

LEARNING TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE

by Stacy R. Wood, Jr

*The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep . . . and **THE SHEEP LISTEN TO HIS VOICE**. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because **THEY KNOW HIS VOICE**. But they will never follow a stranger, in fact, they will run away from him because **THEY DO NOT RECOGNIZE A STRANGERS VOICE**. I have other sheep that are not of this flock I must bring them also. **THEY TOO WILL LISTEN TO MY VOICE**, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10:1 ff).*

This parable concerns the ability of sheep to faithfully follow their own shepherd. The sheep comply with the shepherd solely on the basis of **KNOWING HIS VOICE**. Such behavior clearly demonstrates that they are not mere "simpletons," as they are so often pictured. The fact is they are so discerning of the shepherd's voice that a stranger **USING THE SAME WORDS** can not lead them astray. **NOTICE**: They have learned to follow **THE VOICE** and not **THE WORDS** of the shepherd.

DOES VOICE RECOGNITION COME AUTOMATICALLY?

The ability to ascertain the true shepherd, solely by his voice, does not come **AUTOMATICALLY**. It is not an inherent capability because someone is "*a sheep by Birth*." However, through **FELLOWSHIP** and **DISCIPLINE** sheep become conditioned to listen for the voice of the true shepherd.

Jesus used this illustration concerning sheep because He recognized **THE NEED FOR LEARNING HOW TO HEAR** in the lives of all those he called to follow Him. Luke's record of the Good News makes mankind's need for discipline in the area of hearing evident for all to see. In the Gospel of Luke Jesus admonished his disciples saying, "**PAY ATTENTION HOW YOU HEAR!**" In the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus again warns his disciples to "**TAKE HEED WHAT YOU HEAR**." (Lu 8:18; M'r 424).

HOW MANY WAYS CAN A PERSON HEAR?

In a previous writing entitled "*The Most Important Parable*," we dealt with the subject of hearing. It was through "*The Parable of the Sower*" that we recognized the possibility of receiving what we hear into any of four distinct areas of the human intellect. The first area of reception is the well-traveled "*wayside of dogma*." The second area is "*the shallow stony halfheartedness of religiosity*." The third area of hearing is "*the weed infested entanglements of double-mindedness*." Then finally the area of hearing referred to as "*the good rich soil of genuine response*." Due to the possibility of receiving God's word incorrectly it becomes necessary for us to be cautious of **WHAT WE LISTEN TO**, as well as, **HOW WE LISTEN** to a thing. This is so we do not suffer loss of the life and fruitfulness of the word.

IS THERE A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF HOW TO HEAR?

In the book of Acts we encounter a people set forth as an example of how to receive the declaration of the Good News of Christ. It is here that we discover the writer considered the people in Berea to be **MORE NOBLE** than those of Thessalonica. This was because they received the word with **ALL READINESS** and **WILLINGNESS OF MIND**, examining the scripture **DAILY**, with a positive view, expecting to prove what they had heard to be true. Likewise we must learn **HOW TO LISTEN** with an open, yielded, and genuinely

responsive frame of mind. (Acts 17:11).

HOW MANY VOICES CAN THERE POSSIBLY BE?

In this present day there are **MANY KINDS OF VOICES** in the world, as well as in the Church. None of these voices are without significance for they all have a message. (1 Cor. 14:10). The following is a list of a few voices spoken of in the Scripture. First, we find the voice of the Lord God and of His excellency. Then we see the voice of the trumpet, the voice of a great rushing, and the voice of many waters. We also locate the voices of thanksgiving, joy, praise, rejoicing, gladness and the voice of triumph. Next, there is the voice of harpers harping, the voice of the turtle dove, as well as, the voice of the bridegroom and the bride. Moreover, we discover the voice of swearing, and of oppression. Then there is the voice of wailing, weeping, trembling, howling, and groaning. Furthermore, we find there are the voices of charmers, fools, a multitude, and the voice of strangers.

It is because there are so many voices in the earth that we must **LEARN TO DISTINGUISH** or **DIFFERENTIATE** the many sounds that come into our personal world everyday. Remember. It is the voice that makes clear the true significance and reveals the genuine character of every word.

WHAT TO DO YOU MEAN DECIPHERING THE VOICE?

We find an illustration of comprehending the voice of words in the use of my very own name. You see I am a "**Junior**," which simply means my father gave me his name. Now to make matters a little more interesting my wife and I gave my name to our son making him "**the Third**." It all seems quite simple, but how about when we all gather into one location at the same time. This causes confusion for those who do not understand how to interpret the voice of the one calling *our* name. None of us like being called by our titles, Senior, Junior, or The Third. Each of us prefers the use of our given name. People often become inquisitive when someone calls out, "**Stacy!**" This is the case especially when the correct Stacy responds. They question, "*How do you know which one of you is being spoken to?*" The answer lies within **THE DISTINCTION FOUND IN THE VOICE** of the one doing the bidding.

We find another example that many can relate to in the phrase "*I love you!*" These are three simple words in the English language that can express such a variation of thought. What this expression conveys to the hearer depends completely on **WHAT VOICE IS BEHIND THE WORDS**. One might hear the voice of appreciation. Another, may ascertain the voice of dominion, or the voice of eroticism. Still another could detect the voice of animosity.

Potentially everyone can listen to **CORRECT WORDS** given in a **WRONG VOICE**. This is why I cannot over emphasize the importance of **LEARNING TO DECIPHER THE VOICE OF WORDS**. When we learn to know the voice of words we will no longer be vulnerable to deception and error. The issue of knowing what voice we listen to becomes extremely important when we consider that our **FAITH** or **PERSUASION** increases through our hearing. Moreover, the life we live and portray is greatly effected by our beliefs. Furthermore, if we build our persuasion or conviction upon a false premise, because of improper hearing, it becomes meaningless and unfruitful. (Rom. 10:17; Prov. 23:7).

DO WE NEED INTELLECT OR ACKNOWLEDGMENT?

The prophet Hosea declared, "*The destruction of God's people is due to their lack of knowledge!*" Moreover, Isaiah said, "My people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge." (Hos. 4:6;

Isa. 5:13). Many believe to acquire a greater intellectual knowledge of the purpose of God guarantees they will not become deceived. However, holding a particular doctrinal concept and calling it a spiritual revelation is not what the prophet means by knowledge. This becomes indisputable when we see such an absence of fruitfulness and maturity in the lives of so many "*deeper word saints*." The deficiency in the life of God's chosen is not due to a lack of intellectual knowledge. Rather, the lack has to do with the absence of **ACKNOWLEDGMENT** and **RECOGNITION** of God. Knowledge, or data, only serve to **PUFF UP** and make those who obtain it proud. However, love builds up! Now if anyone supposes he understands anything, he acknowledges nothing *yet* as he should. Nevertheless, the one who loves God and grows in **INTIMACY** and **FELLOWSHIP** with him becomes known by Him. (M't 7:20-23; John 17:3; 1Cor 8:1-3).

We see a vivid picture of this missing element of **ACKNOWLEDGMENT** or **FELLOWSHIP** when we find Jesus speaking to the Pharisees about their vast knowledge. He told them that with all their acquired knowledge they **FAILED TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE**. This was the very factor that prevented them from perceiving **GOD'S FORM**, as it was manifest in Jesus Christ. The Pharisees "*missed the mark*" and they concluded that they had eternal life. Just as many of the religious minded in this hour presume that they have "*eternal life*." However, Jesus told them it would be necessary for them to again "**SEARCH THE SCRIPTURE**." This time they were to search as **THE BLOOD-HOUND** searches for the catch. Now the hound relentlessly follows the scent of a quarry until it locates the source. If any of the Pharisees listened to Jesus' instruction, and diligently searched the Scripture, they came to Jesus, **THE WHO OF THE WHAT**, they looked for all along. (Joh 5:37-39; De 4:29-30).

To more accurately comprehend the voice of the word one must first be open to a proper personal relationship, or fellowship with the Lord. It is the Lord, who initiates the beginning of our relationship and union with him. Yet he looks for a **RESPONSIVE PEOPLE** that have learned to **OBEY THE VOICE OF HIS WORDS**.

HOW DO WE OBEY THE VOICE OF WORDS?

*"The Lord has established his throne in the heavens; and his Kingdom rules over ALL. Bless the Lord, all his messengers, mighty in strength, whom perform his word, **OBEYING THE VOICE OF HIS WORDS!**" (Psa. 103:19ff).*

It is of utmost importance that we learn how to properly **HEAR** and **OBEY** the voice of God's word. Truly, it is God who initiates the **FELLOWSHIP** that correctly associates mankind with himself. However, if a person does not **FULLY RECOGNIZE GOD'S INTENTION** how is he to give a genuine response to what he hears? Furthermore, if a person does not properly and lovingly **YIELD TO THE INTENTION WITHIN THE WORD**, how can there be a productive union?

We do not come to God through any human effort or self-generated awareness. The gift of his *grace* and *faith* motivates us to exchange our allegiance with sin and death to follow him. Yes, while we were still dead in sinful disobedience and sensuality, God enlivened us together with Christ. Furthermore, he freely forgave us of every lawless act. He cleared the legal agreement that was in force against us by nailing it to the cross, and completely removing it out of our way. (Eph 2:5; Col 2:13ff; Rom. 5:6ff; 10:17; Pro. 20:12).

God made a public example of every principality and authority, which had jurisdiction over us. In doing this he fully disarmed our enemy. He accomplished this by boldly displaying his triumph over them

through the cross of Jesus Christ. Now give thanks to God for he triumphed over all. He presently leads us about, here and there, displaying us to all the world. Yes, he even causes us continually to triumph in all things through Christ Jesus our Lord. (Col 2:15; 2 Cor 2:14ff; Rom 8:37ff).

Acknowledging he paid the price to purchase us. Moreover, recognizing that we do not belong to ourselves, enables us to gain the confidence we need to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present age. It is God who began the good work in us. It is also God who is able to perfectly complete it in the day of the Lord. Yet, having this understanding does not absolve us from the responsibility of **OBEYING THE VOICE OF HIS WORDS**. (2 Cor 6:19f; Phil 1:6; Tit 2:11-12).

HOW DO WE IDENTIFY HIS VOICE?

It is interesting how many have placed God's voice into a **PRECONCEIVED CONTEXT**. These do not realize they are only making it more difficult to distinguish when God is or is not truly speaking. The reality is God cannot be **BOXED** into humanity's limited perception. However, a person can box themselves in so they can no longer hear God.

There are some who expect God to express himself through a vessel that feverishly **RANTS** and **RAVES**, while others are looking for him to appear in a more relaxed **CONVERSATIONAL TONE**. Certain ones look for the **SUPERNATURAL** to prove that it is really him, while still others emphasize **METHODOLOGY** to make God's presence evident. All too often, Christians think that any means of expression outside of their own religious perception cannot be God. Yet the reality is, no matter which manner of expression humans presume to be "**THE REAL THING**," each is, at best, a limited concept of God's voice.

HOW MUCH DIVERSITY IS IN THE VOICE?

The shulamite maiden, in the Song of Songs, presents the **VOICE** of her beloved as "*SKIPPING upon the hills*" and "*LEAPING upon the mountains.*" She further describes it as the voice of "**THE TURTLE-DOVE**," being **SWEET**, or **AGREEABLE**. (Can 2:8, 12, 13). David describes the voice of the Lord in this manner: "*The voice of the Lord IS UPON THE WATERS; the God of Glory THUNDERS, the Lord is over many waters. The voice of the Lord IS POWERFUL, the voice of the Lord IS MAJESTIC. The voice of the Lord BREAKS THE CEDARS; yes, the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord HEWS OUT FLAMES OF FIRE. The voice of the Lord SHAKES THE WILDERNESS The Lord shakes the wilderness of Caddish. The voice of the Lord MAKES THE DEER TO CALVE, and STRIPS THE FORESTS BARE, and in his temple everything says, 'GLORY!'*" (Psa 29:3ff).

The prophet Elijah looked to find the Lord in all that took place around him at Horeb, the Mount of God. He was well-aware that God could manifest Himself in **WHATEVER PORTRAYAL HE WOULD CHOOSE**. The prophet waited for the lord to pass by him. There was a great and strong **WIND** that was rendering the mountain and breaking the rocks into pieces. An **EARTHQUAKE** followed, and subsequently a **FIRE**, but the prophet could not find the voice of God in any of these manifestations. Then, the **SOUND OF A GENTLE BLOWING** or **THE SOUND OF STILLNESS** came by the place Elijah abode and **HE HEARD THE VOICE OF THE LORD**. (1Ki. 19:11ff).

The voice of the Lord, many times comes in the sound of judgement. At these times his voice can be heard as thundering, breaking, carving, shaking, adjusting, and stripping. However, we need to notice that when his voice is heard in this way everything in his temple says, "**GLORY!**" His majestic, powerful, agreeable, sweet, still and dove like nature, or characteristics shine forth, causing his chosen dwelling place to rejoice in everything that he does. Remember. "*The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold. They are sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them your servant is*

warned, and in keeping them there is great reward.” (Psalms 19:9-11). **HALLELUJAH!**

WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF OBEDIENCE?

God is looking for a **PEOPLE OF RESPONSE** who discern and **OBEY THE VOICE OF HIS WORDS**. The thought of obedience, to God's word, is not foreign to any true follower of Christ. However, to obey with genuineness one must hear not only the words, but **THE VOICE**, or **FULL INTENTION** of the word. Attempting to comply with the **WORD** of God often causes confusion even in the most mature saint because **THE FULL INTENTION OF GOD** eludes and baffles them.

Few ever ask, *"What does it really mean to obey?"* Fearful of sounding foolish most will not ask such a presumably simple question. Everybody knows that to obey means, **"TO DO WHAT YOU ARE TOLD!"** Even Webster's Dictionary says it simply means, *"To follow the commands or guidance of, to comply with, to execute an order."* However, this definition falls short of the Scriptures' thought on obedience. The Hebrew word used in the phrase **"OBEYING the voice of His words"** is *"shama,"* (Strong's #8085), and means **"TO HEAR INTELLIGENTLY."**

IS THERE A SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLE OF OBEDIENCE?

We find one of the best Biblical illustrations of what it means to obey the voice of God's word in the prophecy of Haggai. The prophet told the people they needed to consider all that had taken place around them. By edict of the new ruler, Cyrus King of Persia, nearly fifty thousand Jews returned to Palestine from seventy years of Babylonian captivity. Cyrus commissioned them to restore the city of Jerusalem *and* the temple. Immediately, upon their return, they rebuilt the alter and reinstated the offering of sacrifices. Next, the people began the work of restoring the temple. However, before they completed the **FOUNDATION** the work halted because of attacks by neighboring enemies. Close to sixteen years passed and they accomplished nothing else because the people lost interest.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HEAR THE VOICE AND OBEY?

Then the Lord spoke to the people through Haggai the prophet. God told them the reason for their poor crops, failing economy, and inability to find true satisfaction was because the house of the Lord was laying waste. The people had become complacent in their goal of restoring the house of the Lord. They became contented with the self-satisfaction of living in their own splendidly paneled houses. Moreover, they became convinced that it was not yet time to rebuild the Lord's house. (There is so much in the book of Haggai that speaks to the church in this hour. However, let us not touch on that at this time, lest we miss or delude the lesson we need to learn on obeying the voice of the Lord's word). The word of the Lord of hosts came through the prophet to the people. God said, *"Consider your ways! Go up to the mountain, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified. You look for much, but behold, it comes to little when you bring it home I blow it away. Why? Because of my house which lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house."* (Hag. 1:7ff). What was Israel's response to the voice of God? How did the people respond to this word? The Scripture tells us that the people **OBEYED** or **HEARD INTELLIGENTLY** the voice of the Lord their God. (Hag. 1:12).

WHAT DOES FEAR HAVE TO DO WITH OBEDIENCE?

In Proverbs chapter twenty-four and verse three, we discover that wisdom builds the house, understanding establishes it, and knowledge fills it. There is an order to building the house of the Lord. This order begins with wisdom. It then grows into understanding. Then it is knowledge that fills the rooms with all precious and pleasant riches. God's house is not built with knowledge, methodology, tradition, or dogma. It is built with wisdom. James says, "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom." Now there are two forms of wisdom

and each is clearly identifiable. The first is a wisdom that does not come from above. James says, “*This wisdom is earthly, soulish, and demonic.*” Moreover, it attempts to deceive by falsehood. The characteristics of this wisdom are apparent in bitter zeal and rivalry. Now where this exists confusion and every evil thing is also present. However, the wisdom that is from above is first pure. Then it is peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits. Furthermore, it is void of partiality and hypocrisy. (Jam. 3:14-18).

The wisdom, understanding, and knowledge that are needed to complete the building and furnishing of God’s house all find their beginning with **THE FEAR OF THE LORD**. That is, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of **WISDOM** and **KNOWLEDGE**. Moreover, knowledge of the Holy One is **UNDERSTANDING**. (Pro. 1:7, 9:10, 24:3-4). All too often God's people miss this very needful, yet **ELEMENTARY**, response because they lack awareness of the voice. Most would immediately attempt to bring to pass the letter of the word, without understanding its full intent.

Although “God has not given the **SPIRIT OF FEAR**, or timidity,” the Bible instructs believers to **FEAR GOD**. Many cringe when they hear that they are to fear the Lord. However, the true meaning of the word fear is “*reverence.*” The Hebrew and Greek languages both carry the thought of knees making a clacking noise as they knock together. It plainly speaks of the awe and respect that causes one to tremble in the presence of the Lord. Responding with fear toward a gentle, loving, tolerant, and forgiving God becomes difficult for some to understand. This is because the church is in great need of a **REVIVAL OF THE FEAR OF THE LORD**. (Acts 9:31; 2 Cor 7:1; 2Ti 1:7; Eph. 5:21; 1Pet 2:17; Re. 14:7).

CAN EARTHEN HUMANITY UNDERSTAND PROPER FEAR?

The pragmatic application of a proper **RELATIONSHIP IN FEAR** becomes demonstrated in the principled relationship of a loving father and his children. A good father recognizes he must help his children become liberated from the foolishness that is bound in the heart of a child. This becomes possible only as he compassionately loves and honors them as his very own flesh and bone. Also, through virtuous living, the father sets an example before his children. Then, through applicable instruction he develops high standards of responsibility within their lives. Moreover, as it becomes truly necessary the loving father does not spare the rod, but he applies the timely remedy with consistency. Having an **AWARENESS THAT HE WILL DELIVER HIS SON'S SOUL FROM HELL**, he does not minimize the needed correction. He will not cease from the needed discipline, even when his own heart becomes anguished because of his children's discomfort. He knows the correction drives the foolishness far from his offspring. (Pro. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13ff 29:15).

When I was a child, my father applied these very principles to my life. At times, he applied **THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, TO THE SEAT OF MY UNDERSTANDING** to create a lasting impression upon my mind. This was truly grievous for both of us at the moment of application. Yet, the discomforting affliction yielded the peaceable fruit of uprightness afterwards. **THE LOVE EXPRESSED IN MY FATHER'S VOICE**, or intention—both in word and deed—built in me a reverence or respect for my Father. It also produced a fondness for that which is good and a strong dislike for that which is evil. (Pro 3:7; 8:13). Dad's visible love and appreciation of me caused the anguish of the rod to fade into a recognition that I had disappointed and distressed my father through my actions. My sincere desire was to be well-pleasing and to cause neither hurt nor agony in the one who loved me so very much. (Psa 130:3-4).

So you see, true fear of the Lord is not a matter of being frightened by what will happen if one does not obey Him. Instead, **TRUE FEAR OF THE LORD** means that one yearns to understand completely the full intent held within every word that he speaks. True fear is born out of a response to God's unfailing love. His love creates in us a heart that sincerely desires to be well-pleasing and expressive of the Father's character. Moreover, his love creates in us a heart that genuinely desires to be untainted and unspotted by

our humanity. (Heb. 12:5ff; Ps. 130: 3f.).

WHAT IS THE OUTCOME OF WHOLESOME FEAR?

As God's people in Haggai's day heard intelligently the voice of God they responded by fearing the Lord. This demonstrates that they were wise enough to understand they could do nothing apart from the Lord. **“UNLESS THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE, THEY LABOR IN VAIN WHO BUILD IT!”** (Psa 127:1). When the Lord saw the response of his people he dispatched a word to enable and energize them. That is, he stirred them up to do the work that he intended them to do in restoring his house.

The Lord's throne is settled in the heavens and his dominion rules over all. Yet it is our continual prayer to witness the full establishment of his kingdom upon the earth. (M't 7:10). God will accomplish through people **“WHO PERFORM HIS WORD, OBEYING THE VOICE OF HIS WORDS.”** (Psa 103:19ff).

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