephthah did. God intervened for Abraham in a way He did not for Jephthah. May we learn not to initiate in the way Jephthah did. It is not wrong to make a vow, but it should be provoked by God and not something birthed from our human spirit. A great difference existed between the actions of Jephthah and Abraham. The outcome in each situation

had dramatically different results in the lives of their children. He never intended human sacrifice as the heathen practice it. How important it is to hear from God!

Moses

Moses was born during a time when deliverance was needed for God's people. Israeli babies were being killed because of a perceived threat to the stability of Egypt. A commandment was given by Pharaoh to cast all the baby boys into the river. Moses' life was spared through the courageous faith of his parents. They obeyed the king's word after hiding Moses for three months (Hebrews 11:23). They built a small boat in which he was placed before putting him in the river. What wonderful alternatives God provides to men and women of faith!

Moses was found by Pharaoh's daughter, taken into Pharaoh's house, and raised in the ways of Egypt. However, because his parents trained him until he was weaned, this was time enough for them to impart a vision and an understanding of God's ways. How important it is for parents to make investment in their children from the beginning of their lives.

When he became of age to choose for himself, he chose *"rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward"* (Hebrews 11:25-26). Moses understood, probably through the teaching of his parents, that he was to be a deliverer. Of course, he initially tried to fulfill God's call in his own strength and his own way. He fled to the wilderness where he lived as somewhat of a recluse for the next forty years. He must have lived with the memory of the call of God from his earlier years. What

had gone wrong? Had he completely failed and ruined his opportunity? Had God rejected and forgotten him? Perhaps he would spend the rest of his life with these broken dreams and a vision that had died. Life had settled into a boring, unfulfilling routine. Could anything change it now?

One day as he was shepherding his father-in-law's sheep near Horeb, Moses experienced a life-changing event.

*And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, **the voice of the Lord came unto him** (Acts 7:30-31).*

Yes, life could change in a way greater than probably he had ever imagined. The voice of the Lord came to him—that powerful, life-giving, life-changing voice of the Lord! Dynamic faith was birthed in his heart, which led Israel out of Egypt, unified them as a nation, and established them under a theocratic government. The voice of the Lord set Moses' life into action like nothing else could!

The Bride of Christ

The Song of Solomon is an allegorical portrayal of a developing relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and His bride. There can be no ongoing relationship unless she develops an ear to hear His voice and responds to Him. *"The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills"* (Song of Solomon 2:8). In this first stage of development she has come to identify His voice. As we shall see later, it often takes time to mature so that we can always recognize His voice and are able to distinguish it

from other voices. Her heart seems to be moved in response to him, just as a wife is moved toward or away from her husband by the things he speaks to her.

In the next incident of His speaking, her response is quite different. She has become accustomed to hearing from Him. His speaking has become somewhat commonplace to her and she has become complacent.

I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer (Song of Solomon 5:2-6).

At this point, she finds it inconvenient to respond to Him. She is ready for bed for the night. She has perhaps become a bit familiar and lost some respect for their relationship. How often is this scene repeated in the lives of Christians? The Lord comes speaking and seeking to draw us into intimate fellowship with Him, but we find it to come at an inconvenient time. We reason that He could return at a more appropriate hour.

Finally, her heart is moved for Him. She is influenced by His lovely meekness of spirit and decides eventually to take

action. However, as she did, she found that He had withdrawn His precious presence. His withdrawal caused her to begin to understand what a precious opportunity she had let slip away. If she could find Him, she would never again lightly esteem the opportunity afforded her in hearing His voice and fellowshiping with Him.

“Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it” (Song of Solomon 8:13). The word *dwellest* contains the thought of permanently settling down, to remain and to marry. This verse conveys the idea that those who want to be close to the Lord and become His bride are those who *hearken* or hear when He speaks and respond to Him. May we each love His speaking to us and delight to fellowship with Him. We should never lose our respect for the opportunity we have been given when He speaks to us. Our response to Him is essential if we are to maintain a developing relationship with Him.

The Priests

God had originally desired that the whole nation of Israel would be priests unto God (Exodus 19:6). For various reasons, all the people did not qualify to become priests and, eventually, God chose one tribe from the nation to be so. The deciding incident took place at Mt. Sinai. While Moses had gone up the mountain to meet with God, the rest of the nation had become involved in folly.

And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies:) Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD'S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together

unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves to day to the LORD, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day (Exodus 32:25-29).

Because the tribe of Levi responded to the word of the Lord through Moses, God chose them to be His priests. They took action because they feared God and regarded what God thought of them more than anyone else. They were willing to execute the judgment of God without regard to their close family members or other friendships.

Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar. Bless, LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again (Deuteronomy 33:9-11).

The Levites respected God above everyone else. They were willing to obey Him no matter what! This was the reason that the Lord respected them and made them His priests. The prophet Malachi again confirms God's purpose in this regard.

*My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should **seek the law at his mouth**: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts (Malachi 2:5-7).*

The priests were not called by God to teach and govern God's people by only the laws that had been given to Moses, but they were *to seek the law at His mouth*. What does this mean in a practical sense? Men commonly consider God's laws and logically try to apply them. We can see that in so doing, misjudgment often takes place. The Lord had never intended it to be so.

The scribes and Pharisees who brought the woman taken in adultery to Jesus are a perfect example of this thought (John 8:1-11). They gave a perfect legal sentence but missed justice and equity. Jesus always sought *the law at his mouth*. This does not mean that Jesus forsook the law. He never misapplied the law or misjudged anyone because He always heard from the Father. "*I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me*" (John 5:30). The Lord's purpose was that the priests would come to God, hear His voice, and apply the law as intended from the heart of the Father.

God intended that His people would not rely solely on His written laws, but seek Him to know how to apply specific laws in every situation. A case in point is in the application of the laws of restitution (cf. Exodus 22:1-17; Leviticus 6:1-5;

Proverbs 6:30-31; Luke 19:1-9). One law of restitution did not fit every matter of injustice.

Later we will investigate the concept of how receiving wisdom from God is related to hearing God's voice. We will see how essential it is that we do not rely upon our own understanding in matters that require judgment. We must learn to seek the law at His mouth as He spoke to the priests.

The New Testament Church

The Feast of Pentecost mentioned in Acts 2 had its beginning with Israel at Mt. Sinai. Remember that one of the central issues of that first Pentecost was that God wanted them to begin to hear His voice and respond to Him (Exodus 19:5). Some of the manifestations were the same in the early church as with Israel at that first Pentecost. The fire of God was certainly present on both occasions.

When Saul of Tarsus met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was blinded and told to go to the house of Ananias. Three things were spoken to Saul by God through Ananias: *"The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest **hear the voice of his mouth**"* (Acts 22:14). It is interesting to note that God is always concerned that we hear His voice. In order that Paul could fulfill all that God had appointed for him, it was necessary for him to know God's voice and hear Him on an ongoing basis.

The book of Hebrews centers on the thought of moving on to obtain God's best. This message of hearing God's voice permeates the book. The writer begins with the thought of

hearing from the Lord Jesus, “*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*” (Hebrews 1:1-2). With the beginning of the early church, the Lord is making a new attempt to draw a people that would hear His voice directly, and not through an intermediary such as the prophets. God spoke through the prophets because Israel asked for it to be done that way. His purpose is that we hear from the Son for ourselves.

The message in Hebrews 3-4 is again concerned with the matter of hearing God’s voice. The ongoing thought of hearing God’s voice today and not failing to respond permeates both chapters of the text. The book further addresses the subject with a strong admonition and warning.

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:25-29).

His message is consistent throughout the Bible. God wants a people who will hear His voice and respond to Him. Again, He makes comparison with the incident of Israel’s initial rejection at Sinai. The issue is still the same today. The Lord wants us to know the power of His voice that enables

us to fulfill His will. His holy fire will burn in us as it did in Israel at Sinai and in the early church at Pentecost. His voice will bring forth life in us and death to self as it did in Israel long ago!

Jesus, the Head of the church, when facing temptation in the wilderness by Satan, quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3, "*It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*" (Matthew 4:4). It is significant that Jesus speaks about the word that is proceeding out of God's mouth and not just something said or written long ago. The word that gives us life is one that He is speaking to us through His voice.

Jesus further declared, "*The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live*" (John 5:25). The scriptural evidence is clear – God's voice gives life.

Present Day Christians

What is the situation with the church today? Are God's people any different from past generations? Could we be in a time similar to that which was prophesied by the prophet Amos? "*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it*" (Amos 8:11-12). The famine described here is not for natural food or for having God speak, but rather a famine for **hearing** the words of the Lord. Is this the situation with many of God's people today? How many Christians have developed an ear to hear the voice of the Lord? How many

really care? As we have begun to see from our study of the scripture, this is a very critical issue, a matter of life and death.

Those who do not know God's voice are vulnerable to the deception of the last days. They also will not obtain the grace they need to run their spiritual race. Grace is often given to us as God speaks. Job presents an interesting appraisal: *"Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessities"* (Job 23:12). Job realized that hearing from God could be more important than what we may often consider to be essential to life. Job held fast to what God was saying to him because it was life to him.

Joshua led Israel over Jordan into Canaan after they had wandered in the wilderness for forty years, while the generation that refused to hear and obey God's voice died off. God never desired it to be so. He wants His people to have more abundant life. Jesus made this declaration before Pilate: *"Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice"* (John 18:37). May we have a heart of truth and desire to develop an ear to hear His voice and respond to Him.

CHAPTER 5

Getting to Know God's Voice

A Learning Process

Even though we hear the Lord speaking to us to bring us to salvation, we must usually get to know His voice through a learning process. Many of us are like Samuel who had to learn to recognize God's voice. Samuel was brought as a weaned child to the house of the Lord. He ministered to the Lord under the care of Eli, the priest. Because of the backsliding in the priesthood, as well as in the general populace, the spiritual atmosphere was dark, the word of the Lord was scarce, and spiritual revelation was nearly nonexistent. Before the word of the Lord was completely snuffed out, God began to speak to Samuel. The first three times God spoke to Samuel, he thought that it was Eli calling him. After the third time, Eli, who was spiritually dull, began to realize what was happening and gave Samuel instruction.

Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth (1 Samuel 3:7-10).

We see here the patience of the Lord. He wants us to hear His voice and begin to recognize it. God was persistent with Samuel. He continued to speak until Samuel caught on to what was happening. Sometimes it takes more time and different circumstances for us than it did for Samuel. We often need the guidance of more mature saints, as did Samuel. Jesus gives some valuable instruction in this matter.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers (John 10:1-5).

Notice that it is the full-grown sheep that know the voice of the shepherd, not the little lambs. Little lambs know the voice of the mother sheep, just like Samuel knew the voice of Eli. He did not yet know the voice of the Lord. As the little lambs are with their mother they will come to know the voice of the shepherd.

It is not enough for the sheep to know and respond to the shepherd's voice. They must also be sensitive so that they will not respond to the voice of strangers. Some Christians respond to any voice they hear, assuming that it is the voice of the Lord.

In my early years as a pastor, I had an experience that demonstrates this. As I was driving, I was nearing an

intersection that gave a choice of two different ways to go to my house. Suddenly, the Lord spoke to me to take a specific road. As I drove along I came near the house of a family from our church. Again God spoke telling me to stop at their house. They were having a problem at that moment and I was there, sent by God, to help them. They rejoiced, as did I, at the goodness of God to arrange everything the way He did.

About two weeks later the scene nearly repeated itself. I was traveling the same road, nearing the same intersection, when a voice spoke to me and said, “Which road will you take at the intersection? You know what happened the last time and you don’t want to miss God in this situation.” I was immediately filled with a certain measure of panic. I began to pray and ask God which way He wanted me to go. There was no answer from the Lord. Yet the voice continued to taunt me: “Which way will you go? You don’t want to miss God.”

I realized after a time that God was not answering me when I asked which way to go, and I began to question the source of the voice. With an awareness that I needed to be careful and be certain I was not resisting God, I reminded the Lord that He knew my heart. I did not want to disobey if it was He who was speaking to me. I also did not want to respond if it was another voice. Asking Him to intervene if I was making a mistake, I made a decision to take the other road home and deny the voice that was speaking to me. After a time, the Lord made it clear that the kingdom of darkness was seeking to provoke me to listen to its voice, bring confusion to hearing God’s voice, and perhaps ultimately bring me into deception.

Jesus said that His sheep know His voice and resist the voice of strangers. Each of us must develop both abilities as we mature in our relationship with Him. There are many voices

in the world that fall into three basic categories—God's voice, human voices and Satan's voice. We must be able, by the grace of God, to distinguish His voice from all others.

That Still, Small Voice

There is something in man that craves the spectacular. We often enjoy the bizarre. Sometimes this nature of man carries over into our relationship with God. We want God to speak to us in pomp and grandeur. The Syrian army captain, Naaman, came to Elisha seeking healing from leprosy. He was annoyed by Elisha's seeming lack of understanding that he had been accustomed to recognition and ceremony. *"But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper"* (2 Kings 5:11). Naaman desired a big show, but it is evident that God does not always comply.

The prophet Elijah experienced quite a lesson in this regard. After challenging and slaying the prophets of Baal, Elijah fled because of threats from Jezebel. He was exhausted spiritually, emotionally, and physically. God brought tremendous manifestations of wind, earthquake, and fire, but God was not in any of these. Then came the still, small voice of the Lord. It was not spectacular like the other manifestations, but so powerful that Elijah wrapped his face with his mantle or coat. God certainly can do the spectacular but normally does not. Most often His communication to us is conducted in a quiet manner.

Isaiah received a wonderful revelation of the Lord enthroned, with seraphim declaring the holiness of God. As he received the revelation of the Lord, Isaiah also received a revelation

of his own unclean lips. His lips were cleansed with a coal from the altar. Then he heard the voice of the Lord, *“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me”* (Isaiah 6:8). The voice of the Lord was very distinct in the midst of all else that transpired. No matter what else is happening, it is always very special when He speaks.

Later, Isaiah speaks prophetically of the Lord Jesus Christ: *“He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street”* (Isaiah 42:2). His nature is not to be loud or boisterous. When God speaks, it is usually in that still, small voice. May we develop an ear to hear it and not miss Him by seeking something more appealing to the flesh but not giving life to the spirit.

We must often quiet ourselves so that we are able to hear that precious voice that produces life within us. If we become so busy and our life is cluttered with needless activity, we can easily miss hearing what He is seeking to share with us. *“Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still”* (Psalms 4:4). Remember that it was at night when Samuel laid down to sleep that the Lord began to speak to him. When he ceased from other activities and quieted himself, God was able to begin speaking to him. *“But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him”* (Habakkuk 2:20). We must learn to still the rumblings of our minds and become quiet before Him. Only then can we begin to develop an ear to hear that precious voice.

Scripture provides a number of admonitions to harness our activities and thoughts so that we can hear from God. *“Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child”* (Psalms 131:2).

Our soul, including our mind, will, and emotions, must be conquered. If we allow our soul to rule, we will always find it difficult to distinguish the voice of the Lord. We are like children who must receive training and discipline to learn to hold steady and be quiet when we may not feel like it. Until we discipline the soul, we may find ourselves remembering things to do that we never think of any other time.

God's Means of Speaking

God uses various means of speaking to His people. All of these are powerful and can be life-changing. We should not fall into the trap of thinking that God is limited to any certain way of speaking to us. God chooses the means by which He desires to speak to us.

Scripture

Perhaps the most common way that God speaks is through scripture. As we read the Word of God, we often experience a quickening of a certain phrase or verse. It can be as though the words jump off the page at us. They become something personal that speaks to a specific situation in our lives at that moment. *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"* (Psalms 119:105). We can be amazed at the matters that God can address in our lives through the scriptures.

A board of elders at a Bible school was seeking the Lord for direction concerning building. The discussion had gone around without a solution being provided. They decided to pray and ask the Lord what to do. As the president of the school brought his head up from prayer, his eyes fell upon a phrase in his randomly opened Bible from Nehemiah 2:18: *"Arise and build."* Those words were a quickened word from

the Lord that helped guide them through a needed building program.

Audible Voice

Apparently God spoke in an audible voice to Samuel. We are certain that Saul of Tarsus experienced this way that God sometimes uses to speak to man.

And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me (Acts 22:6-9).

Saul heard the audible voice of God, yet the others traveling with him did not. His life was transformed with that encounter and hearing God's voice. God is able to speak so selectively to his people.

Prophecy

God also uses prophecy to speak to us. The prophets spoke the word of the Lord to the kings and people of nations. These were men anointed of God to speak His word in His behalf. Paul received a word of the Lord through the mouth of the prophet.

And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he

was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles (Acts 21:10-11).

Paul reminded Timothy to stir up gifts of the Spirit he had received through prophecy and the laying on of hands (1 Timothy 4:14). Prophecy must be judged for authenticity, but it is an effective means of God communicating to man (1 Corinthians 14:29).

Dreams and Visions

Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them (Acts 16:6-10).

God also uses visions and dreams to speak to us. The disciples received perfect direction through this vision given to Paul during the night. God spoke to Jacob through dreams (Genesis 46:2-4). Joseph's brothers called him a dreamer. He not only received dreams for himself (Genesis 37), but also interpreted the dreams of the butler and baker as well as the dreams of Pharaoh (Genesis 40-41). God used Joseph

to spare his family during a time of prolonged famine in Canaan through these dreams.

God spoke to Balaam through visions. *“He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open”* (Numbers 24:4).

Daniel was another who had dreams and visions from the Lord. These not only spoke of events in the kingdoms of the world in his day, but also spoke of events that will be fulfilled at the end of this age. God continues to speak to His people through dreams to this day.

Through Our Thoughts

The Early Church faced the problem of those who sought to force Jewish laws and customs upon the Gentile believers. This conflict increased until it became necessary for the leaders at Jerusalem to make a decision. They arrived at the decision as the Holy Spirit put the word of the Lord in their minds: *“For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things”* (Acts 15:28). God often uses our thoughts as a means to speak to us.

About twenty years ago, I was driving along in the car when this phrase came into my thoughts: “Pillars and narrow windows for lights.” Although this would not be obvious to others, I knew that God was speaking that we were to build a new church building. God also spoke to others by other means to confirm this to us as a congregation. We continue to use the facility that resulted from that word spoken by God into my thoughts at that time.

The Quickened Word

God may quicken a word to our hearts that may come from several different sources. As we are reading or listening to someone speak in a conversation, preaching, or prophesying, God may use something spoken to quicken a word to our heart.

When I was studying at Bible school, I worked a part-time job. One day my foreman informed me that the company would no longer allow part-time workers. Although I knew it would be difficult, I thought I had no options and decided to work full-time.

A few days after the company's announcement, I came upon one of my teachers who introduced me to a new student. In the course of the conversation, my teacher, who knew nothing of my situation, made this statement: "It would be spiritual suicide to try to work full-time and go to Bible school full-time." His statement may not be true for others

*God may
quicken a word
to our hearts
that may come
from several
different
sources.*

in similar situations, but it was the word of the Lord for me. This sentence stood out of the conversation as the voice of God speaking to me. I discussed the matter with my wife and we decided that if it meant changing jobs, I would do so.

As I made an appeal to my foreman, the former decision was rescinded, and all of us from the school were allowed to work part-time as before. This word from the Lord spoken through my teacher changed our course and saved us from

possible spiritual destruction. The Lord uses all these means to speak to us His quickened word, which gives us life.

Angels

Concerning angels, the Scripture says, “*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*” (Hebrews 1:14). Numerous accounts are provided of saints of old whom God spoke to through angels. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, Manoah, Balaam, Elijah, Zechariah, Joseph, Mary, Zacharias, Peter, Philip, and Paul are a few. God still speaks through angels to His people today. However, we must be cautious to determine whether the angel is from the Lord or from Satan’s kingdom. Satan can appear as an angel of light, seeking to deceive us (2 Corinthians 11:14).

CHAPTER 6

Checks And Balances

Which Is God's Voice?

All of us, at one time or another, have heard people declare that “God” has told them to do something that we realize is contrary to His ways or His Word. Some have committed murder or other heinous crimes and have attributed the idea as coming from God. How can people say such things? God would not speak to them to do something contrary to His ways.

Obviously they have heard a voice that they assumed was God speaking to them, but the voice was from another source. Some people think that anything supernatural must be from God. This is not always true. There are many voices in the world. Paul confirms this: *“There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world” (1 Corinthians 14:10).*

There are basically three sources of voices – God, man, and Satan. One must not assume that because a voice comes in a persuasive, compelling, or supernatural way that it is of God. Remember that the true sheep hear His voice but will not respond to the voice of strangers. We have considered the voice of the Lord. Now let us consider the other sources of voices that speak to us.

Satan is the great deceiver. He and his cohorts are seeking every opportunity to turn an unsuspecting soul aside from the way of truth. We can be confused at times thinking we

are hearing from God when actually a member of Satan's kingdom, acting as an imposter, is seeking to plant in our minds ideas that are not true. Peter had the problem of hearing a voice that he thought was God when it was not.

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven (Matthew 16:15-17).

Jesus declared specifically that Peter had heard this from the Father, so we know that Peter heard from God. However, we also realize that Peter heard the voice of Satan and thought it was God speaking to him. From the narrative in Matthew, it seems that this next incident was not long after the first.

From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men (Matthew 16:21-23).

Peter surely thought that he was expressing the will of God, but Jesus again made perfectly clear to him and the other disciples the source of the voice this time as well. This came from Satan who was seeking to detour Jesus from

the victory of the cross. We also are extremely vulnerable to such a problem – we can hear the voice of God but not always distinguish it from other voices.

King David experienced trials because of things being said to him by the powers of darkness. *“Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication. Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise; Because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked” (Psalms 55:1-3)*. Some trials are greatly amplified by the taunting of the kingdom of darkness. The Lord wants us to develop an ear to know His voice so that we will discern the voice of the enemy and reject his harassment.

Human voices can be another source that must be discerned apart from God’s voice. Catchy sayings, non scriptural proverbs, reasonings, and philosophies can come to mind giving us the impression that God is speaking. Even the good teachings of our youth that have value can interfere when we need to hear from God. Paul spoke of this kind of intrusion that must be recognized: *“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8)*. The best that man can muster in words cannot compare with the powerful, life-giving voice of the Lord. *“Lo, he doth send out his voice, and that a mighty voice” (Psalms 68:33)*.

Jesus warned that we should beware of deceivers. *“Take heed that no man deceive you” (Matthew 24:4)*. We often think of deception as coming only from the kingdom of darkness, but Jesus warns of the deception coming from the words of men. We must learn to discern the voice of the Lord so that we respond when He speaks to us.

Check It Out

God has provided checks and balances to prove if something spoken to us is from God or another source. Following the right voice can save our lives at times. God wants us to prove if He is speaking to us. One of the great kings of Judah named Josiah died before his time because he failed to recognize when God was speaking to him. He should have been careful to check it out and not be presumptuous. *“Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo” (2 Chronicles 35:22).* Josiah’s premature death was totally unnecessary.

Scripture gives us several means of testing a word that we have received to help determine if it is the word of the Lord or not. These are not absolute proofs in themselves that establish that it is a word from the Lord. They are more like medical tests that are conducted by doctors that are unable to identify a problem conclusively, but which enable them to rule out certain problems. A word from the Lord can be tested by these criteria, but individually none of them are conclusive.

Scripture

God will not speak that which is contrary to the scriptures. *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).* God has given the Bible as a foundation for our lives and relationship with the Lord. *“The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isaiah 40:8).* God has established the scriptures and He will not go against them. If a voice speaks something to us that

is contrary to God's Word, we can know that the thing is not from the Lord. God does not contradict Himself. We must study so that we have adequate knowledge of the scriptures so that we may rightly understand what God is saying and what is on His heart. *"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15). Great confusion and loss can occur if one misapplies scripture.

Of course, scripture alone is not an absolute proof that something spoken is from God. Satan misused scripture to try to detour Jesus and cause Him to fail (Matthew 4:1-10). Jesus had an excellent knowledge of the Word and heard from His Father, which enabled Him to defend Himself with the sword of the Spirit against Satan (Ephesians 6:17).

Confirmation

"In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established" (2 Corinthians 13:1). When God speaks something it will be confirmed at least once if not more. God will speak something soon enough so that there is time to confirm the matter in another way.

God spoke to Pharaoh through dreams that were interpreted by Joseph. *"And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass"* (Genesis 41:32). These dreams were given and confirmed in plenty of time so that preparation could be made in the seven years of plenty before the seven years of famine came upon Egypt. Often the voice of deception is impatient and demands immediate action. When God speaks, He does so in a still, small voice that invites us to ask for confirmation.

Gideon has often been criticized for seeking so much confirmation. He placed the fleece of wool on the ground and asked God for two opposite signs of confirmation. God graciously responded to confirm that which He had spoken to him earlier (Judges 6:36-40). God did not finish with this, but initiated a further confirmation so that Gideon would be thoroughly convinced of God's purpose spoken to him. God allowed Gideon to hear a Midianite soldier speaking of a dream that confirmed that God was with Gideon to defeat the Midianites (Judges 7:9-15). This encouraged Gideon to lead Israel to victory over their oppressors. God seemed pleased to provide what was necessary in the way of confirmation to convince Gideon. He will provide ample confirmation of His speaking to us as well. This is not to say that we should tempt God by asking for an endless number of signs to confirm His word to us.

We must be careful in this matter of confirmation, however. Some people have cited confirmations of things that God was not speaking. At times they look for signs that are not true confirmations from God. Care needs to be taken not to set the conditions for confirmation unless God has provoked it. People say things as frivolous as, "If God allows the sun to shine tomorrow, then I will receive it as a confirmation of what I want." This is foolish and very dangerous. If we want something more than we want the will of God, our wrong desire could provide an opening for Satan to provide a false confirmation for us. We must also realize that God will not confirm something to us that is contrary to His Word.

Counsel

"Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established" (Proverbs 15:22). Counsel

from those in a higher spiritual position than our own can be crucial in matters pertaining to hearing God's voice. At times a novice may think he has heard something from God that an authority over him recognizes to be of another source. By submitting the message he thinks is from God to an appropriate counselor, he can be spared the major heartache that error can bring.

Another problem that a good counselor can help avoid is the problem of misapplying what is truly a message from God. We all tend to filter what we hear through our experience, which influences our perspectives and opinions. Words can conjure up images based upon past experience or knowledge that can taint or misdirect God's purpose in a life.

When I was a child, God began to speak to me about ministry to many different nations. This brought considerable question as to what God meant because I thought only missionaries went to other nations. I knew that I had been called to be a pastor and teacher. Because God spoke to me prior to the advent of the Boeing 747 aircraft that made international travel on a short-term basis feasible for pastors, I thought what God was saying was impossible. I was locked into trying to understand the word of the Lord filtered through my limited knowledge at the time. God, in His foreknowledge, was speaking of possibilities that were based upon that which was not yet developed by man.

A wise counselor can see past a person's limited view and guide them into a more balanced perspective of what God has said to them. The word *counsel* carries the thought of steerage, as a boat that is guided along by ropes through a canal. An able counselor is able to provide guidance to the word God has given so that it will not be misapplied and

take an individual in a wrong direction. *"Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14).*

Consideration must be given to who is a suitable counselor. We should not go to just anyone who will hear us. Many have been led astray through improper counsel.

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation...Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (Hebrews 13:7,17).

God has placed authorities in all our lives to help guide us and do us good. If we look to peers for guidance, we must remember that their perspective of situations is often no better than our own because we are on the same plane as one another. When seeking guidance in the crucial matters of life, we must have the input from one whose vantage point is much higher than our own. Authorities are like watchmen in a tower who can see from a perspective far greater than our peers. Those who are given the responsibility to watch for our souls view a much bigger portion of the total picture than we or our peers do.

David's son, Amnon, made a fatal error in this regard. Rather than submitting his problem to his father who could have helped turn him from his evil purpose, he turned to his cousin, Jonadab, who guided him into a pathway that ended in death.

And it came to pass after this, that Absalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. And Amnon was so vexed, that he fell sick for his sister Tamar; for she was a virgin; and Amnon thought it hard for him to do any thing to her. But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother: and Jonadab was a very subtle man. And he said unto him, Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day? wilt thou not tell me? And Amnon said unto him, I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister. And Jonadab said unto him, Lay thee down on thy bed, and make thyself sick: and when thy father cometh to see thee, say unto him, I pray thee, let my sister Tamar come, and give me meat, and dress the meat in my sight, that I may see it, and eat it at her hand (2 Samuel 13:1-5).

Amnon did not have the strength to fulfill his evil desire without being infused with Jonadab's wicked scheme. He sought the guidance of a peer who could not see the outcome of the matter any better than he could. Neither of the young men understood the truth that says, *"Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death"* (James 1:15). This was Amnon's end, aided by the counsel he sought from an inept source.

While marriage partners are equals, they each possess a very different perspective on situations. God designed the husband and wife with the ability to see from differing sides of an issue. Our mate can give balance as we submit to each other (Ephesians 5:21). We should always consider matters together when we believe that God has spoken to us. God intended for a husband and wife to complement each other in this way. When a couple have consulted with each other in the matter, then they should seek the counsel of a proper

authority who can guide them from a higher view of the situation.

Try the Spirit

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). When a person hears something that he believes could be from God, a further test of it is required. John tells us to try the spirit to see what is the source of it. We will investigate two different applications of this thought.

First, God wants us to challenge the person of the voice speaking to us to determine its source. As Israel entered the land of Canaan, Joshua encountered a spiritual being that spoke to him.

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the LORD'S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so (Joshua 5:13-15).

Jesus, who is captain of the Lord's host or army, was standing before Joshua, and yet Joshua rightly challenged the spirit to identify its source. Should he not have known that this was the Lord Jesus Himself? Would he not have been convinced by His beauty and brilliance that this was the Son of God?

Scripture makes it clear why we cannot rely upon our natural senses to discern such things.

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Satan and those in his kingdom can put on a spiritual façade of light and beauty, appearing to be something they are not and seeking to deceive anyone who does not challenge them. They are very willing to receive worship that rightfully belongs to God. If given opportunity, they will deceive and seek to divert us and, if possible, derail us from God's purpose. Joshua did not assume anything in this matter. He tried the spirit to be certain its source was from heaven. This being was not an angel of the Lord because God's angels will never receive worship that belongs only to God.

Secondly, we must try our own spirit to ascertain what is in our own heart. Previously, we discussed how our experiences in life can taint our perspective and interpretation of what God is speaking to us. Jesus gives us this admonition: "*Take heed therefore **how** ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have*" (Luke 8:18). When we believe that we have heard from God, it is essential that we try our own spirit.

The context of this verse is the parable of the sower (Luke 8:11-15). Jesus speaks of four different results of how we hear the word of God. In each case, the outcome

and fruitfulness are determined by our heart condition in hearing. Jesus identified a hard heart, a heart that has little spiritual depth, a heart cluttered with the pleasures and cares of this life, and an honest and good heart. What is your heart condition? Are heart issues hindering the word of God from bringing forth the desired fruit?

Any pollution in our spirit, wrong motives, or a will that is not fully submitted to God's will can pervert our hearing. Jesus told us to take heed **how** we hear. If we have a strong desire for something, our spiritual hearing can be fooled to think we are hearing from God to fulfill that desire.

My wife, Angeline, faced a very traumatic experience learning carefulness in **how** you hear. Her father had surgery to correct a problem. After several days as he was recovering, he had a heart attack. We were living 750 miles away and could not easily travel to see him. She was asking the Lord one day if she should hurry to go see her father when she heard God speak to her, "I AM the healer." She immediately jumped up from her place of prayer and began to rejoice. She assumed that God was saying that He would heal her father. Her desire was to see him healed and raised up from his bed of suffering. The next day she received a call from her mother that her father had just gone to be with the Lord. Confusion and hurt filled her mind and heart. She had thoughts that God had deceived her.

After the memorial service was past, she was praying and asking God why He had deceived her. God spoke so lovingly and assured her that He had not deceived her in any way. "I spoke that I AM the healer. You heard what you wanted to and jumped up, not allowing Me to finish what I was saying to you. I was saying that I AM the healer of broken

hearts. Because you were not able to be there when your father died, I have something special planned for you that will heal your broken heart.” A few nights later Angeline had a dream of her father as he was in heaven. He was so happy and contented, rejoicing in the presence of the Lord! Her heart experienced a wave of healing and restoration with this dream. She realized that her heart’s desire had created an inability to hear all that God was saying. How important it is that we try our own spirit and be careful how we hear.

Parable of the Sower—Luke 8:11-18

- Sown by the wayside - a hard heart.
- Sown on the rock - a heart with little spiritual depth.
- Sown among thorns - choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life.
- Bringing forth fruit - an honest and good heart.

The Peace of God

When God is speaking a word to us, we will have the peace of God in our heart. Paul gave us this advice: “*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts*” (Colossians 3:15). This word *rule* means ‘to arbitrate, to govern, to act as an umpire’ (Strong’s, 1986, G1018). The Holy Spirit within us gives us the peace of God in our heart when all is well and a troubling when it is not. We are admonished to let the peace of God that is given us by the Holy Spirit act as an umpire in our heart. An umpire in a game calls a decision absolutely when an

infringement of the rules has occurred. When that troubling of spirit comes in our heart and we lack the peace of God, we should always stop to consider what is happening.

If we receive a word and the peace of God does not accompany it, we should have great reason to question whether it is really from God. At this juncture we must make a distinction between the peace of God in our heart and peace of mind. These are not synonymous. Situations may arise when God speaks and we have the peace of God in our heart but do not have peace of mind in the matter. Our mind may be troubled with many unanswered questions and concerns about how the things God has spoken will work out. If we have the peace of God we can rest our mind, assured that God will work everything out for our good.

On other occasions we may have plans before us about which we have peace of mind. We think we know the circumstances before us, we have the desire to do it, and we are ready to move ahead. However, if the peace of God is not in our heart we should not move forward no matter how good the situation seems in our mind. We must allow the Holy Spirit who governs the peace of God in our heart to make the call. Leaning upon our own understanding could lead us to disaster.

Joshua and Caleb returned to the Israelite camp in the wilderness with the ten other spies who had been sent into Canaan. Every one of them saw the conditions in the land. They saw the wealth of the land, the cities that had been established, and they all saw the giants there. The ten spies did not remember what God had promised Israel and allowed their lack of peace of mind to provoke them to give what God called "an evil report" (Numbers 13:32). Joshua and

Caleb had the word of the Lord in their hearts as well as the peace of God. If they lacked peace of mind because of the conditions in the land, it could not be detected in their response,

And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not (Numbers 14:7-9).

Both Joshua and Caleb allowed the peace of God to rule in their hearts. They refused to allow the circumstances to detour them from moving ahead in the word that God had given the nation. These two were the only ones of their generation who were able to enter the land and possess the inheritance God had promised them. The Holy Spirit gives the peace of God in our hearts when God is speaking a word to us.

If the Word Is Fulfilled

I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How

shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him (Deuteronomy 18:18-22).

Those who deliver the Word of the Lord, or who are perceived to do so, wield great influence upon others. God gives a stern warning to those who refuse to hear and respond to the Word of the Lord through the mouth of His prophet. But then He speaks to the issue of a word that may be questionable. If a word is spoken presumptuously and not from the Lord, the prophet is not to be feared. But how can we be sure? God makes it clear that we should wait to see if the word that the prophet speaks comes to pass or not. An example from the life of Jeremiah the prophet should help us understand this.

And Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it. So Hanameel mine uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD (Jeremiah 32:6-8).

When Hanameel came to Jeremiah and made an offer, Jeremiah was sure that the word he heard was from God because it came to pass. If God is speaking we can expect that evidence will follow.

Some matters are time-sensitive, however. God is eternal and is not always concerned about time like we are. Some things that God speaks will not be fulfilled for many years. Take Joseph's situation for an example. At age seventeen Joseph had two dreams that his brothers would bow before him. It happened just as God had shown him it would, only 22 years later. Probably at age seventeen he would have been expecting the dreams to be fulfilled shortly after he had received them. The time factor was difficult for Joseph. Speaking of Joseph before the fulfillment of his dreams, the Psalmist writes, "*Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him*" (Psalms 105:19).

Isaiah prophesied nearly 175 years before Cyrus gave the decree to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem that Cyrus would do so. The point here is that sometimes a word from the Lord can take many years to be fulfilled. If the word given indicates a time factor that God has not spoken, and the thing spoken does not transpire in that time, the word may be discounted and that prophet who spoke presumptuously is not to be feared.

Beware of Accepting All Supernatural Signs

When God speaks a word it will be fulfilled. The disciples of Jesus preached the gospel and signs followed. "*And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following*" (Mark 16:20). Supernatural signs can be a wonderful confirmation of a word that God has spoken. However, scripture provides an extremely important warning as we near the end of the Church Age. Satan desires to try to frustrate God's purposes and derail the weak and unsuspecting from completing their divine calling. All supernatural phenomena are not from God. Discernment of the source is vitally important.

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deuteronomy 13:1-3).

The Lord makes it clear to us that we should not believe any sign, no matter how spectacular, if the purpose is to draw us away from God and His truth. God does not seek to deceive us, but if we do not love the truth and delight in believing a lie, He will allow deception to come our way. Many warnings are provided to help us understand the magnitude of the deception of the last days before Christ's return. The kingdom of darkness has the ability to produce supernatural phenomena, but only to a point.

Remember Moses in Egypt as he stood before Pharaoh and brought God's judgments upon the Egyptians and their gods? The court magicians replicated the miracles from God to a certain point, but could proceed no further (Exodus 8:16-19). Even though they are limited, the powers of darkness are allowed to provide signs for those who choose to believe a lie and reject God. Before Christ's second coming to earth, the antichrist will deceive many and separate those who love the Lord from those who do not.

*And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, **whose coming is after the working of Satan with***

all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12).

Some people, like many in Jesus' day, do not love the truth, but seek supernatural signs rather than obeying God, "*A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign*" (Matthew 16:4). We want to ask the Lord to give us an ear to hear His voice and respond only to Him so that we will not be open to deception that is taking the hearts of many in these last days before His return. Our God is all-powerful and will do great signs and wonders in the last days of the age. We want to know Him and discern the false from the genuine.

A Humble, Patient Heart

We have taken a look at these various checks and balances that help us test whether a word is from the Lord or not. These alone are not foolproof. Our attitude of heart is so very important as well. The prophet speaks a thought that we must consider: "*so the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the LORD*" (Zechariah 11:11). Arrogance and impatience creates a condition of heart that can cause a person to miss hearing God's voice or be deceived. Notice that it is *the poor of the flock* who know the word of the Lord. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught about the attitudes of those who inherit the kingdom of God. The first one He mentioned was "*the poor in spirit*" (Matthew 5:3). Those who are humble and understand how needy they are, fulfill part of the required heart attitude that is necessary to hear God's voice.

Zechariah indicates a further necessity, which is patience. It was the poor of the flock *that waited upon me* that knew God was speaking. Impatience can cause a person to miss what is upon God's heart. An unwillingness to quiet ourselves when God is not speaking can lead us to provoke something to happen in our own strength or open us to deception by the powers of darkness. Another prophet gives this counsel and warning:

Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow (Isaiah 50:10-11).

A variety of spiritual seasons and circumstances are essential in our journey of being conformed to the image of Christ. At times God will allow us to pass through a dry spell when He does not speak to us. It is as though God gives last minute instructions and then turns out the lights.

Our church basement has no windows, which makes it impossible to see without a light turned on. Being very familiar with everything in the room and afraid of nothing there, I have tried at times to walk through without turning a light on. I am always amazed how the darkness changes the familiar to the fearful at times. Have you ever walked into a microphone stand in complete darkness? Believe me, it can be scary until you realize what you have met up with. Darkness changes your perspective of everything. Those things with which we were once familiar become strange

and frightening to us in the darkness. We can panic in such times and forsake what God has said to us.

However, we must remember the last thing God spoke to us before He turned the lights out. We must not panic and seek our own way out of the situation but be obedient to the word of the Lord, trust Him, and hold steady. *“The treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places”* mentioned in Isaiah 45:3 can be gathered only in these dark times through which God causes us to pass.

If we seek to kindle our own fire when the fire of God within us seems to be extinguished, we will reap the results of seeking to comfort and enlighten ourselves. God promises that the outcome will be only sorrow. More importantly, we will have missed out on gathering those treasures of darkness that God had intended for us. We also become highly vulnerable to deception by another voice during these times. Many of God’s people are unwilling to be quiet and obedient when He is not doing something spectacular. They often go from place to place seeking for light when God has called for a time of darkness. As God has warned, the outcome of such action is never good.

The benefits are many for those who are willing to wait for the Lord to move in His way and time. *“They shall not be ashamed that wait for me” (Isaiah 49:23)*. God is not seeking to make us suffer needlessly, but some things He wants to do for us can only be developed in time and darkness. *“And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him” (Isaiah 30:18)*.

After Israel had rejected God from being their king, Saul was chosen and anointed by God to be king (1 Samuel 8:7). He was a gifted man upon whom God had bestowed much. However, God ultimately rejected Saul for his disobedience and unwillingness to wait upon Him in a time of great distress.

And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering. And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering. And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee (1 Samuel 13:8-14).

Saul's legacy as a king was darkened by his disobedience and impatience. Near the end of his life, he was so deceived that he went to a woman with a familiar spirit. Previously,

he had driven out those who practiced witchcraft. His kingly reign was not passed on in his family but was given to David who was known as “a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will” (Acts 13:22).

God wants to speak to His people, but we must be patient when He is silent and wait patiently for Him that He may be able to do the very best for us.

Accepting God’s Message Through His Chosen Vessel

At times God uses the most unlikely vessels to speak to us. We must maintain a heart attitude of humility so that we can receive from God through unusual sources. King Josiah of Judah should have learned this lesson before it was too late for him.

*After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him. But he sent ambassadors to him, saying, What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not. Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and **hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God**, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo. And the archers shot at king Josiah (2 Chronicles 35:20-23).*

Because of his insensitivity to the vessel God used in this situation, he was ignorant of the will of God and was killed

in the battle. How sad for Josiah because he had been such a righteous king that had turned Israel back into the Lord's ways. We must also be certain that we are quick to hear God speaking to us no matter who is the vessel He uses.

Paul addresses a similar issue when he wrote to the Corinthian church. *"And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you"* (1 Corinthians 12:21). Sometimes we reject certain people that God may use because they are different from us. We want to develop an ear to hear God's voice no matter what vessel He uses. May we walk in true humility and meekness so that we may receive the life that is imparted to us when we hear His voice!

CHAPTER 7

The Foundation For Faith

The Necessity of Faith

Hearing God's voice is an essential element in the development and growth of faith in the life of a Christian. Faith is necessary in the life of every believer. *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"* (Hebrews 11:6). We all are motivated by the deep desire to please the Lord. Without faith, this is impossible.

The apostle Paul states this thought in a stronger way: *"...for whatsoever is not of faith is sin"* (Romans 14:23). The Greek word *sin* used here, *hamartia*, comes from a word that means *to miss the mark so as not to share in the prize* (Strong's, 1986, G266). God intended that faith should be a governing factor in all we do in life. Those works we produce that are not born of faith are, according to God's word, sin or dead works (Hebrews 6:1). We understand that our own works cannot save us. Salvation comes by faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross for us. And yet faith is not just an ethereal force floating around. True faith, which is born out of a word that God speaks, produces good works that remain eternally. James addresses this issue demonstrating the connection between faith and works.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou

how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also (James 2:21-26).

Faith will bring forth good works, not dead works. Only works that are a result of faith will receive an eternal reward and please our heavenly Father.

In reference to Israel in the wilderness, God expressed His displeasure with them when He spoke of them as “...*children in whom is no faith*” (Deuteronomy 32:20). They did not believe the words that God spoke to them, but aborted the process of faith that is completed with the fulfillment of the promise. We must learn from Israel’s example and pursue a vibrant and growing faith that causes us to obtain a good report, as did many of the saints of old (Hebrews 11:2).

Christian growth is an ongoing process that requires faith. “*And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith*” (Acts 15:8-9). Here Peter is declaring that our hearts go through a process of purification as faith is working within us. This is not a one-time event but rather a process that works over a period of time as God speaks to us and produces faith within our hearts. We will address the subject of righteousness that is imparted to us by faith in a later chapter.

The prophet, Habakkuk, received the word of the Lord that is essential to our understanding and our experience: “...*the just shall live by his faith*” (*Habakkuk 2:4*). The apostle Paul used this verse three times in his writings. Notice the variety of thoughts that are connected with this one little sentence. Let your heart grip the sense of the ongoing process that is involved with the work of faith in our lives.

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Romans 1:17).

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith (Galatians 3:11).

Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him (Hebrews 10:38).

The law cannot make us justified before God, but true righteousness comes as God speaks a word of faith to our hearts. “*Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace*” (*Romans 4:16*). Grace is the divine ability or the power to do the will of God. This grace flows to us as we hear the voice of God. Faith, grace, and hearing God’s word to us are often connected in thought. “*And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the **word of his grace**, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified*” (*Acts 20:32*). His words are full of power that enables us to do His will. This is grace in action.

Psalms 45 speaks of the Lord Jesus and His bride. One phrase, speaking of Jesus, is of particular interest in this regard: “*grace is poured into thy lips*” (*Psalms 45:2*). This could well be translated *grace is poured forth from thy lips*, which

gives us a completely different concept. As Jesus speaks to us, grace, or the power of God to do His will, pours forth from His lips enabling us to fulfill His will.

God has purposed for us to become so full of His grace because we are hearing from Him that our words pour forth grace to others. *“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29).*

We must not draw back from God or what He speaks to us, but press on in this adventure of faith that we might be pleasing to Him. Remember that the power to become what God wants us to be is given to us as God speaks to us. The power is imparted to us through His voice. Hebrews 11 gives an account of a number of patriarchs who received a word from God that produced faith in their hearts. As they responded, amazing things took place that caused them to obtain a good report from God. The word they received and the results that were produced was not the same for any two of them. They each received their own specific word from God that led them to the fulfillment of faith. This kind of faith brings delight to God’s heart—this faith we must pursue.

Misconceptions About Faith

Many Christians have experienced frustration and disappointment as they have tried to increase their faith. Some who have embraced an intense “faith” teaching have become disillusioned, feeling that they are a failure. Others assume that God has forsaken or rejected them because they are not able to produce the results they had expected. Why does this happen? If God is so concerned that we have faith, why does there seem to be so much confusion in the matter?

Many years ago a lady in our church pursued a course of teaching she had received elsewhere to increase her faith. She encouraged others to “release” their faith to see great things happen. As I observed this scenario, I began to realize that something was missing, and there was an imbalance in her doctrine on the subject. As I sought God for answers, God began to reveal a crucial element that was lacking in her understanding. Many of God’s people have misunderstood the doctrine of faith and have experienced great distress because of their lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). Truth that has missing elements becomes error!

What is faith? How does it function in the believer? How do we receive it? What is God’s part and what is our part? How do we increase our faith? How are hearing God’s voice and faith connected? We will search for these answers in the scriptures.

Habakkuk Lays the Foundation

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith. (Habakkuk 2:1-4).

Several important elements of faith are found in this portion of scripture. We know that the passage speaks of faith. As mentioned previously, Paul used the last sentence several

times in his writings. This portion of scripture begins with the prophet waiting upon God to receive whatever He will speak. God speaks and instructs him to wait until the word is fulfilled. These are essentials in the process of faith working in us.

Looking more carefully, we find that the prophet calls it *His faith*. Also, we realize that the prophet has nothing until God speaks. Faith can only be produced in us as God speaks a word to our heart. This leads us to the understanding that God is the one who initiates faith, not us. Hebrews 11 provides a list of those who obtained a good report from God as they responded to His word to them. The writer crowns this exciting exposition with these words: *"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus is the author of faith. He initiates faith. The Bridegroom initiates and the bride responds to His words. Without this crucial, preliminary element of God speaking a word to an individual, there can be no faith.

Receive the *Rhema*

Paul gives us this first essential step for the conception of faith: *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17). He explains that faith comes when we hear the word of God. This is further confirmed in his letter to the Galatians: *"This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the **hearing of faith?** ... He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the **hearing of faith?**"* (Galatians 3:2,5). The hearing of faith is necessary for faith to be formed in us.

This Greek word that is translated *word* in English is *rhema*. This word is often compared with another Greek word *logos*. While both are translated *word* in English, they are very different in concept. When studying the subject of faith, it becomes essential to know the difference between the two. *Logos* is defined as *something said (including the thought), a topic (subject of discourse), also a reasoning* (Strongs, 1986, G3056). The teaching of Jesus is referred to as a *logos*. Jesus Himself is called the *Logos* (John 1:1).

A *logos* is a teaching or a general word spoken to all. When Jesus spoke the parable of the sower, the seed, which is the word of God, was the *logos* (Matthew 13:19-25). In many passages where *logos* is used, the word *teaching* or *discourse* fits well in the thought.

A *rhema* differs greatly in concept, being defined as *an utterance, a matter of topic, especially of narration, command, or dispute* (Strongs, 1986, G4487). The *rhema* is a word that is spoken to a specific individual for a specific situation for a specific occasion. It is not a general utterance to anyone who may be listening but a word directed to a selected individual. When the difference in these two words is recognized while studying the scriptures, new meaning and understanding emerge from the text.

A rhema is a word that is spoken to a specific individual for a specific situation and for a specific occasion.

For the purpose of our study, this example should suffice. If a sign is posted on a door saying, "This door should be kept shut at all times," this is a general word given to anyone who

may pass by at any time. However, if I say, "Thomas, will you close the door, please," this is a *rhema* to Thomas and not anyone else. These scriptures will further demonstrate this difference.

"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word (rhema) that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Not just any word that we read or hear gives us quickening life, but only that word that proceeds or is spoken forth from God's mouth to us gives us that life.

And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word (logos) of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word (rhema) I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake (Luke 5:1-6).

An excellent example of both words is provided in these verses. Jesus is teaching a general discourse to the multitudes as is indicated by the word *logos*. Then He turns to Peter and gives him a specific command as is designated by the word *rhema*: "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets." This seemed fruitless to Peter because they had tried all night to catch fish without success. However, he had received from Jesus that powerful, life-giving *rhema* that produces faith

and he quickly responded. What a catch! Perhaps they had never caught so many fish in one haul before! Peter threw himself at Jesus' feet in awe of Him and with a realization of his own need.

This was a specific word spoken to Peter. Not everyone who reads this portion of scripture can expect the same results. Nor could Peter expect such results on another occasion unless Jesus spoke such to him again. Many of God's people have tried to take a *rhema* spoken to someone else and apply it to their own situation. This will not produce the desired results, but rather frustration and often a sense that we have failed God or He has failed us.

Jesus and Peter provide us with another excellent example of the *rhema* in action in Matthew 14:22-31. The disciples were sent in a boat to the other side of the sea. The winds arose and hindered their journey. Suddenly they saw someone or something coming toward them on the sea. It was Jesus who then spoke to them a word of comfort. In response Peter said,

"Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me" (Matthew 14:28-29).

Peter came out of the boat and began to walk on the water because Jesus had spoken to him a *rhema* to do so. The *rhema* gave him the faith to step out of the boat and walk on the water. When he began to doubt, he started to sink. This incident did not suggest that Peter was able to walk on the water at will. No matter how much we may will it to be so or

believe it to be so, it is impossible without faith that the Lord has initiated by a *rhema* He has spoken to us.

Paul provides us another example in his list of spiritual armor, "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word (*rhema*) of God" (Ephesians 6:17). When a Christian is defending himself against the powers of darkness, this cannot be accomplished with any scripture that comes to mind, but rather a word spoken from God for the situation. The *rhema* of God is the sword of the Spirit, not the *logos*.

Many Christians are perplexed that some of their prayers do not seem to be answered by God. Their concept is that they can ask whatever they want to and God will do it. However, notice the limitation that Jesus places on prayer: "If ye abide in me, and my words (*rhema*) abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). We may ask whatsoever we will as long as our heart is governed by a specific word that God has spoken to us. He is not saying that we can have anything we want. When we pray according to the word that He has spoken specifically to us (the *rhema*), we can be assured that He will answer our prayer and perform what He has spoken to us.

Obedience to the Logos

God wants to bring us to a place of development where we will live a life in response to His initiation. Does this then mean that a Christian should do nothing until he hears God's voice? Does this negate our responsibility to obey scripture? Jesus lived His life in response to His Father's will and desire.

Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I

Speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him (John 8:28-29).

Jesus did nothing unless the Father so indicated. Should we do nothing when we become a Christian until we begin to hear the voice of the Lord and receive a *rhema*? Learning to hear His voice can take time. Should we remain inactive, doing nothing until we have developed that hearing ear? John writes this in his epistle:

*My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ...And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word (**logos**), in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him (1 John 2:1,3-5).*

God expects us to keep His commandments that we sin not. But does this produce legalism and negate responding to the *rhema*? Until we develop the ability to know God's voice, we should seek to obey the scriptures and respond to the *logos*. Jesus was obedient to Joseph and Mary when He was a child (Luke 2:51). As we are obedient to God's laws, He will work in us that we may come to know His voice and respond to the *rhema*. Paul gives further clarification to this matter.

Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise

by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster... Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father (Galatians 3:22-25; 4:1-2).

Until we develop a hearing ear and begin to obey the *rhema* of God, we are placed under the training of a schoolmaster called the law. Acting as a tutor or governor, the law trains us in lessons of obedience, keeping us from sin. When faith begins to be produced in our lives, we are no longer under this schoolmaster, but we obey the *rhema* that guides us into doing His will from our hearts. When faith comes, our response to God is not only because His written law says to do so. We now respond because He is speaking to us, and grace flows with His voice giving us the power to do His will. If Christians never develop an ear to hear God's voice, there is the tendency to become legalistic or find the law to be a heavy burden to bear. The vibrant life that gives power to fulfill the law comes as a *rhema* from God and produces faith in us.

Believe the *Rhema*

After the essential first step of receiving the *rhema* which initiates faith, the next part of faith is to believe what God says. The first step comes from God. The second step is our responsibility. We must believe God, *"Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall*

ye prosper" (2 Chronicles 20:20). Faith proceeds no further if we do not believe what God has spoken to us. "*If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established*" (Isaiah 7:9). Believing can be quite simple if we understand how something can be achieved, but difficult when it is beyond our comprehension. If we are to believe God we must not rely upon our own understanding by trying to figure out how everything can be accomplished (Proverbs 3:5).

Jesus gave the disciples a wonderful promise when they marveled that the fruitless fig tree that He had cursed dried up so quickly. "*Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done*" (Matthew 21:21). If we do not doubt when God speaks to us, faith moves a step closer to fulfillment.

What does it mean to believe God? The Greek word carries the concept of *persuasion, credence or conviction* (Strong's, 1986, G4102). The Hebrew word means to *build up support, to foster as a parent or nurse, or to render firm or faithful* (Strong's, 1986, H539). From these definitions, we derive the thought that believing is to be so fully persuaded of the truth of what God has said, that our words and actions portray a confidence that it is so.

When we were attending Bible school, we lived in a village that had very hard water, making it difficult for Angeline to clean our clothes effectively. She became convinced that only a certain brand of soap powder would work properly for washing the clothing. My manner had been to always buy the soap that was the best price, but she **believed** in only one brand. I could not convince her otherwise, no matter

how hard I tried. She was thoroughly persuaded that nothing else could do the job. Her actions and words confirmed that she was an avid believer and would not budge from her position.

God wants us to be as fully persuaded when He speaks to us as Angeline was about her soap powder. When we truly believe Him, we will not be moved by the magnitude or seeming impossibility of the word. Contrary circumstances will not shake us from our position if we believe Him. Our words and our actions will further prove that we trust Him completely and are fully persuaded by His word to us. A person's words and actions will ultimately portray what he truly believes.

Why People Do Not Believe

Scripture identifies at least seven reasons why people do not believe God. Doubt and unbelief are a curse to a Christian and prohibit the development of faith. We want to mark these enemies and drive them out of our hearts so that we may obtain a good report from God by faith.

Not Hearing God's Voice for Ourselves

Previously we looked at the fact that Israel had rejected hearing God's voice at Mt. Sinai. They chose to hear what God had to say to them through Moses rather than directly from God. This resulted in their not being fully persuaded of what God said.

And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to

destroy us. Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there. Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them. The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes; And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place. Yet in this thing ye did not believe the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 1:27-32).

Because they were not hearing God's voice for themselves, they did not receive the power that is in His voice and unbelief filled their hearts. Their thinking was negative and their testimony of God was false. They assessed the situation from information they had received from the evil report given by the ten spies rather than believing the true report of Joshua and Caleb and, more importantly, the word of the Lord.

Jesus stated it this way: *"But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"* (John 10:26-27). He made it very clear that we must hear His voice if we are to believe Him.

Seeking Honor from Man

Another problem that blocks people from believing God is desiring and seeking the honor that comes from man more than the honor that comes from God. *"How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that*

cometh from God only?" (John 5:44). If a person regards more what other people thinks of him rather than God's opinion, he will be full of unbelief and doubt concerning the things of God.

Resisting Repentance

The process of repentance is an ongoing need in a Christian's spiritual walk. Jesus identified this problem when He gave this command: "And saying, *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.*" (Mark 1:15). Repentance precedes believing God. This is further confirmed in the teachings of Jesus: "For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him" (Matthew 21:32). If a Christian resists the ongoing work of repentance in his life, unbelief takes over in the heart and faith evaporates. Repentance creates a place in the heart to believe what God speaks and keep faith alive.

In describing the results of the process of repentance, Paul lists the responses that lead a person to having a spirit that believes when God speaks the *rhema*.

For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter (2 Corinthians 7:11).

As the process of repentance accomplishes its work in God's people, the heart and mind is transformed to believe what

God speaks. Repentance renovates a person's thinking so that he sees things God's way and responds with a heart that is ready to believe God (Tucker, 1994).

Fear

Certain types of traumatic circumstances in life can take away our breath. The fear that accompanies them can paralyze us mentally and emotionally. Fear can displace believing God and cause faith to flee away. Jesus spoke to a distressed father in such a circumstance (Mark 5:21-24). While Jesus was on His way to go to the sick child, He received word that she had already died. Jesus stilled the troubled mind of her father with these words: "*As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe*" (Mark 5:36). Fear must be contained and not allowed to rule the situation so that a person can believe what God declares. When Jesus arrived, He declared that she was not dead, but only sleeping. Others laughed at Jesus, but the father and mother of the girl believed Jesus and saw her miraculously raised up. Give your fears to Jesus and believe what He is speaking to you.

Trust in Natural Senses

The Christian must learn that the natural senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste do not always give a complete nor true reading of situations in life. Until we learn this lesson, most of us can identify with the attitude and expression of Thomas.

The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print

of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe (John 20:25).

Thomas would only trust what he could perceive with his natural faculties. Jesus invited Thomas to touch Him so that he would not be full of unbelief, but He also made it perfectly clear that there is something higher. *“Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29).*

We have more than merely natural senses. Our spirit, governed by the Holy Spirit, can discern a deeper level of understanding and perceive elements in situations that are hidden from our natural senses. We must not put our full trust in our knowledge or perception of situations, but rather learn to trust the Lord to help us know that which cannot be known by natural means. *“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5).* Trust in our natural perception of circumstances and situations will handicap us and hinder us from believing God. Thomas was immature and full of doubt because of this reliance upon his own understanding. We must leap from the false security of what we can understand with our natural senses into the everlasting arms of God as He speaks to us, and believe Him, putting our full trust in Him.

We are to learn to trust the Lord to help us know that which cannot be known by natural means.

John declared an interaction with the living word of God that included but also transcended his natural sensitivities. He expresses the fact that his natural senses were in tune with what God was saying and doing. They were not a

hindrance to believing God, but complemented his spiritual perceptions.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-3).

God wants our natural senses involved with spiritual things. We must not rely upon natural senses, but allow God to use them to bear witness to His workings.

Hardness of Heart

Israel had hardened their hearts against hearing God's voice because it meant that the voice of God would deal with the works of their flesh. Consequently, when it was time to enter into their inheritance, their hearts were hardened and they did not believe God. A brief recounting of this incident is provided in Psalms 95:7-11. Paul quotes these verses in his letter to the Hebrew believers, giving a fresh warning of the problem to the church both then and now.

Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known

my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God (Hebrews 3:7-12).

When Israel heard the voice of the Lord speaking to them, they hardened their hearts against what God spoke to them. They did not know or understand God's ways. They could not believe God and thus were not able to enter into the promises. Paul warns us not to harden our hearts as they did or we will reap the same results. He gives an awesome warning in verse 12. He calls it an *evil heart of unbelief and departing from the living God*. This hardening the heart proves to be a more serious matter than many would like to believe.

A hard heart prohibits believing God. Paul faced this problem when he first came to Ephesus, preaching to the Jews in the synagogue.

And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-9).

When they hardened their hearts against Paul's teaching, the result was unbelief and speaking against the truth. Paul removed the disciples who believed so they would not be tainted with the evil speaking. We must not resist God and harden our hearts lest we develop a heart of unbelief. As we allow God to speak to us, our hearts can be kept tender and responsive to Him. "*For God maketh my heart soft*" (Job 23:16).

Failure to Act

Believing God requires action, not just a verbal consent. The brother of our Lord Jesus states it this way: “*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*” (James 2:19-20). James calls to task those Christians who are not producing the good works that their believing declares. As was mentioned previously, our actions prove what we truly believe. A heart that truly believes what God says produces good fruit. Failure to act destroys any credibility that one truly believes.

Some Reasons People Do Not Believe God

- Not hearing God’s voice for ourselves
- Seeking honor from man
- Resisting repentance
- Fear
- Trust in natural senses
- Hardness of heart
- Failure to act

Confessing What God Declares

So far we have looked at two steps toward faith: hearing the *rhema* of God and believing it. Now we come to the third step toward the fulfillment of faith: confessing the *rhema* of God. Once God has spoken to us, what we declare is very critical to the ongoing development of faith. “*We having*

the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak” (2 Corinthians 4:13). What we truly believe will issue forth from our lips. The word that initiates faith in us is confirmed or denied out of our own mouth. We are warned not to waver in our professing what God said, no matter what circumstances may develop to the contrary. “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)” (Hebrews 10:23).

Many people begin to say things that destroy faith when circumstances do not transpire as they had hoped. Some make slanderous statements, defaming God’s name and character. Our words often declare how we view God. Sarah gave a good testimony of God as she waited for the fulfillment of His promise to her: *“Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised” (Hebrews 11:11). Sarah judged God with her testimony of Him. Her judgment was that God is faithful. Her testimony of God enabled Him to prove His faithfulness to her.*

Notice Israel’s testimony of God when they did not believe Him to enter into Canaan:

And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? (Numbers 14:2-3).

Their confession kept them from entering the land. And what did they receive from God? They died in the wilderness as they had spoken with their own lips.

Forty years later, after that generation finally died off in the wilderness, a new generation went through the Jordan River into Canaan. The first city they were told to take was Jericho. They were to march around the city for seven days. All the while they marched, they were to keep quiet and not speak a word (Joshua 6:10). Could the reason be that they were not to speak because God wanted to spare them from destroying faith with a negative confession? One soldier expressing a tinge of fear or doubt could stir others the wrong way and undo the whole offensive.

Peter speaks to us about the “*trial of our faith*” (1 Peter 1:7). Part of the trial is passing through circumstances that turn in the opposite direction of the *rhema* that God has spoken. Joseph was given dreams from God that his brothers would bow before him one day. Being a teenager, he probably envisioned that the next time he saw his brothers this would be fulfilled. Instead, they threw him into a pit, seeking to kill him, but finally selling him as a slave. What a turn of events from his expectations and the word of the Lord through the dreams!

David was given the word of the Lord and anointed to be king over the nation of Israel. It was not long after that he was exalted to a high position in Saul’s army. Then came the turn of events in his life that tried his faith. He was driven from Saul’s presence and hunted like a dog in the wilderness. He was sorely tried before he saw the fulfillment of God’s word to him.

We must hold fast and continue to believe God, confessing what He said. Our words are also very powerful and can help to confirm faith or quench it. James tells us that our tongue is like the rudder that guides a great ship:

Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! (James 3:4-5).

Which direction will we allow our words to guide the ship of faith—on into the port of fulfillment or into the shoals of unbelief where the Christian never brings forth that which pleases the heart of God? We are to understand that our confession emanates from what we believe in our heart (Luke 6:45). What power the tongue wields! *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof” (Proverbs 18:21).*

God wants us to believe Him and use our words to confirm our confidence and trust in Him. Our confession validates our faith in the *rhema* of God and moves us closer to seeing it fulfilled. *“Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee: and the light shall shine upon thy ways” (Job 22:28).* This truth can be visualized in the following examples.

“And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). Philip was compelled by the Holy Spirit to leave the revival in Samaria. This obedience produced a Divine appointment with this Ethiopian official. Philip

would grant him baptism if he believed with all his heart, which was confirmed with his confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

A distraught father with a demon-possessed son came to Jesus for help and deliverance for his son. *“Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief”* (Mark 9:23-24). Even though the father had doubt in his heart, he chose to believe and made his confession of that point. He then asked the Lord to free him of any unbelief.

Another example, although negative, serves well to demonstrate this point further. *“Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”* (John 12:42-43). These Pharisees were moved in their hearts to believe Jesus’ gracious words. A *rhema*, that faith-producing word, was planted in their being waiting to be propelled on by their own words. However, the stirring in their hearts progressed no further because they would not confess Him before men. Like Esau, they opted for that which is temporal and worthless in comparison to that being offered.

Joseph was so convinced of the things God spoke to him about Israel returning to Canaan that he gave them a commandment that would not be fulfilled for several hundred years. *“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones”* (Hebrews 11:22). His words, commanding his posterity to take his bones, affirmed what was in his heart!

We must not boldly proclaim words that God has not spoken as a *rhema* to us. That is like a child, who in order to impress his friends, makes grand claims that his dad is going to do spectacular things for him. His father feels no compulsion to try to fulfill such bold bragging on the part of his son. The father only feels responsible to fulfill what he has promised. So it is with our heavenly Father. But when He speaks that specific word that is directed to our situation, we must boldly proclaim and affirm Father's promises to heaven and earth.

The Obedience of Faith

The steps of faith we have discussed thus far are: hearing the *rhema* of God, believing it, and confessing it. The next critical part we must act upon is mentioned by Paul. *"But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the **obedience of faith**" (Romans 16:26).*

This essential action on our part must not be ignored nor neglected if we are to see the fulfillment that causes us to receive His good report (Hebrews 11:2). Often when God gives us a *rhema*, it not only contains promises but also conditions that require obedience on our part. Peter expresses this well:

Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner (1 Peter 2:6-7).

After believing what God has said, we must follow through with obedience. Peter makes the point here that those who do

not believe are disobedient. They do not follow through so that faith can progress. Remember, a heart that truly believes takes action. It follows through to respond in obedience to the conditions set forth by the Lord for the fulfillment of the promises.

The letter to the Hebrews clearly identifies the final issue that deterred Israel from entering the promise God had spoken to them. “*Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief*” (Hebrews 4:6). Many other translations correctly translate *unbelief* as *disobedience*. Because they did not obey the word spoken to them, they were not able to see faith completed to fulfillment. God was faithful to do His part, but they were rebelliously disobedient and could not receive the promises.

In reading about the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, one can readily recognize the obedience of each one to the *rhema* God had spoken to them. Noah received a word from God to prepare an ark in order to save his family during the coming judgment. “*And Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him*” (Genesis 7:5). His faith would never have been completed had he not obeyed the word of the Lord. He would have perished with many others who were disobedient (1 Peter 3:20).

Abraham was also given steps of obedience that were necessary for the promise to be fulfilled. “*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went*” (Hebrews 11:8). It is relatively easy to obey God when we understand His purposes and are familiar with where He is leading us. Think what trust Abraham had in

God to move in obedience! An even greater trust is exhibited when God spoke to Abraham to offer Isaac:

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure (Hebrews 11:17-19).

He did not flinch from obeying God no matter how difficult it was to understand God's motives and purposes. What a man of faith to believe and trust God!

Ten lepers cried out to Jesus for deliverance from their disease. Notice how He responded, how they responded, and the results. *"And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed" (Luke 17:14).* Their desire was fulfilled when they responded in action to His command.

We could continue looking at many other saints who received the *rhema* and followed through in obedience to see the fulfillment of the promise: Moses, Rahab, Gideon, David, and a multitude of others, right up to our day. Our obedience to the *rhema* releases heaven's forces to spring into action on our behalf. The obedience of faith is essential for the fulfillment of the promise.

Patient Waiting with Prayer

The fifth element that is often necessary for the fulfillment of faith is patient waiting. *"For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" (Habakkuk 2:3).*

Occasionally, especially in the case of a new Christian, the word of faith is fulfilled almost immediately. This is the way we would most often choose it to be.

When Angeline and I were in Bible school, we experienced an occasion of almost instantaneous fulfillment of the *rhema*. Angeline was very ill and I knew she would need help from a doctor if matters did not change quickly. As I was ascending the stairs to our apartment, the Lord spoke to me that her problem was an attack by Satan's forces. I was instructed to pray for her and tell him to leave her alone. I did so, and within five minutes Angeline was healthy and normal again. The immediate response of God in the matter was wonderful!

A quick fulfillment of the *rhema* is not always the case in the development of faith, however. Most often, this fifth step of faith proves to be an essential element of our learning to walk in faith. Habakkuk found this to be true as he received the word of the Lord: "*though it tarry, wait for it.*" It seems that fulfillment usually does tarry, necessitating our need to wait patiently after we have done what God told us to do.

For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul (Hebrews 10:36-39).

Most promises take time to be brought to fulfillment. God takes no pleasure in making us wait just to fulfill some needless amount of suffering, waiting for the completion of

the promise. God's interest is not only that we receive the promise, but also that we obtain a good report from Him and develop a deeper relationship with Him as we are waiting. He takes pleasure in those who have learned to trust Him no matter what the circumstances look like.

During times of patient waiting, we come to know God's ways and His reasons for doing things the way He does. So many are impatient, wanting the promises more than wanting the God who promised. Those who wait patiently demonstrate that they want to please Him more than anything else. We know that without faith it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6). Waiting on God demonstrates our faith in action.

Why does God speak promises to us and then make it necessary to wait? We have already considered a couple of reasons. God declares one very important reason through the prophet Isaiah: *"And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him"* (Isaiah 30:18). God loves us with a depth of love that we often cannot fathom. He wants to do the very best for us, if we will allow Him to. The patient waiting becomes necessary so that God can do the very best for those who are willing to wait for His timing. His best for us takes time to develop!

If we are impatient and move ahead, seeking to fulfill what we want in our own way and on our own timetable, we cannot receive His best. In the end, we will be disappointed with the results. We will have aborted what He was developing in us if we fail to steady our souls and wait patiently.

God waits so that He can be gracious to us and display His great mercy to us. What a depth of contentment and

satisfaction when the fulfillment of His promises is complete in us! *“When the desire cometh, it is a tree of life”* (Proverbs 13:12). His blessing abounds fully in us, if we are willing to wait until He has been able to develop to maturity everything He has planned .

Consider all the highly esteemed saints of old who found it necessary to wait upon God. Abraham and Sarah waited for 24 years from the time that God said He would make of them a great nation until the time that Isaac was born.

Joseph was a slave in Egypt for 13 years before he was made the prime minister. Another nine years passed before his brothers came and bowed to him as in his dreams. He waited a total of at least 22 years for the fulfillment of what God said to him. These years of waiting were not easy for him. *“Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him”* (Psalms 105:19). However, God was waiting so that He could be gracious to Joseph and do the very best for him.

Jesus and his mother, Mary, attended a wedding feast. He had never performed any miracles up to that point but was patiently waiting for the time appointed of the Father (Galatians 4:2). When the wedding host ran out of wine, Mary made a suggestion and Jesus responded. *“And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come”* (John 2:3-4). Jesus refused to act on His own to perform miracles, even though He knew that was part of His calling. He waited patiently for His Father’s good time.

We can easily miss out on God’s purposes if we do not learn to wait patiently upon Him. Patient waiting is often a vital step to the fulfillment of faith. These two elements are linked

together in Scripture. “*That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through **faith** and **patience** inherit the promises*” (Hebrews 6:12). Inheriting the promises requires patience so that faith can have time to fully develop and bring forth the promises of God. “*So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your **patience** and **faith** in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure.*” (2 Thessalonians 1:4).

In the book of Revelation, John connects these same lines of thought several times. “*He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the **patience** and the **faith** of the saints*” (Revelation 13:10). Patience and faith are working together to fulfill the purpose of God. “*Here is the **patience** of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the **faith** of Jesus*” (Revelation 14:12).

*We should
not wait
passively
for the
fulfillment
of God's
promises
but pray
diligently.*

At times, the most difficult part of faith is the waiting, yet God is able to accomplish so much in us through patient waiting. Peter describes this process well.

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:6-9).

God esteems the trying of our faith more valuable than gold. No matter how long the trial, it will pass when the work is accomplished. When the praise, honor, and glory that Peter speaks of begins, we will forget all the sorrow and heaviness of heart we passed through. When faith is fulfilled, it will be worth it all.

James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus and the pastor of the church at Jerusalem, also confirms Peter's thoughts on allowing the full work of faith in our lives: "*Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing*" (James 1:3-4). God has planned a complete work for us that will cause us to be satisfied with His goodness in the end and will ensure that we also obtain a good report by faith.

The waiting process should be an active time of prayer for the fulfillment of the promise God has given us. We should not sit by passively waiting for something to happen but rather pray diligently. This was the response of Elijah the prophet when he received word from God that it was time for rain once again in Israel. He declared to King Ahab, "*there is a sound of abundance of rain*" (1 Kings 18:41). Elijah had his ear attuned to hear what God indicated. As we mentioned before, it was James who wrote "*But let patience have her perfect work,*" but James also gave us the example of Elijah's praying the promise through.

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit (James 5:16b-18).

Elijah was actively involved in prayer for the fulfillment of the promise. And pray he did! His praying involved more than making a simple, dispassionate request to God. James says his prayer was fervent. The thought is that he prayed effectively through powerful praying (Greek – *energeo*). It seems that he entered spiritual travail similar to labour for childbirth. *“And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees”*(1 Kings 18:42). His intense prayer continued for seven sessions until he experienced a breakthrough to the promise. When his servant saw a small cloud in the shape of a man’s hand, Elijah knew he had prayed through. This attitude and action of prayer is an essential part of the patient waiting that is a part of faith.

Jesus gave a parable on this matter of waiting patiently and praying through to the fulfillment of faith. *“And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint”*(Luke 18:1). This account was about a woman appealing to an unjust judge for justice in a matter. She persisted in her appeal to him. Jesus gave the point of the parable. *“And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”*(Luke 18:7-8).

The message Jesus gives us here confirms the action of Elijah. When we are waiting on God for the completion of God’s word to us, we must pray fervently and not give up until the promise is brought forth. When the time for fulfillment has arrived, God will move quickly on our behalf. Until then, we are admonished to pray and not faint, to cry unto Him day and night until the promise is realized and faith is complete.

The Complete Process of Faith

Each of these five elements of faith is usually essential in the fulfillment of a word of faith. We must remember that God initiates the whole process of faith in us with the *rhema*. The next three steps of the process of faith are our necessary responses to the word of faith: believing what God said, confessing what God said, and obeying what God said. The final step of waiting and praying is normally a required final action on our part to bring faith to fulfillment. Jesus Christ finishes or completes the process of faith working in us with the fulfillment! (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus, the Author and Finisher of Faith

- Receive the rhema from God
- Believe what God said
- Confess what God said
- Obey what God said
- Wait patiently and pray for the fulfillment

CHAPTER 8

Growing Faith

God Intends Faith to Grow in Us

Everything that God has created is intended to grow and develop. Nothing He created stands still but is always moving on. Scripture provides many occasions indicating that God intends for faith to grow and develop in us. We will look at some of these together.

*“Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men’s labours; but having hope, **when your faith is increased**, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly” (2 Corinthians 10:15).*

Paul recognized that the faith of the Corinthian believers would increase as they matured in Christ.

In writing to the Thessalonians, he recognized that their faith was developing. *“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that **your faith groweth exceedingly**, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth” (II Thessalonians 1:3).*

Many scriptures give us the picture that God measures the amount of faith in His people. Notice these concepts contained in the following phrases.

*“According as God hath dealt to every man the **measure of faith**” (Romans 12:3).*

"O ye of **little** faith" (Matthew 6:30).

"I have not found so **great** faith, no, not in Israel" (Matthew 8:10).

"For he was a good man, and **full** of the Holy Ghost and of faith" (Acts 11:24).

"Might perfect that which is **lacking** in your faith" (1 Thessalonians 3:10).

If faith can be measured, then faith can grow and develop in us as we respond to the *rhema* spoken to us. When we have held faithful to each of these steps and each step of faith is fulfilled within us, God will lead us into another cycle of faith and a new adventure with Him. Paul expresses this to the Romans: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from **faith to faith**: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17). God's purpose is to pass us through many different experiences of faith. As we go from faith to faith, our faith will grow to the glory of God.

*Faith
grows and
develops
in us as we
respond to
the rhema
word spoken
to us.*

How Does It Grow?

How does faith increase within us in a practical way? The disciples of Jesus were concerned with this: "And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). Jesus' response to them is given in verses six through ten. Then in verses eleven through nineteen Luke provides a further example that demonstrates what Jesus had answered the disciples.

We will look at these scriptures to ascertain how our faith can increase.

Jesus used a simile to compare growing faith with the mustard seed: *“And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you”* (Luke 17:6).

In Matthew 13:31-32, Jesus said that the mustard seed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown is the greatest among herbs. “Modern opinion tends to identify it with black mustard, *Sinapis nigra*. It has been observed growing wild to a height of twelve feet, so the cultivated variety may have been as sturdy as Jesus describes” (MacKay, 1970, p. 49).

The point that Jesus is making to the disciples is that resident within His faith is tremendous power of growth like the mustard seed. Though the mustard seed is so very tiny, it has the growth potential within to mature to great height. When faith has been sown in a person and is nurtured, explosive growth potential lies within that can multiply many times over. Jesus spoke of this same principle in the parable of the sower, *“But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty”* (Matthew 13:23). God intends this growth potential to be a normal part of the faith He plants within us.

This parable, commonly called the parable of the sower, might be more correctly referred to as the parable of the soil, the soil being the condition of the heart of man. The situation of our heart plays an important part in the development of faith, as we have studied previously. Just as the type and preparation of the soil greatly affect the growth of a plant, so

also does the condition of our heart dramatically affect the growth and development of faith.

What Kind of Heart Response?

The next point Jesus makes in His answer to the disciples further defines the necessary heart response that engenders growing faith. Notice in our text in Luke 17 that the next section is conjunctive and not a separate thought.

But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do (Luke17:7-10).

A mentality of minimal responses to God hinders the explosive growth of faith. Certain responses are merely our duty or required responsibility. We must have the heart and mindset of the servant that Jesus cites in this passage. Jesus indicated to His disciples that an attitude of willingness to respond and do more than the minimal requirements was required if they wanted their faith to increase. We too must know the heart of God and provide a greater response than what is customary.

Luke includes for us an example that further serves to demonstrate the truth Jesus spoke. Notice that His teaching

and this example are a sequence of thought which serve to give us a complete picture of the concept revealed by Jesus.

And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole (Luke 17:11-19).

All of these lepers responded to Jesus' command to show themselves to the priest, as prescribed in the Law of Moses. They each obeyed the word He spoke to them. However, notice the difference in the response of the Samaritan who, when he saw that he was healed, returned to Jesus to worship and give Him thanks. Something in his heart discerned more than the basic command to go to the priest. He heard the depth of the heart of God that is seeking worshippers (John 4:23). This Samaritan did more than what was required of him. He returned, fell at Jesus feet, and gave thanks. He was motivated to respond in a way that fostered a growing faith. Jesus declared that this faith not only brought him healing, as the other lepers also experienced, but wholeness as well. This means that he received much more from Jesus than his healing.

Being made whole is far superior to receiving only physical healing. We are created as spirit, soul, and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). This leper exhibited growing faith that was a benefit affecting his whole being. The others were healed of their physical condition, but this man was made whole in spirit, soul, and body. His physical condition could well have been a reflection of the situation of his spirit and soul. But he responded with more than was required, resulting in growing faith.

It is true that we cannot initiate faith. Jesus is the author and initiator of faith within us. When He gives us the *rhema* that initiates faith, our response is critical. Isaiah mourned the fact that this element was lacking in so many of God's people: "*And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee*" (Isaiah 64:7). Growing faith draws from something deep within to take hold of God's promises in a way that is beyond what is expected. Others also exhibited this growing faith that goes beyond the minimal requirements.

Rebekah and the Thirsty Camels

Abraham sent his servant to Mesopotamia to find a suitable wife for Isaac. The servant asked God for a clear sign that he could choose the right woman.

And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master (Genesis 24:14).

This was quite a request. The servant traveled with ten very thirsty camels. Estimates vary a bit, but camels can drink 20 – 30 gallons of water each. This means that whoever responded would be committing to draw 200 – 300 gallons of water from a well that was probably quite deep. What a lot of work this would be for a young woman! Notice Rebekah's response to the servant.

*And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher. And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hastened, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, **I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking.** And she hastened, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels (Genesis 24:17-20).*

Rebekah offered the common courtesy of a drink of water to a traveler. However, she was a woman who was willing to go beyond what was required. She also watered the camels until they had all they could drink. The camels were later instrumental in taking her to Isaac. Isaac was a man of faith with promises from God. He needed a wife who would be a woman of growing faith. Rebekah qualified to complement this man of faith through her willingness to go beyond what was required. Going the extra mile and beyond can affect the growth of faith in our lives.

The Pharisee and the Sinner Woman

Luke chapter seven gives us another excellent example of this truth. A Pharisee desired Jesus to come to his house for a meal. He had such a laissez faire attitude toward Jesus that

the common courtesies provided for guests were not offered to Jesus.

At the dinner, a woman known by all as a sinner came and began to wash Jesus' feet with her tears. She then proceeded to wipe His feet with her hair and anoint His feet with precious, fragrant oil. The Pharisee criticized Jesus for allowing this type of a woman to touch Him. Jesus then contrasted her extravagant care for Him with the Pharisee's failure to offer the common provision. This woman went beyond what was required because of her desire for forgiveness and change, as well as her love for Jesus. Notice Jesus' response to her: *"And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace"* (Luke 7:50). This woman possessed the elements necessary for a growing faith.

May we also, like this woman, so respond to Jesus as He speaks a word that produces faith in us. We can have the potential to grow and bring forth thirty, sixty, or one hundredfold. Lord, increase our faith!

Adding to Our Faith

What purpose does God have for the process of faith working in us? What end result does God desire? Peter declares that God gives us exceeding great and precious promises so that we may become partakers of His divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). The Lord speaks a living word from His mouth that produces faith in us. We allow the process of faith to work the fulfillment of the promise in our lives. The goal is not the fulfillment of the promise alone, but more that we would come to know the Lord in a greater way on our adventure of faith. He wants to transform us to be like Him and know intimate fellowship with Him.

Peter continues on to encourage us not to make the fulfillment of faith our goal, but to add various qualities of godly character to our foundation of faith. God has not intended faith to be an end in itself.

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5-8).

God’s goal has always been to conform us to the image of Christ. These godly qualities added to faith bring us to a greater knowledge of Him and His ongoing purpose for us. This further assurance is provided for us: *“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10).* Let us allow God’s full purpose for faith in our lives.

CHAPTER 9

Faith in Balance

Faith, Hope, and Love

Throughout scripture various godly qualities are tied together in concept. One incidence of this is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church. *"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity"* (1 Corinthians 13:13). Paul makes the point that love is the most important of these three godly characteristics.

If love is the primary of these three, are we to then assume that hope is more important than faith? It would seem that this is true from the order in which the Holy Spirit placed these words, declaring that love is the greatest. This seems to have established an order of importance that we should consider.

We know that faith is essential to a Christian. *"But without faith it is impossible to please him"* (Hebrews 11:6). However, hope is more important from God's perspective than is faith. God initiates faith as He speaks a *rhema* to us. We must respond, as we have pointed out, but Jesus initiates and completes faith. God can produce faith in us without us knowing Him in great intimacy. God's goal is that through the process of faith working in us, we can mature and come to know Him and His ways in a greater measure.

The scriptural concept of hope is a patient, expectant confidence in God. Hope is established in a believer's life

as we begin to know God and His ways and manner. Hope is built on our knowing God's character, manner, and ways. It does not need a word from God to expect from God certain responses because we know His character, manner, and ways.

Angeline and I have been married for more than 40 years. In this time our relationship and love for one another have grown. Because of this, we have developed certain expectations of one another. These expectations are not based upon promises, but rather upon our knowledge of each other's character, manner, and ways. We have so become one that we often begin to speak the same words at times in response to situations. This has resulted from our developing relationship with one another.

God wants us to come to know Him in a similar fashion. In reference to the first generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt, God said, "*Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways*" (Hebrews 3:10). God had set them up to witness His mighty power and love for them. Yet they failed to come to know and understand God's ways and manner of doing things. This was characterized by their continual murmuring against God rather than having hope built up in their hearts.

Hope Contrasted with Faith

God must initiate faith. Without a *rhema* from Him, we cannot have faith. Much misunderstanding and disappointment with God have resulted from some thinking they can initiate faith and, believing hard enough, can have whatever they want. They begin to become discouraged, thinking that they have failed God or that God has failed them when they do

not see certain things take place which they had prayed for, believed, and confessed. They claimed the promises in the Bible in some cases to no avail. What went wrong?

When God speaks to an individual the *rhema*, that specific, individual word declared by God for a specific situation, faith is planted in the heart. A substance is received from God that will produce the intended results in due time. This is the substance spoken of in Hebrews 11:1. In contrast to this, hope has no word of promise from God, but rather an expectancy that has been developed out of a relationship of experiential knowledge of God's character, manner, and ways. Contary to faith, hope does not have the substance to hold on.

"For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Romans 8:24-25). Hope is an expectancy we have developed through a relationship with God to expect certain responses from Him. We have no promise (that which we can see, as Paul puts it), but we hope for certain things because we know God's past record. However, we must understand that God may not respond as we had expected for reasons that perhaps only He knows at the time. Unless He has promised us by speaking a *rhema* to us, He is under no obligation to fulfill what we have expected. Sometimes we have hope that is based upon knowing only a part of God's ways.

In 1984 we were in the process of a building a new church. It seemed good to us to prepare the parking lot in the autumn of that year. The problem is that typically it is very rainy in that season of the year. Elijah had prayed that it would not rain and it did not rain for three and one-half years. We needed

only about three and one-half weeks. I brought the whole congregation together to pray and ask God to hold the rain away from us until we completed the parking lot. We prayed and it rained. Being undaunted by this, we came together again and prayed some more. Again it rained more.

Finally, one of the men came to me and noted that the more we prayed the more it rained. He felt we were beginning to look foolish. I quieted myself to see how God felt about the matter. My spirit was flooded with the joy of the Lord as I felt the pleasure of the Lord toward us. We had received no word from the Lord that we were to pray that the rain would stop. However, the Lord spoke that He was pleased that we had put our hope in Him. He delighted that we knew He could intervene and stop the rain. It became apparent to us that it was not the best time to finish the parking lot, and God denied our request in order to do what was best for us. The point was that He delighted in us because we had hope in Him based upon His past record. We were not disappointed but strengthened by the joy of the Lord.

Some would point out that we did not have faith when we prayed and they would be absolutely right. We had no faith in that incident. How could we have? God had not given us a *rhema* in the matter. But we had hope in the Lord. *"And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us"* (Romans 5:5). God wants to take us through a process so that our hope can be built up in Him.

The Process of Building Hope

Some believe that we can build our faith by reading scriptural promises. However, we can easily accept some things that

we may have heard all our lives as truth without ever proving them with the Scriptures. Notice what God has to say about this: *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have **hope**”* (Romans 15:4). Our hope, not necessarily faith, is built up by reading the scriptures.

As I read about Noah preaching righteousness for a hundred years, and, in the end, only his family was saved, I have hope to hold steady and not forsake preaching righteousness no matter how many turn away from the truth. When I read of how God was able to transform Jacob from a deceiver to a prince with God and man, I am encouraged that He can change us. Daniel also experienced circumstances that can serve to build our hope in the Lord. Remember how his faithful daily prayer led him to the lion’s den? God was faithful to deliver him in this impossible situation. The list could go on and on as we read of saints of old who found God to be trustworthy and meet them in their impossibilities. My hope is strengthened in the Lord as I consider His past record with others.

Hope Through Experience with God

God establishes hope in our lives through another means as well. This is through a process as we walk through difficulties that God has arranged for us.

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us (Romans 5:1-5).

After we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior through faith we have peace with God. God causes grace to begin to flow in our lives. Then comes the pressure in our lives. This is the meaning of the word *tribulation*. Initially, these pressures are not pleasant to pass through. After a time we begin to understand how they work for our good. We are then able to rejoice as we see them coming.

God has intended that the pressures He brings into our lives become a blessing rather than a curse. The prophet Hosea shares an important concept about the work of trouble in the life of each believer,

And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt (Hosea 2:15).

The name *Achor* used here has the meaning of *trouble*. Passing through valley experiences of trouble leads one to a door of hope ultimately. Trouble and pressure can become a blessing in disguise if we will allow them to complete the purpose God intended. In his poem, Trouble Is A Servant, John Wright Follette beautifully describes this valuable work.

All of us know trouble – at least I hope we do;
 Trouble is a servant, but known as such by few.
 We are taught to shun her and, if she comes too near,
 Seldom do we face her but run away in fear.
 Good and bad must meet her, the universe around –

Sinners, saints, kings and knaves –
she comes where man is found.
Always make her serve you, for she can serve you well;
Just HOW you may use her your life will always tell.
Trouble is but passive – it's by our power to will
We make her either bless us or do the soul some ill.
How do you translate her from phrases filled with pain
To messages of strength – from loss to endless gain?
By faith we see behind the outer frightful mask
A servant in disguise, to do a gracious task.
Hearts may feel her wounding and life may suffer loss;
Faith translates her working, as freeing gold from dross.
Trouble will discover to any yielded heart
Hidden depths of power it only knew in part;
Sympathizing power, and love that understands;
Strength to help another with trouble-tested hands.
Trouble will release you from self and make you kind,
Adding new dimensions to heart and soul and mind.
Do not shun this servant, but look beyond her task
To beauty she will work – for which you daily ask.
Always see in trouble a chance to grow in grace,
Not a stroke of evil to hinder in your race.
Live the life triumphant above her fiery darts;
Rich fruitage will be yours to share with needy hearts.
(Follette, 1957, p.viii – Used by permission)

It is through the process of experiencing pressure that we learn to be patient and hold steady. It is not uncommon when we first experience pressure in our life that we panic and seek to flee the pressure. After a number of trips through pressure and trouble we manage to quiet ourselves and gain experience. This record we build gives us a confidence that God is always faithful and sees us through the time of trouble. The end result is that our hope is built up in the Lord.

Over a period of time we are able to look back over the past of our experience with God and form certain expectations from God's past dealings with us. This past record we keep is often fostered by experiences that have been generated by a word of faith God has spoken to us. In present circumstances we may rightly expect that God will move in our life as He has in times past. We may also draw upon the experiences of others who have a testimony of God's faithfulness.

It is faith in Jesus Christ that initiates this process in us. Hope results from the process of going through tribulation. The final outcome is that God's love fills our hearts. Again, we see the same pattern of faith, hope, and love that Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:13.

Holding to Hope so that Hope Can Hold Us

Hope provides significant benefit in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The very nature of hope necessitates that we learn to hold steady under times of intense pressure. This causes us to witness God's faithfulness, develop godly character, and come to know Him in a greater way. We must learn to take control of our soul in such times of difficulty so that hope can do its work in us.

Peter quotes these words of David from Psalms 16:8-9:

For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope (Acts 2:25-26).

Only as we continue with our eyes fixed on the Lord in our times of pressure can we exercise the necessary self-control.

We must not be moved by our emotions and thoughts during these distressing times. Our soul must come to a place of rest as we hold steady, putting our hope in the Lord.

David spoke to his own soul in his tribulations and commanded it to hope in the Lord, *“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance”* (Psalms 42:5). David learned the need to still the raging storm within his soul and quiet himself so that hope could guide him to a desired end. How important it is that we remember God’s past record with others and us. Many of God’s people do not hold hope long enough to see the salvation of the Lord.

*Hope is like
an anchor
that can
hold us
steady in the
storms of
life.*

Paul declares that hope is like an anchor that can hold us steady: *“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil”* (Hebrews 6:19). Hope that is founded upon experience of knowing God’s ways is powerful. That hope can help convey us into the very presence of our God within the Holy of Holies. Therefore we are so admonished, *“Hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end”* (Hebrews 3:6). What a wonderful blessing hope is to us as we hold fast and allow it to anchor our soul to the Lord.

Jeremiah

God’s people have found it necessary to rely upon hope in Him throughout the ages. The prophet Jeremiah certainly passed through many times in his life that made it necessary to do so. One of the accounts is provided for us in The

Lamentations of Jeremiah. We detect some of the depth of his distress and initial despair in this narrative:

And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgot prosperity. And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD: Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me (Lamentations 3:17-20).

As Jeremiah lived in a time of spiritual decline and backsliding, he experienced many of the woes that were affecting the general populace. He also bore much sorrow as he sensed the grief of the heart of God toward His people. Jeremiah expressed a wide spectrum of emotions and sense of rejection that plagued his soul. He felt that God had forsaken him. As he allowed this vein of thought continuance in his mind, he lost all hope. But in the midst of this cesspool of despair, his spirit arose within him against his own emotions and thoughts. He began to reach back into the past of his own experience, and possibly that of many other saints of old, to recount God's record of dealings with man.

This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him (Lamentations 3:21-24).

As Jeremiah began to recount God's faithfulness, his hope was renewed. Hope became an anchor for his soul. His vision began to clear. He received new grace for endurance in his present circumstances. Although he

remained in darkness without a word of faith to sustain him, he was able to endure and hold steady with his eyes upon the Lord.

How much joy must it give the heart of God when we pass through such confusing situations as did the saints of old and hold on to hope as it anchors us in Him! In these times He is able to reveal more of His beauty and goodness to us as we develop a greater understanding of His ways. When the “Accuser of the Brethren” comes before God, does our God not bring our name up with joy and say, “Look at my son (or daughter) who is suffering intensely yet has chosen to put his hope in Me. Even though he cannot understand what is happening to him, he is holding steady because he has remembered My faithfulness and holds fast in his love for Me”? What rejoicing must fill the heart of our loving heavenly Father, our precious Lord Jesus, and our blessed Holy Spirit!

No one enjoys these difficult times, but afterward we would not want to trade the benefits we have derived for anything else. I think that perhaps there will be no greater joy than to know the Lord is rejoicing over us because we have hoped in Him. It is true that without faith it is impossible to please God, but hope pleases God to a greater degree because we have come to know His ways and trust Him as He causes us to pass through the darkness (Isaiah 50:10). We are able to journey through unpleasant and confusing times without becoming offended at Him (John 6:61-69).

Being Made Hope for Others

As noted in Follette’s poem on the work of trouble in our lives, the outcome is that we will have passed through

circumstances which become a foundation for others to put their hope in God. Our testimony of God's faithfulness is added to the testimonies of saints in the scriptures as well as others through the ages since. Paul expresses this well.

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

The comfort we received from God as we passed through trouble can be a blessing we can pass on to others who are facing similar circumstances. The King James Version uses the word *consolation*, which has the meaning of the word *comfort*. Because we have suffered with our own troubles, we find that we have an understanding and compassion that we would not have had before. Passing through difficulties and trials qualifies us with experience in knowing God's ways and manner of doing things. We are comforted as we receive comfort from Him in these times. This becomes a foundation of hope that can minister comfort to others as they pass through similar situations. God does not waste anything. Every situation can become a blessing for others, as well as ourselves, as we come to trust and put our hope in Him.

Faith Governed by Love

While recognizing the necessity of faith to please God, we also consider the importance of faith being motivated by love. Paul identifies this necessity in his famous chapter on love: *“And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity (love), I am nothing”* (1 Corinthians 13:2). One could possess faith powerful enough to move mountains, yet without love there would be no benefit to the possessor of such faith.

In his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul further writes concerning *“faith which worketh by love”* (Galatians 5:6). God has intended that the outworking of faith in our lives develops through the process stated in Romans 5:1-5. The beginning is faith working in us, which leads to passing through tribulation, which leads to our gaining God’s approval, which leads to hope, which leads to *“the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts”* (Romans 5:5). The whole process is designed by God to bring us to a place that the faith working in our lives is motivated by God’s love.

At times, Christians may be mightily used of God and demonstrate powerful faith. Some become arrogant and lift up themselves in their own minds above others because of the display of faith that God has initiated in them. Faith governed by the love of God seeks to bring only benefit to others without exalting self. Paul addresses this in two different letters:

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word,

*even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”
(Galatians 5:13-14).*

*“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.”
(Romans 15:1-3).*

True faith that is motivated by love always seeks to do the very best for others without self-seeking or self-serving. God intends that His love will develop more fully through faith working in a person's life.

Jesus presents a very compelling concept in the Sermon on the Mount:

*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity
(Matthew 7:21-23).*

In order to visualize what Jesus is teaching here one must understand what He meant by “*I never knew you.*” This phrase does not indicate that He never knew that they existed but rather that they had no intimate relationship developed with Him. The meaning that Jesus intended was the concept of the word *knew* in the situation between Joseph and Mary found in Matthew 1:24-25: “*Then Joseph being raised from sleep did*

*as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And **knew** her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS."*

The works that bring glory to God and remain for eternity are those that are born out of our relationship with Jesus. We must know Him intimately and conceive spiritual seed that brings forth the good works that He accepts.

It is possible to present to Him powerful deeds that would seem to be highly acceptable in His sight but which He utterly refuses. He will only put His stamp of approval upon works that He has conceived within us by that word of faith which He has initiated. He gives His name only to His own seed.

Because they never knew Him, He commanded them to depart from Him and called them "workers of iniquity." This word *iniquity*, can be translated from the Greek as *lawless ones* (Strong's, 1986, G459). These have conceived works without an intimate relationship with the Lord. Upon presentation to the Lord, these are rejected because He is not the father of such works. Even though they called Him "Lord," their works were rejected because they were not submitted to Him. Their works were not produced out of a love relationship with Him that resulted in faith. It is out of such a concept that Paul declared, "*for whatsoever is not of faith is sin*" (Romans 14:23).

Faith and love combine together in thought in a number of Paul's letters. Paul mentioned to the Thessalonian church that Timothy had spoken of their faith and love (1 Thessalonians 3:6). He exhorts Timothy to hold on to sound words in faith and love (2 Timothy 1:13). In a

greeting to Philemon, Paul tells that he had heard of his faith and love toward the Lord Jesus. These are a few examples of these two elements being linked.

Faith, Hope, and Love

Paul joins together faith, hope, and love in several scriptures. We have already looked together at 1 Corinthians 13:13. He also uses these concepts together in 1 Thessalonians 5:8: *“But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.”* It becomes obvious that God intends certain elements to function in relationship to one another.

These three are found together in Paul’s commendation to the Thessalonians: *“Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father”* (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

In addressing the seven churches of Asia, Jesus speaks this to the church of Ephesus: *“I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil”* (Revelation 2:2). The church of Ephesus had been a mighty, vibrant church at one time. Paul spent over two years teaching there and laying good foundations. It is possible that the other six churches of Asia addressed here were started as a result of evangelism centering out from the church of Ephesus. She was very possibly a mother church that was involved in birthing others.

The commendation seems to be a noble one at first consideration. Jesus spoke of their works, their labor, and their patience. However, when compared to Paul’s greeting to the church of Thessalonica, one begins to see what decline

had transpired at Ephesus. Thessalonica was producing works of faith. Ephesus only produced works. They were apparently not hearing from the Lord, which is essential for works of faith to be produced. In neglecting or forsaking their relationship with the Lord they produced works out of their own mind or desire. Perhaps they had continued an old directive given by God that He had long since left.

The church of Thessalonica generated a labor of love. The church of Ephesus labored, but the life-giving, motivating force of love was absent. How tedious is labor without the force of love propelling it! Ephesus had left her first love, the Lord Jesus, who is the source of all true love.

Thessalonica possessed a patience sustained by hope. The hope was gone from Ephesus. She maintained a grind-it-out patience that was not anchored in godly hope. Ephesus had works, labor, and patience, but the fruit of the Spirit—faith, hope, and love—were absent. *“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”* (Revelation 2:4). They did not maintain their relationship with the Lord and it waned. At some point they did not hear His voice anymore and the life was gone.

May we learn from their failure! Activity cannot replace relationship with Him. When we begin to forsake responding to His voice, we are headed down a pathway similar to that which Ephesus had taken. Ephesus was backslidden and needed to repent. *“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent”* (Revelation 2:4-5).

How important that we each maintain our relationship and have a ready ear to hear His voice. *"The companions hearken to thy voice: **cause me to hear it**" (Song of Songs 8:13).*

CHAPTER 10

Hearing God's Voice - The Foundation for True Righteousness

God's Righteousness and Self-righteousness

As we have seen, hearing God's voice is an essential part of our lives that has a great effect upon many other aspects of our Christian walk. Hearing the voice of the Lord is necessary for the development of faith. As we grow in the Lord, we come to know His various names. Jeremiah 23:6 identifies Him as "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." He desires that we become like Him.

True righteousness results from a vital relationship with the Lord and faith growing in our lives. Without hearing God's voice we cannot live the righteousness of God. God rejects self-righteousness. God is perfectly righteous in everything. *"I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right" (Isaiah 45:19).* His ways cannot be improved upon because He is perfectly right in everything.

This is why we think so differently than He. We must repent and be changed. *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).* We must allow God's working to bring a transformation in us. This work

is called repentance and conversion. (For further study on repentance, read *Changed From Glory to Glory* by Robert A. Tucker, 1994)

We will never be satisfied with our own righteousness. Paul declared this desire: *“And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith”* (Philippians 3:9). He recognized that only the word of faith could produce true righteousness in his life.

Imputed Righteousness

A question arises, however: Are we not declared righteous by God as we believe in the work that Jesus finished for us? Yes, we are clothed with a robe of righteousness and declared to be righteous before God. No matter what our deeds of the past, God views us through the blood of Jesus and sees us as righteous before Him. This is called imputed righteousness. Because we have believed and received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, God the Father attributes to us the righteousness of Christ. We are fully accepted by God. Paul defines this for us with an example from the life of Abraham.

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. (Romans 4:20-25).

God's righteousness was attributed to Abraham because he believed that which God spoke to him. All that was necessary on his part was that he be fully persuaded of the truth of what God had spoken. For this, God imputed His righteousness to Abraham. Paul continues on to make the point that this truth was not only for Abraham's sake, but for us as well. If we fully believe what God speaks to us, He imputes His righteousness to us also.

We are not made righteous because we follow some law, even though God prescribes it. The purpose of the law is to identify and expose sin. No works that we can do within ourselves can ever produce the righteousness of God in us. Paul further clarifies this:

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference (Romans 3:20-22).

As God speaks to us that word of faith, we respond and believe Him; then He confers His righteousness upon us. The law is not able to transform our lives and make us righteous. It is an act accomplished by Him, as we believe Him. He imputes to us His righteousness.

Imparted Righteousness

We can know that God the Father receives us because Jesus has imputed His righteousness to us. But God does not stop here. He wants us to be full of righteousness, not only clothed

with it. He has purposed that righteousness emanate from our innermost being, that we live only His righteousness. This is demonstrated in the life of Noah.

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Hebrews 11:7).

Noah believed what God spoke to him and obeyed. He became a possessor of the righteousness that can be imparted into the life of a believer only as he responds to the *rhema* that produces faith. God gave Noah the *rhema*, he believed God, and the righteousness of God was imparted to him. He and his family were saved. "*Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death*" (Proverbs 11:4). As God spoke to Noah, he responded to God, he was made righteous, and he was delivered from death, as the Proverb says.

The action of obedience to a *rhema* from God is different from the action of trying to keep a written law to produce righteousness. This is not to say that we should not obey God's laws. The problem is that God's laws are general in many cases and do not always address the specific issues of my own heart. The Pharisees did not possess true righteousness, but were hypocrites only playing a part that produced self-righteousness.

The prophet Isaiah wrote about the concepts of imputed righteousness and imparted righteousness:

*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, **he hath covered me with the robe of***

righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will **cause righteousness and praise to spring forth** before all the nations (Isaiah 61:10-11).

“He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” defines the thought of imputed righteousness. The Lord covers us with His righteousness. We appear as righteous in His presence. This is not to say that we need no further work. Isaiah 32:17 speaks of the “work” of righteousness and that is accomplished by impartation.

“He will cause righteousness . . . to spring forth” denotes the work of righteousness that He imparts to us. As we respond to the word of the Lord, righteousness becomes an integral part of us. This imparted righteousness is acquired through a process of the Holy Spirit working in our lives meticulously throughout our lifetime. It is this imparted righteousness with which we are most concerned.

Righteousness by Faith

Man naturally seeks to save himself by his own works. He also has the tendency to seek to make himself righteous. Paul addresses this problem to the Romans.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach (Romans 10:1-8).

Paul clearly understood that righteousness only comes by faith. He could see that Israel sought zealously to fulfill God's righteousness. They wanted to be right with God but they sought to be so by their own means and strength. The root of their problem is found in their response when God spoke to them at Mount Sinai. They rejected hearing the living word that was spoken from God's mouth.

They assumed they could hear the law of the Lord from Moses and follow it in their own strength. If Moses would tell them the rules and God's expectation of them, they would stay within the boundaries and do the will of God. Of course, their disobedience proved that this was impossible in their own strength. Later, Jesus pronounced the Pharisees guilty of keeping the letter of the law, but missing the heart of God's intent.

Like Israel of old and the Pharisees, many of God's people want to know the boundaries, religiously walking the lines of those boundaries without stepping over. Their hearts are hardened against the voice of the Holy Spirit who seeks to change the motive of heart and produce the true righteousness of God. Trying to fulfill the righteousness of God and the law without relationship with God and hearing His voice

produces legalism and hypocrisy. The power to fulfill God's will is resident in His voice. The word of faith produces the righteousness of God in us. *"This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 54:17).*

As individuals we each have our own set of problems that require specific identification and solution. One law does not fit all in most situations. The Holy Spirit knows us intimately and is able to pinpoint our particular need.

Remember the word that Jesus spoke to the rich young ruler who desired to inherit eternal life? *"Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich" (Luke 18:22-23).* The young man had kept all the law from his childhood. But Jesus, anointed by the Holy Ghost, was able to identify that which bound this man. This was his opportunity to respond to the word of faith spoken by Jesus, but he declined and allowed the love of his money to rob him of true eternal riches.

The Holy Spirit identifies root problems that plague us. Our tendency is often to seek to deal with unimportant issues or circumvent the heart of the matter. What God is speaking to us at the present should be our utmost concern. He understands the perfect time and method to deal with and change the unrighteousness in us. If we seek to self-analyze and reform ourselves, we often do not get to the root of the problem. The Holy Spirit knows us perfectly and imparts the righteousness of God to us.

Many years ago, a lady in our church gave a testimony of how God spoke to her to have her hair cut. That seemed

unusual to me in that she had long, beautiful hair, which she kept neat in a nice style. However, when she gave the reason God spoke to her I understood why. She shared that her motive in styling her hair the way she did was that it was “high fashion.” Although others may not have been aware of her motive and would not in any way have condemned her hairstyle, the Holy Spirit was able to pinpoint an area of unrighteousness. In obedience to the word of faith to her heart, she was made righteous in that motive of heart. God had revealed to her not only her wrong motive but also the pride of her heart. This “law” that God spoke for her sake would not necessarily be appropriate or apply to others.

Jesus always fulfilled the righteousness of God. He responded perfectly to the will of His Father and always obeyed His voice. He never did anything but the very best in every situation. These scriptures give testimony to this:

“...The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19).

“...I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him” (John 8:28-29).

Faith and the Law

Many have supposed and taught that Jesus came to do away with the law. The Holy Spirit has made very clear that this is not the case. To the contrary, Jesus shows us how we can be successful in keeping God’s holy laws.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17-20).

This portion of scripture makes clear that Jesus supported the law. Why would anyone wish to destroy the law? The law is perfect and expresses what is best for us. Its only problem is that it has no inherent power to help us fulfill its requirements. Jesus came proclaiming that He would show us how to successfully complete God's holy requirements. Jesus perfectly fulfilled all the law as an example to us.

Paul recognized that the law couldn't produce righteousness, only define some of its boundaries. *"And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9)*. If a Christian seeks to fulfill the law in his own strength it only produces self-righteousness. God's righteousness is a result of faith working in us. Paul provides a detailed explanation of God's purpose for the law.

What shall we say then? is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me

all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good (Romans 7:7-16).

The purpose of the law is to convince us how we have fallen short of the glory of God. The law reveals and defines our sin. Paul again declares our utter inability to fulfill the law without the power God gives us with the word of faith He speaks to us.

We should never despise the law of God. It is essential that we understand that the law can only be fulfilled in us by the power of God working in us. We can exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees who sought to fulfill the law of God in their own strength and miss the true intent of God's purpose. We can successfully fulfill what God had in mind and please His heart.

May we each allow God to establish our hearts in true righteousness by the work of faith that He has provided for us. Not only will He be satisfied with us but we also will be fully satisfied with Him and His miraculous working in us.

“And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever” (Isaiah 32:17).

CHAPTER 11

The Foundation of Wisdom

The Importance of Wisdom

“For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it” (Proverbs 8:11). Scripture reveals many elements necessary to our well being that are provided through Christ Jesus.

Wisdom that comes only from God is the most desired. Aging does not guarantee that wisdom will increase. True wisdom is not necessarily connected to experience, as we shall investigate later in our study.

David and Bathsheba sought to prepare Solomon to reign as king one day. Much instruction was necessary to help prepare him for what lay ahead. They gave him many admonitions to seek wisdom above all else. *“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding”* (Proverbs 4:7). Any skills that could be acquired or abilities that could be developed were nothing compared to the importance of getting wisdom. Riches, power, and influence were not to be compared to the significance of wisdom.

The Book of Proverbs personifies wisdom in several different portions, further defining its importance.

Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words,

saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil (Proverbs 1:20-33).

Wisdom cries out to those who are simple, inviting them to partake of wisdom that gives life and saves from ultimate disaster. No one is refused who seeks for true wisdom. There is no respect of persons. All who are willing may partake. Yet, the essence here is that many refuse to come when beckoned by wisdom.

Wisdom further cries out to the simple: *"I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness"* (Proverbs 8:17-18). Wisdom is attracted by those who desire and love wisdom. Both enduring riches and honor accompany it. Righteousness is also a product of wisdom. We shall later

see that wisdom is intricately tied with our subject of hearing God's voice.

"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Ephesians 3:10). God has intended that the church should be full of His wisdom and manifest it to the spiritual realm of beings. What an awesome plan in the heart of God – that His wisdom is shown forth through such incapable beings as mankind in the weakness of their humanity! For those spiritual powers that previously rebelled against God, it is testimony that the victory is all wrought by God, and not resident in the being itself. These spiritual powers, which were created much more powerful and able than man, are humbled when the wisdom of God emanates forth through His church. Those spiritual powers that remained true to God are awed by His manifold wisdom. Certainly their admiration and praise for Him must multiply as they behold His awesome works in man! *"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Romans 11:33).*

*The wisdom
of God is
intricately
tied with
hearing
God's voice.*

Defining Wisdom

Some would naturally assume that wisdom might be learned or acquired through study. They view it as a skill that may be developed over a period of time. Age and experience do not in themselves produce wisdom. *"I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them*

understanding. Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment” (Job 32:7-9).

What is wisdom, then? Wisdom is often considered to be knowledge or the proper application of knowledge. However, wisdom is more than that. Man's knowledge is incomplete and insufficient for making decisions. When considering the tenor of scripture, one begins to realize that wisdom is the gift giving the ability to make right choices and do what is best in each situation—to act or behave wisely. Wisdom does not naturally reside in man. Because he does not have complete knowledge, even if he were able to perfectly assimilate it into the best choice, he won't have the complete picture.

Wisdom is a gift that can be received only from God. With Him alone are perfect knowledge and the ability to assimilate it into the right decision. He alone is omniscient. He is the personification of all wisdom. Job beautifully explains to us these concepts.

But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the

air. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God under-standeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof (Job 28:12-23).

Job had understanding that wisdom is resident in God and can be obtained only from Him. A search to find it in any other place is futile. The good news is that God is willing to freely share His wisdom with those who will seek Him for it in His way!

Receiving Wisdom

God invites us to search for true wisdom that comes only from Him. We previously considered wisdom personified and crying out to passersby. James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ and the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, gives us this admonition: *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5)*. What a wonderful invitation from the heart of God! He is ready, waiting, and anxious to share His wisdom with us.

There is, however, a limiting factor beyond our asking Him. *“For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy” (Ecclesiastes 2:26)*. God gives wisdom to those who are good in His sight. Only those who are seeking God and seeking to do His will are eligible to receive His wisdom.

Obedience to what God speaks to us is an essential response on our part as well.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in

the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? (Deuteronomy 4:5-7).

Wisdom comes to those who will keep what God commands them. We shall see that hearing and responding to God's voice is vital. If we genuinely love the Lord and want His best we will obey Him. The way is opened for us to receive the wisdom of God.

If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me (John 14:23-24).

Jesus, who is wisdom, will come and abide with us. *"And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding" (Daniel 2:21).* To those who have a desire for godly wisdom and are seeking and obeying Him, God gives His wisdom. A person is given wisdom when he sets his feet in the pathway of wisdom. The more wisdom a person acquires from God, the more God gives to him. *"For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matthew 13:12).*

God not only wants to give us wisdom, but also make us wise people. Solomon possessed great wisdom from God,

but it never really became a way of life to him. He never came to practice what he preached. Wisdom, if practiced, will keep us from falling into sin.

Solomon and Wisdom

King Solomon is known for the wisdom he received from God. Although Solomon did not let the wisdom he received guide his own life and personal affairs, that wisdom was manifest in his rule over Israel. How did Solomon acquire it?

A key surfaces in an account provided in scripture when he was made king. *“Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?”* (1 Kings 3:9). God approached Solomon in a dream giving him the opportunity to ask whatever he desired from the Lord. His request was that God would give him an understanding heart. The Hebrew word used for “an understanding heart” means *to hear intelligently*. Solomon desired more than all else to have a hearing heart, a heart that heard what was on God’s heart.

This provides us a key to understanding how one obtains wisdom from God. Whenever we are confronted with a decision, we should look to the Lord, seeking to hear from Him on the matter at hand, as did Solomon. As often is the case, scripture continues on with an example that demonstrates the truth. Expressed in the same chapter, 1 Kings 3:16-27, is an account of a seemingly impossible situation that Solomon was called upon to judge.

Two harlots had each had a baby. During the night one of the women apparently rolled onto her baby smothering it to

death. When she realized what had happened, she arose and placed her dead child in the bed with the other mother and took the other woman's baby as her own.

In the morning when the other mother awoke, she realized that the dead child was not her own child, but belonged to the other woman. Unable to resolve the controversy, they went to King Solomon for a decision. "Simple," you say. "Let them have a DNA test to determine the rightful mother." Apparently they did not have the knowledge to do so in their day. But Solomon knew God had seen what had taken place and who was the rightful mother of the live baby. God gave him the correct answer, as well as a way to demonstrate to all who the true mother was, so that all could rest at ease in the matter.

Solomon called for a sword to divide the baby between the two women. Of course the true mother of the child would not allow that to happen even if it meant giving her child to the other woman. Everyone present was able to determine the true mother at that point. *"And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment"* (1 Kings 3:28). Solomon asked God for wisdom, and he heard the voice of the Lord telling him the whole of the matter, as well as how to resolve the case. By the way, this was all decided much faster than a DNA test! Israel knew that it was the wisdom of God given to Solomon.

Joseph

Another excellent example of a man receiving wisdom from God comes to us in the life of Joseph. Joseph was brought hastily from prison to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Not only

did he interpret the dreams, but he also gave counsel to Pharaoh to guide him through the turbulent times ahead.

Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine (Genesis 41:33-36).

Pharaoh knew that Joseph had heard from God and that God had given him wisdom. Pharaoh gives further testimony to this in the following statement: *“And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art”* (Genesis 41:38-39). Joseph was given the Egyptian name of *Zaphnaphpaaneah* (Genesis 41:45) meaning *the God speaks and He lives* (New American Standard Concordance, 1981, H6847). Joseph had received wisdom from God as God spoke to him and revealed the solutions to the upcoming situation.

Life Governed by Wisdom

“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom” (Proverbs 4:7). Wisdom touches every facet of life. The earth was created by the wisdom of God. *“O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches”* (Psalms 104:24). Noah built the ark as he received the wisdom

of God. Moses fulfilled the construction of the tabernacle by the wisdom of God. David defeated all of Israel's enemies as he received instruction in wisdom for warfare from the Lord.

Farmers are dependent upon the wisdom of God to instruct them in effective agricultural practices.

Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rie in their place? For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him. For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread corn is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen. This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working. (Isaiah 28:23-29).

Scripture speaks of many aspects of life that are governed by wisdom. Here are a few other examples:

Weaving (Exodus 35:25-26)

Garment making (Exodus 28:3)

The affairs of the house (Proverbs 14:1; 31:10-31)

Government (Proverbs 8:15)

The ministry (Ezra 7:25)

Moral purity (Proverbs 7:4-5) (Bailey, 1997, pp. 29-30)

As man cooperates with God's instruction, he is blessed. When he relies upon his own knowledge and understanding,

disaster often follows. How often has man sought to prove God's wisdom inferior, only to find out after a time that God knew best all along! Mad cow disease is a prime example of man's wisdom and the disaster that ensues. Thousands of animals had to be destroyed because of the foolishness of man trying to feed animal material to vegetarian beasts.

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain (1 Corinthians 3:18-20).

Those who teach God's Word must take care to do so in the wisdom of God and not rely upon man's ability. "And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not" (Ezra 7:25).

Paul also encourages Christian teachers to teach in the power of the Spirit and of the wisdom of God and not man's ability.

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory (1 Corinthians 2:4-7).

Many preachers and teachers use powerful and eloquent vocabulary, which can be very effective. But if their teaching relies upon their ability to mesmerize people with their linguistic wizardry, then this is foolishness and will not endure. Paul certainly would have had the ability, but rather trusted in the Lord to anoint him with the Spirit of power and wisdom in his preaching.

Two Sources of Wisdom

James identifies two separate types and sources of wisdom – the wisdom of God that descends from above and human, earthly wisdom. He also provides us with character identity of each type of wisdom.

Earthly, Sensual, Devilish

“But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (James 3:14-16). Bitter envying, strife, confusion, every evil work—the wisdom that evolves from man’s own heart and the earthly realm manifests itself by its fruit, called the works of the flesh. At first it may appear very noble and superior, but in the end it is exposed for what it really is. Its origins are fully revealed. Not only is this wisdom carnal and earthly, but sensual and even devilish.

This type of wisdom results in envy and strife. *“Jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame” (Song of Songs 8:6).* Envy and jealousy go hand in hand causing torture and havoc in the individual and many others as well.

Some of the so-called “earthly wisdom” has its origins from the satanic realm – doctrines of devils (1 Timothy 4:1). This wisdom certainly contains areas of truth, which makes it attractive to people. All false religions have espoused certain areas of truth. However, this truth is perverted because of its source – the kingdom of darkness.

When Jesus faced His temptation in the wilderness, Satan used scripture to tempt Him.

And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone (Luke 4:9-11).

The scripture is the truth. We would all recognize this quote from Psalm 91:11-12 as the word of God. But Satan used this truth in a perverted fashion in order to cause Jesus to fail. This is the nature of devilish wisdom—it always destroys.

This problem carries over into many areas of present-day life as well. *“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8).* Aspects of psychology and psychiatry identify what Paul speaks of here. While they possess many areas of truth, that truth is not complete and pure as is the wisdom of God.

Angeline had carried a depression upon her life for many years. We sought the Lord many times for a release from this terrible plague. During a prayer meeting the Lord began to speak about the two wisdoms in James 3. The source of

the depression was the wisdom that is earthly, sensual, and devilish. The Lord pointed out that the depression came when she took a class on psychology in high school. Satan was able to bring years of distress through this opening. As she repented of opening her spirit to psychology, freedom came from the depression and has lasted to this day.

Since sharing this testimony, we have received numerous accounts from people who have had a similar experience of finding freedom from depression after repenting concerning their involvement with psychology. This portion of a letter we received from a missionary friend provides further testimony to this fact.

I want to thank Angeline for sharing how she had received the key to freedom from depression in her life. A few days prior to hearing your testimony my husband had commented on the fact that I had been depressed since our marriage. I knew that this was an ongoing problem that persisted since my teenage years. When I heard your testimony, the Lord quickened me about my own search for answers and relief from childhood problems. During high school I had read much on child psychology, innocently searching the field of psychological studies for personal identity and solutions to personal deficiencies. The Holy Spirit showed me that this had opened the door and was the source of the depression in my life. After sharing with my husband, we prayed together for release from this terrible burden. I asked God to forgive me for opening this door into my soul, even though it was done in ignorance and innocence. Thank God He has brought new release and freedom in my life.

Human attempts to solve these problems are futile without God, who is the source of all true wisdom. These human efforts to relieve the sufferings of others may be discerned as being compassionate, in a sense, and are probably offered with the best interest in mind for those they seek to help. While man can study behavioral patterns and recognize many similarities and possible solutions, only the Holy Spirit can precisely pinpoint the exact solution to an individual's needs. The Holy Spirit alone has the whole truth and appropriately applies it in an individual's situation. When solutions are derived from the satanic realm, a person is left in bondage with a cloud of oppression rather than relief and freedom.

Nehemiah and the Restorers

Because Judah refused to obey God's voice, the Babylonians took them into captivity. After a prescribed time of judgment, God returned a group of them to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Later, God and the king commissioned Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem, rebuild the walls, and establish government, law, and order. As they began the task of rebuilding the walls, they faced major opposition by the culturally mixed people who had moved in after the destruction of Jerusalem, led by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem.

At the beginning, these evil men who opposed God's purposes threatened the Jews who rebuilt the walls. However, when the walls were complete they changed tactics and sought to join the Jews in the endeavor.

Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the

temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me. My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear. So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days. And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God (Nehemiah 6:10-16).

The enemy's plan was to join forces in compromise in order to ultimately defeat the project. Nehemiah refused to respond because he knew that these men were evil and nothing good could come from them. Even though they spoke kind words, their evil intentions were to oppose and destroy God's plan.

This account in the book of Nehemiah provides an excellent account of the problem that exists between the purposes of God and the spirit of psychiatry and psychology. While these fields of study provide parallel truth to the word of God, they are not The Truth. That comes only from Jesus who is Truth and Wisdom.

This wisdom from below has infiltrated the church, and the Spirit of Counsel, that functions by the power of the Holy

Ghost, is laid aside. Ultimately, people are not set free but rather detoured from God's best and blinded by this devilish wisdom.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer shared similar observations on the usefulness of human psychology. He contrasts the two wisdoms of which James speaks.

The most experienced psychologist or observer of human nature knows infinitely less of the human heart than the simplest Christian who lives beneath the cross of Jesus. The greatest psychological insight, ability, and experience cannot grasp this one thing: what sin is. Worldly wisdom knows what distress and weakness and failure are, but it does not know the godlessness of men. And so it also does not know that man is destroyed only by his sin and can be healed only by forgiveness. Only the Christian knows this. In the presence of a psychiatrist I can only be a sick man; in the presence of a Christian brother I can dare to be a sinner. The psychiatrist must first search my heart and yet he never plumbs its ultimate depth. The Christian brother knows when I come to him: here is a sinner like myself, a godless man who wants to confess and yearns for God's forgiveness. The psychiatrist views me as if there were no God. The brother views me as I am before the judging and merciful God in the cross of Jesus Christ. It is not a lack of psychological knowledge but lack of love for the crucified Jesus Christ that makes us so poor and inefficient in brotherly confession (Bonhoeffer, 1954, pp.118-119).

The field of psychology tends to circle problems and find others to blame, creating an impossible situation for the patient because others are identified as being at fault for the problem. Psychologists often deny the personal

responsibility of their patients. They often deny God who provides the only source of true hope. The true need of a man is not to find a reason or excuse for his problems and behavior but rather to have the humility to acknowledge what the Holy Spirit declares to be so about himself. Hearing God's voice will lead us to true solutions as we respond to Him.

The Character of Godly Wisdom

The wisdom from above stands in stark contrast to human or devilish wisdom. It stands erect and straight like pillars giving strength and stability to a temple. James gave seven character qualities identifying wisdom to be like the seven pillars of wisdom in Proverbs 9:1.

Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace (James 3:13, 17-18).

Pure

The wisdom that comes from above (from God) produces a purity of body, soul, and spirit. David and Bathsheba intertwined the thought of seeking for wisdom in order to be preserved from sexual impurity throughout their instruction to Solomon in Proverbs 1-9. How important to be preserved for the right mate without bringing intruders from the past into marriage. How crucial to be protected in marriage from a strange or adulterous woman.

When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee...To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life (Proverbs 2:10-11; 16-19).

Wisdom from God, along with the fear of the Lord, help preserve one from such horrible snares. The purity of godly wisdom also influences the soul and spirit as well. Godly wisdom produces pure motives in every aspect of life. Actions that are influenced by subversive motives will not bring the desired results in the final outcome of life. The Lord knows our true motives for the actions we take and, ultimately, others will see them also. Such divisiveness borne out of impure motive will lead to strife and contention.

Godly wisdom produces a heart like that of Nathanael. *“Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” (John 1:47).* There were no hidden motives or agenda in his heart that would trip up others and create strife and contention. May we have such purity as well, as we hear God’s voice speaking to us the *rhema* of life that leads to true wisdom.

Peaceable

When a person’s life is governed by the wisdom that descends from above, it brings peace into turbulent situations rather than igniting them into something more intense. Jesus declared, *“Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9).* Wisdom helps

uphold personal peace in the midst of stormy circumstances. It helps foster peace in relationships with others when facing explosive situations. We are thus commanded, *"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men"* (Romans 12:18).

The person with the wisdom of God will respond in a way that, as much as possible, promotes peace rather than contention in situations. Wisdom helps to defuse situations at times.

Many years ago I traveled from the school I was attending with a gospel trio. We visited a church with a lady pastor—a godly, retired missionary. Her sister, who lived with her, was backing out of the driveway when a car struck her vehicle. No one was injured, but by the time we all arrived on the scene the verbal war was on, as accusations volleyed back and forth between the two women involved in the accident.

As the lady pastor saw what was happening, she simply asked her sister if she had insurance to cover the accident. When she answered that she did, she encouraged her to just turn it over to the insurance company and let them handle the situation. With a question and a few words of wisdom from God, the lady pastor had completely defused the situation. The peace of God came flooding into the atmosphere and tranquility prevailed. That happened more than 35 years ago, but that pastor's conduct in the situation has influenced me to this day!

Gentle

King David declared of God, *"Thy gentleness hath made me great"* (Psalm 18:35). God was always gentle in His dealings

with David even though some of David's actions warranted a harsh response from God. This action on God's part caused David to prosper in doing God's will.

The wisdom of God is manifest in this type of reaction in His people toward others. God will speak in situations and adjust our responses by lowering our volume or tone so that we do not injure them and hinder them from receiving the help they need through us from God. *"A soft (Gr. – tender) answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger"* (Proverbs 15:1).

How important to deal in wisdom with those who are young in the Lord or weak in spirit! With the gentleness of Christ people can be saved from destruction. The Holy Spirit will often speak to us to treat people gently as would a nursing mother her baby (1 Thessalonians 2:7).

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

Easy to be Entreated

Flexibility and the ability to stand immovable are two essential elements in life that are at opposite ends of the spectrum. A key to successful living is knowing when to do what. Wisdom from God guides us to know when to yield and when not to yield. His still, small voice prompts us to yield when issues are insignificant and standing for truth is

not at stake. The wisdom of God makes it easy for us to yield in appropriate situations.

When Angeline and I first began our ministry more than 30 years ago, I was quite unyielding in many decisions I had to make regarding church leadership. The conditions of that time greatly affected me. The Charismatic Revival was taking place. Many Christian leaders began to compromise and yield in critical matters of leadership, letting down God's standards which an unruly generation entering the church were not ready to embrace. Indeed, some standards placed by man and not God's Word had to be dismissed, and rightfully so. However, I witnessed compromise which was taking place in certain realms that I believe has caused a moral decline and disintegration of the family, destroying the church and nation to this day.

*The wisdom
of God
makes it
easy for us
to yield in
appropriate
situations.*

Wanting to be faithful to the call and people of God, I purposed in my heart that I would not compromise and yield as I had witnessed so many leaders of the day doing. Consequently, as I look back, I realize that I was unyielding in many circumstances that were insignificant. Righteousness and God's honor were not at stake.

Wives have a way of assisting God in helping a man decide which matters are critical and which are not. I learned this lesson first in our family life and then in the church. I am so thankful for the Lord's faithfulness and my wife's appeal to some of those non-critical decisions that I had made. We have seen many husbands who have not learned when to yield. Some of them later see the results of not being easy

to be entreated and swing too far in the opposite direction, letting down critical godly standards. Some have lost their children to backsliding and immorality because of being too rigid or too loose.

Parents can be unyielding to their children, not allowing the children to make their own decisions in non-critical issues. This can cause the children to become angry and inept at making critical decisions when they are older.

In an interview with a four-star general in command of the U.S. Army, the question was asked what role his parents played in affecting his leadership later in life. His response was that they give him the opportunity to make non-critical decisions at a young age, but helped him understand that he would have to live with the consequences of those decisions. This had its impact upon his lifetime decision-making process.

How important for parents to possess this virtue of godly wisdom! But parents must also know when not to yield to their children in issues of God's absolutes.

If I am immovable in a decision, I now make certain that I can defend my position by rightly dividing the word of truth, or a *rhema* from God that others recognize as such, with confirmation. Matters such as the timing of the annual church picnic are not critical. I may have an opinion as to what may work best, but that can easily be overruled with a better idea.

There are, however, issues that I will not yield to—matters of righteousness, holiness, and obedience to God. I want God's approval more than anything else. By His grace and

wisdom, I trust to always have the humility to know when to and not to yield. It can only be as we continue to hear His voice and receive His wisdom. Oh, how we all need the wisdom of God in these turbulent times!

Full of Mercy and Good Works

Mercy reveals itself as the highest of God's character qualities. Mercy means to stoop in kindness to an inferior. God shows His great mercy in compassionate action toward us. He desires us to show mercy to others. *"Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful"* (Luke 6:36).

The quality identified here is mercy and good works. Forgiveness and compassion are manifest in taking action to help others recover from their transgression. It is not enough to show mercy and walk away. Action must follow that will assist the individual in recovering out of the snare of the devil and setting his feet in a straight pathway. Wisdom is required to know what help a recovering person may need. This is the reason scripture gives this admonition: *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted"* (Galatians 6:1). The spiritual maturity of wisdom from God is needed to minister the good works that are necessary to accompany God's mercy.

Without Partiality

Partiality always creates strife, envy, and tension in relationships. Isaac and Rebecca were each partial toward a different son. The outcome of that partiality manifested itself in problems with each son.

James speaks very pointedly to the problem that is a product of earthly wisdom: *“But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors”* (James 2:9). He addresses the issue of preference for the wealthy. Jesus extended this impartiality not only to those we love but also to ones we would perhaps disdain.

And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil (Luke 6:31-35).

Only wisdom from God can convince us to respond to people in this way. This is the nature of divine wisdom. Little wonder that God says wisdom is the principal thing and that we should desire it more than rubies, silver, or gold.

Without Hypocrisy

Jesus is Truth; there is no deceit in Him. He wants us also to be full of the truth. Jesus spoke openly and often against the scribes and Pharisees because they were full of hypocrisy. *“Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity”* (Matthew 23:28).

Hypocrisy is acting a part when in reality a person is not that, but something else. God wants us to be real with no

pretense. He sees us the way we really are and He wants us to “*speak the truth in our heart*” (*Psalms 15:2*). If we harbor deceit we will ultimately disqualify ourselves. God does not reject us because we have problems, but He is unable to do anything for us if we will not come honestly before Him and acknowledge our lack. Trying to appear righteous in our own strength repels Him from us.

In every aspect of our daily lives we must allow wisdom to penetrate and guide our being. Our marriage, family relationships, work ethic, worship, and ministry must be conformed to the image of Christ. It is impossible to fake it. One day we will all stand before Him who sees and knows everything. We want to stand unashamed and hear the joy of His heart.

The Seven Pillars of Wisdom

- Pure
- Peaceable
- Gentle
- Easy to be entreated
- Full of mercy and good works
- Without partiality
- Without hypocrisy

The House that Stands

As Jesus concluded His Sermon on the Mount, He made this declaration:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his

house upon a rock And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it (Matthew 7:24-27).

God gave Solomon great wisdom. He had a hearing heart that enabled him to receive what was on God's heart and mind. Yet, Solomon was not a wise man. Jesus made clear that those who do what He speaks to them become wise men, not those who only hear.

We have been studying the seven pillars of wisdom that support the house. *"Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars" (Proverbs 9:1).* One may possess all knowledge and not be a wise person, as we have seen. Obedience to the wisdom that God speaks will build a house that endures the storms of life. The raging storm will beat against every house. Will your house stand? Those that are built upon obedience to the wisdom of God will stand firm. Sadly, those built upon knowledge without obedience cannot endure, but are doomed to failure.

We are living in a day of apostasy when many have turned away and forsaken the truth. Their spiritual houses that would provide vision, covering, and safety for generations to come have fallen in the storm. The seven pillars of wisdom were not placed through obedience to the voice of the Lord. Great is the fall of those houses. The damage and loss can seldom be fully realized in this life. But what will it be like in eternity when the veil is lifted and we behold matters as they truly exist?

May we, each one, receive from God the abundant grace that is necessary to become a wise person. As we have studied earlier, that grace only comes as we hear His voice. May we not think like Israel, who assumed that once they received God's command, they could fulfill it in their own strength. He will provide everything that we need to finish our course successfully. *"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"* (Philippians 1:6).

Let your house be built upon that solid Rock, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Father, who are wisdom, and it will remain firmly established. *"That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"* (Colossians 2:2-3).

Moses' Request

As Moses neared the end of his life, he made an interesting inquiry of God: *"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom"* (Psalms 90:12). At this point, Moses is not speaking in terms of years but rather days. He had come to realize how valuable our time on this earth is. The word "to number" that he uses here means *to weigh out* or *to parcel out carefully* (Strong's, 1986, H4487). The idea is that time is a precious, valuable commodity that should be given out very cautiously to life's purposes and not be wasted on vanity, or that which is worthless and empty.

And what purpose, at this point in his life, did he deem to be the most important pursuit? Applying his heart to wisdom. He had come to see the value of wisdom above all else. In

the remaining days of his life, his major concern was not only the acquiring of wisdom, but more importantly, the application of wisdom in his life.

The word *apply* used here is the same word used in Proverbs 2:10: “When wisdom **entereth** into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul.” Although translated differently in English, these two words, *apply* and *entereth* are the identical Hebrew word. Moses had come to realize that the most important thing he could do with his remaining days would be to carefully use every day, every opportunity to see that wisdom became a practiced part of his daily living.

May we each come to that critical understanding that Moses had acquired—to apply our hearts to wisdom! What more important pursuit can we have than seeking Him who is wisdom and responding in obedience to His voice!

CHAPTER 12

Cause Me to Hear It

A Scriptural Theme

Our study on hearing God's voice has shown us that this subject is woven throughout scripture. Beginning with the first verse of the Bible, God created the earth with His powerful voice. He came in the Garden of Eden daily and spoke with Adam and Eve.

Enoch knew the joy of walking daily with the Lord in sweet fellowship as he heard God's voice. Noah heard the voice of the Lord as he received instruction in building the ark. His obedience to God's voice made a way for him to save his household and all the animals so that the earth could be repopulated.

Abraham and Sarah developed a special relationship as they responded to God's voice, becoming friends with God. God used them to establish the Old Testament church. They prepared the way for those in generations to follow (including us) who will respond to God's voice and become heirs of the promises by faith.

Moses was a man who knew God face to face. He was commissioned with the responsibility to bring Israel out of Egypt, establish them under divine law, and form them into a holy nation that was to be governed by each individual hearing and responding to God's voice. However, at Sinai they rejected hearing God's voice for themselves and chose to try to fulfill God's will without His strength.

Israel failed and, ultimately, God took from them the holy commission and gave it to the early church. *"Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"* (Matthew 21:43). God admonishes the church to remember Israel and their pitfalls (1 Corinthians 10:1-11).

That brings us to this important question: What will the modern day church do with this holy commission? What will you do? Israel failed on the important issue of hearing God's voice. How do we respond to God at our Mt. Sinai? How do we respond when our will crosses what He is speaking to us?

God provides us with repeated warnings and encouragement on the importance of responding in obedience to His voice. The message of Hebrews chapters three and four is to hear God's voice and enter into rest by ceasing from trying to do God's will in our own strength and fulfill it by the strength that comes from hearing His voice.

After bringing our attention again to the events with Israel at Mt. Sinai, the book of Hebrews comes near to a close with this warning:

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth,

much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:22-29).

Paul presents a contrast between staying at Mt. Sinai versus moving on into God's original purpose to possess all the promises of God in Mt. Zion. After Israel's response at Mt. Sinai, that first generation never went any further. In the truest sense they had disqualified themselves at Mt. Sinai when they rejected hearing God's voice. It was apparent they had completely disqualified themselves when they rejected entering the land of promise at Kadesh-barnea. The power of God that was needed to pass their qualifying examinations was rejected. They were unable to pass any of their tests.

Paul is here provoking us to consider that we must pass the tests that Israel failed. Then he makes the point that we must go on to possess Zion, receive the blessing of the firstborn ones, and become just men who go on to the perfection of Christ so that we may reign with Him. He also points out that the central issue is how we respond to God's voice. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven." Again he identifies for us the critical point where Israel failed. He also indicates the intensity of shaking and fire that will come into

our lives as God speaks from heaven. We will not find our journey any easier than did Israel; in fact, our journey will be more intense. We must have the power of God that emanates from His voice. We can succeed only by the grace of God that flows to us through His voice as He speaks to us.

May we not live by godly principles alone but by “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (*Matthew 4:4*). May we, like Job, that patriarch of old, declare, “*I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessities*” (my translation – *Job 23:12*).

Open the Door

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). In the beginning, we see God coming to the garden daily to fellowship with man in sweet communion. At the end of the Bible we hear God’s heart cry again. He created us for His pleasure. He longs for communion with us! We must open the door to Him. He typically does not force His way into our lives, but He knocks. We encourage you beloved reader to open the door, be like Samuel and respond, “*Speak for Thy servant heareth*” (*1 Samuel 3:10*). What an awesome thought that the Master of the universe delights to fellowship with those who love Him and the sweetness of His voice.

Do not be one who only hears of others who have heard the voice of God, but seek Him to know that still, small voice for yourself. Respond to His powerful voice that can transform you into His own likeness. “*Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it*” (*Song of Songs 8:13*).

References

Bailey, B.J. (1997). *The two wisdoms: the epistle of James*. Waverly, NY: Zion Christian Publishers.

Bonhoeffer, D. (1954). *Life together: a discussion of Christian fellowship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.

Follette, J.W. (1957). *Broken bread: a book of sermons and poems*. Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House.

Hurnard, H. (1972). *Hearing heart*. Portland, OR: Artype Services.

MacKay, A. I. (1970). *Farming and gardening in the Bible*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company.

New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. (1981). The Lockman Foundation. Retrieved from Craig Rairdin and Parsons Technology database (QuickVerse for Windows 4.0e, CD-ROM, 1992-1996).

Strongs Exhaustive Concordance. (1986). World Bible Publishers. Retrieved from Graig Rairdin and Parsons Technology database (QuickVerse for Windows 4.0e, CD-ROM, 1992-1996).

Tucker, R. (1994). *Changed from glory to glory: the gift of repentance*. Marine City, MI: Zion Christian Publishers.

Other Books by Robert A. Tucker:

EXCEPT THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE: God's keys for abundant marriage & family life. Co-author Angeline Tucker

God intended marriage and family life to be like heaven on earth. So few these days find it to be so. Whatever your age, marital status, or cultural heritage, this book will help identify weaknesses in relationships and provide workable solutions to build an enduring marriage and family life.

Let God speak to you through these pages and help you find keys to God's order and purpose of function in your family relationships.

CHANGED FROM GLORY TO GLORY: The gift of repentance

Changed from Glory to Glory is a study of the neglected, but greatly needed, subject of repentance. People tend to think of repentance as being necessary only at the initial experience of receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. However, if Christians are to mature into the full purpose God has ordained for His people, it is necessary to allow the Holy Spirit to lead them through a process of revelation and response to God that Scripture calls repentance. This work of the Holy Spirit transforms God's people into the image of Christ and nurtures a vital, growing relationship with Christ.

What an exciting and humbling thought that God has purposed to transform His people from lowly beggars into kings and priest unto Himself! Open your heart and allow God to quicken your spirit as you study this exciting subject!

Please contact us for further information:

Zion Christian Publishers

P.O. Box 70, Waverly, New York, U.S.A. 14892

Tel: 1-877-768 7466 (toll-free within USA) or (607) 565 2801

Fax: (607) 565 2801

www.zcpublishers.com