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## **Whose Voice Will You Hear?**

Your voice speaks for the kingdom.  
God's voice speaks through the Holy Spirit.  
Reveal, explore and receive God's voice.  
For many voices are gone out into the world.

In this study we will learn that there are many voices in the world.

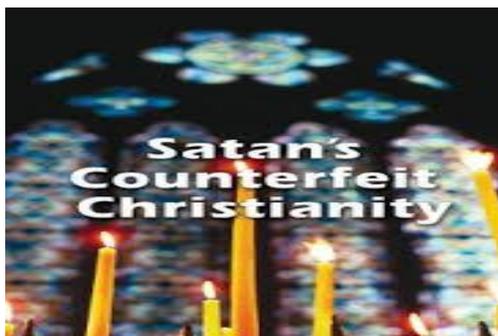
The voice of God  
The voice of your conscious  
The voice of reasoning  
The voice of your flesh, and  
The voice of the devil.

In most cases, other voices will lead you away from the voice of God.

You will see how to enter into the kingdom of God, speak faith filled words and use the word of God to recognize and understand how to hear his voice.

Your challenge as a believer is to allow the Holy Spirit within you to teach you God's voice. He is ever ready to hear you.

## Chapter 1



**Ways the voice of the devil will come**

**He will come to deceive**

**Rev. 20:7-8**

When the thousand years end, Satan will be let out of his prison. He will go out to deceive the nations from every corner of the earth, which are called Gog and Magog. He will gather them together for battle—a mighty host, as numberless as sand along the shore.

Gog and Magog symbolize all the forces of evil that band together to battle God. Noah's son, Japheth, had a son named Magog (Genesis 10:2). Ezekiel presents Gog as a leader of forces against Israel (Ezekiel 38-39).

This is not a typical battle where the outcome is in doubt during the heat of the conflict. Here there is no contest. Two mighty forces of evil—those of the beast (Rev. 19:19) and of Satan (Rev. 20:8)—unite to do battle against God.

There will be no unexpected outcome, for God will win the battle.

## **He will cause oppression.**

**Acts 10:38**

And no doubt you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the Devil, for God was with him.

## **He will seek to discourage you**

**Numbers 32:6-9**

"Do you mean you want to stay back here while your brothers go across and do all the fighting?" Moses asked the Reubenites and Gadites. "Are you trying to discourage the rest of the people of Israel from going across to the land the Lord has given them?"

This is what your ancestors did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to explore the land. After they went up to the valley of Eshcol and scouted the land, they discouraged the people of Israel from entering the land the Lord was giving them.

## **He will cause bitterness**

**Col. 3:19**

And you husbands must love your wives and never treat them harshly.

Christian marriage involves mutual submission, subordinating our personal desires for the good of the loved one, and submitting ourselves to Christ as Lord.

## **He will cause confusion.**

**Acts 19:32**

Inside, the people were all shouting, some one thing and some another. Everything was in confusion. In fact, most of them didn't even know why they were there.

## **He will cause you to rationalize sin**

**Isaiah 5:20**

Destruction is certain for those who say that evil is good and good is evil; that dark is light and light is dark; that bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter.

When people do not carefully observe the distinction between good and evil, destruction soon follows. It is easy for people to say, "No one can decide for anyone else what is really right or wrong."

They may think getting drunk can't hurt them, extramarital sex isn't really wrong, or money doesn't control them. But when we make excuses for our actions, we break down the distinction between right and wrong.

If we do not take God's Word, the Bible, as our standard, soon all moral choices will appear fuzzy. Without God, we are headed for a breakdown and much suffering.

## **He will blind your mind**

**2 Cor. 4:4**

Satan, the god of this evil world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe, so they are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News that is shining upon them. They don't understand the message we preach about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

The gospel is open and revealed to everyone, except to those who refuse to believe. Satan is “the god of this age.” His work is to deceive, and he has blinded those who don’t believe in Christ (see 2 Cor. 11:14-15). The allure of money, power, and pleasure blinds people to the light of Christ’s gospel. Those who reject Christ and prefer their own pursuits have unknowingly made Satan their god.

**He will cause you to doubt God’s word.**

**Hebrews 3:12**

Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God.

Our hearts turn away from the living God when we stubbornly refuse to believe him. If we persist in our unbelief, God will eventually leave us alone in our sin. But God can give us new hearts, new desires, and new spirits (Ezekiel 36:22-27).

To prevent having an unbelieving heart, stay in fellowship with other believers, talk daily about your mutual faith, be aware of the deceitfulness of sin (it attracts but also destroys), and encourage each other with love and concern.

**He will cause divisions in your family, church or work.**

**Mark 3:25**

A home divided against itself is doomed.

Although God permits Satan to work in our world, God is still in control. Jesus, because he is God, has power over Satan; Jesus is able to drive out demons and end their terrible work in people’s lives. One day Satan will be bound forever (Rev. 20:10).

**He will cause you to disobey the word of God.**

**Joshua 5:6**

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years until all the men who were old enough to bear arms when they left Egypt had died. For they had disobeyed the Lord, and the Lord vowed he would not let them enter the land he had sworn to give us—a land flowing with milk and honey.

## Chapter 2



### Listening to the voice of the flesh

#### Actions that follow listening to the voice of the flesh

1. Adultery, which is unlawful sexual relations
2. Fornication that includes pornography, harlotry and incest.
3. Uncleaness, such as homosexuality, lesbianism, pedophiles and sexual perversion.
4. Lasciviousness which is undisciplined, lewd, overeater, lazy or shiftless.
5. Idolatry, including worshiping sports stars, movie stars, music icons, preachers, money etc.
6. Witchcraft, including drug use, spells, luck charms, horoscope, or zodiac signs.
7. Hatred, such as holding grudges, malice or holding anger against someone.
8. Variance that is to quarrel with words, stir up strife and invite debates.
9. Emulations which is a spirit of jealousy. It is a rivalry spirit.

10. Wrath such as creating domestic and civic turmoil.
11. Strife is payback for a wrong. It is angry contentions.
12. Seditions or stirring up strife in the church, the government or home.
13. Heresies cause discord and unrighteous indignation.
14. Envy to wish ill of others.
15. Murder to mar the happiness of others or to kill.
16. Drunkenness including intoxication, alcoholic , addictions
17. Revellings – clubs, house parties, carousing or obscene music.

The voice of the flesh will never inspire you to do the will of God

## Chapter 3



### Listening to the voice of reasoning

#### Acts 28:1-6

Once we were safe on shore, we learned that we were on the island of Malta. The people of the island were very kind to us. It was cold and rainy, so they built a fire on the shore to welcome us and warm us.

As Paul gathered an armful of sticks and was laying them on the fire, a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, fastened itself onto his hand.

The people of the island saw it hanging there and said to each other, "A murderer, and no doubt! Though he escaped the sea, justice will not permit him to live." But Paul shook off the snake into the fire and was unharmed.

The people waited for him to swell up or suddenly drop dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and decided he was a god.

The island of Malta is 60 miles south of Sicily. It had excellent harbors and was ideally located for trade. God had promised safe passage to Paul (Acts 27:23-25), and he would let nothing stop his servant.

The poisonous viper that bit Paul was unable to harm him. Our lives are in God's hands, to continue on or to come to an end in his good timing. God still had work for Paul to do.

These people were very superstitious and believed in many gods. When they saw that Paul was unhurt by the poisonous viper, they thought he was a god.

### Mark 2:6-8

But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there said to themselves, "What? This is blasphemy! Who but God can forgive sins!"

Jesus knew what they were discussing among themselves, so he said to them, "Why do you think this is blasphemy?"

Before saying to the paralytic, "Get up," Jesus said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." To the Jewish leaders this statement was blasphemous, claiming to do something only God could do. According to the law, the punishment for this sin was death (Leviticus 24:15-16).

The religious leaders understood correctly that Jesus was claiming divine prerogatives, but their judgment of him was wrong. Jesus was not blaspheming because his claim was true. Jesus is God, and he proved his claim by healing the paralytic (Mark 2:9-12).

### **Human reasoning cannot understand the ways of God.**

### Numbers 13:26-33

To Moses, Aaron, and the people of Israel at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran. They reported to the whole community what they had seen and showed them the fruit they had taken from the land.

This was their report to Moses: "We arrived in the land you sent us to see, and it is indeed a magnificent country—a land flowing with milk and honey. Here is some of its fruit as proof.

But the people living there are powerful, and their cities and towns are fortified and very large. We also saw the descendants of Anak who are living there!

The Amalekites live in the Negev, and the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country. The Canaanites live along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and along the Jordan Valley."

But Caleb tried to encourage the people as they stood before Moses. "Let's go at once to take the land," he said. "We can certainly conquer it!"

But the other men who had explored the land with him answered, "We can't go up against them! They are stronger than we are!"

So they spread discouraging reports about the land among the Israelites: "The land we explored will swallow up any who go to live there. All the people we saw were huge.

We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. We felt like grasshoppers next to them, and that's what we looked like to them!"

Although Kadesh was only a desert oasis, it was a crossroads in Israel's history. When the spies returned to Kadesh from scouting the new land, the people had to decide either to enter the land or to retreat.

They chose to retreat and were condemned to wander 40 years in the desert.

It was also at Kadesh that Moses disobeyed God (Numbers 20:7-12). For this, he too was denied entrance into the Promised Land. Aaron and Miriam died there, for they could not enter the new land either. Kadesh was near Canaan's southern borders, but because of the Israelites' lack of faith, they needed more than a lifetime to go from Kadesh to the Promised Land.

The Promised Land, also called the land of Canaan, was indeed magnificent, as the 12 spies discovered. The Bible often calls it the land flowing with milk and honey.

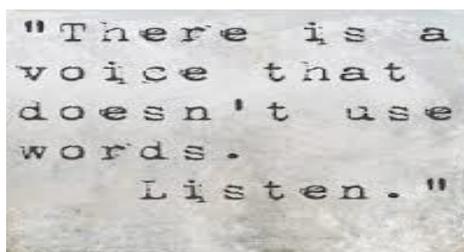
Although the land was relatively small—150 miles long and 60 miles wide—its lush hillsides were covered with fig, date, and nut trees. It was the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The “descendants of Anak” were a race of abnormally large people. The family of Goliath may have been descended from these.

The fortified cities the spies talked about were surrounded by high walls as much as 20 feet thick and 25 feet tall. Guards were often stationed on top, where there was a commanding view of the countryside.

Some of the inhabitants, said the spies, were formidable men—from seven to nine feet tall—so that the Israelites felt like grasshoppers next to them (Numbers 13:33). The fortified cities and the giants struck fear into the hearts of most of the spies.

## Chapter 4



### Listening to the voice of your conscious

**We are given a conscious so we may know the difference between right and wrong.**

### Listening to a good conscience

#### 1 Tim. 1:5

The purpose of my instruction is that all the Christians there would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and sincere faith.

There are many leaders and authorities today who demand allegiance, some of whom would even have us turn from Christ to follow them. When they seem to know the Bible, their influence can be dangerously subtle.

How can you recognize false teaching?

(1) It promotes controversies instead of helping people come to Jesus (1 Tim. 1:4).

(2) It is often initiated by those whose motivation is to make a name for themselves (1 Tim. 1:7).

(3) It will be contrary to the true teaching of the Scriptures (1 Tim. 1:6-7; 1 Tim. 4:1-3).

To protect yourself from the deception of false teachers, you should learn what the Bible teaches and remain steadfast in your faith in Christ alone.

**Acts 24:16**

Because of this, I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and everyone else.

### **Listening to a weak conscience**

**1 Cor. 8:7**

However, not all Christians realize this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated.

Paul addressed these words to believers who weren't bothered by eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Although idols were phony, and the pagan ritual of sacrificing to them was meaningless, eating such meat offended Christians with more sensitive consciences. Paul said, therefore, that if a weaker or less mature believer misunderstood their actions, they should, out of consideration, avoid eating meat offered to idols.

## Listening to a seared conscience

1 Tim. 4:2

These teachers are hypocrites and liars. They pretend to be religious, but their consciences are dead.

False teachers were and still are a threat to the church. Jesus and the apostles repeatedly warned against them. The danger that Timothy faced in Ephesus seems to have come from certain people in the church who were following some Greek philosophers who taught that the body was evil and that only the soul mattered.

The false teachers refused to believe that the God of creation was good, because his very contact with the physical world would have soiled him.

Though these Greek-influenced church members honored Jesus, they could not believe he was truly human. Paul knew that their teachings, if left unchecked, would greatly distort Christian truth.

It is not enough that a teacher appears to know what he is talking about, is disciplined and moral, or says that he is speaking for God. If his words contradict the Bible, his teaching is false. Like Timothy, we must guard against any teaching that causes believers to dilute or reject any aspect of their faith. Such false teaching can be very direct or extremely subtle.

Paul said the false teachers were hypocritical liars who encouraged people to follow “deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.”

Satan deceives people by offering a clever imitation of the real thing.

The false teachers gave stringent rules (such as forbidding people to marry or to eat certain foods).

This made them appear self-disciplined and righteous. Their strict disciplines for the body, however, could not remove sin (see Col. 2:20-23).

We must not be unduly impressed by a teacher's style or credentials; we must look to his teaching about Jesus Christ. His conclusions about Christ show the source of his message.

In opposition to the false teachers, Paul affirmed that everything God created is good (see Genesis 1). We should ask for God's blessing on his created gifts that give us pleasure and thank him for them.

This doesn't mean that we should abuse what God has made (for example, gluttony abuses God's gift of good food, lust abuses God's gift of love, and murder abuses God's gift of life).

Instead of abusing, we should enjoy these gifts by using them to serve and honor God. Thank God for the good gifts he has given. Using the gifts God has given you in ways pleasing to God.

### **Listening to an evil conscious**

#### **Hebrews 10:22**

Let us go right into the presence of God, with true hearts fully trusting him. For our evil consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

We have significant privileges associated with our new life in Christ:

(1) We have personal access to God through Christ and can draw near to him without an elaborate system (Hebrews 10:22);

(2) We may grow in faith, overcome doubts and questions, and deepen our relationship with God (Hebrews 10:23);

## Chapter 5



### Hearing the voice of God

#### 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Meanwhile, the boy Samuel was serving the Lord by assisting Eli. Now in those days messages from the Lord were very rare, and visions were quite uncommon.

One night Eli, who was almost blind by now, had just gone to bed. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the Tabernacle near the Ark of God. Suddenly, the Lord called out, "Samuel! Samuel!"

"Yes?" Samuel replied. "What is it?" He jumped up and ran to Eli. "Here I am. What do you need?"

"I didn't call you," Eli replied. "Go on back to bed." So he did.

Then the Lord called out again, "Samuel!"

Again Samuel jumped up and ran to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "What do you need?"

"I didn't call you, my son," Eli said. "Go on back to bed."

Samuel did not yet know the Lord because he had never had a message from the Lord before. So now the Lord called a third time, and once more Samuel jumped up and ran to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "What do you need?"

Then Eli realized it was the Lord who was calling the boy. So he said to Samuel, "Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, 'Yes, Lord, your servant is listening.' " So Samuel went back to bed.

And the Lord came and called as before, "Samuel! Samuel!"

And Samuel replied, "Yes, your servant is listening."

Although God had spoken directly and audibly with Moses and Joshua, his word became rare during the three centuries of rule by judges. By Eli's time, no prophets were speaking God's messages to Israel. Why?

Look at the attitude of Eli's sons. They either refused to listen to God or allowed greed to get in the way of any communication with him.

Listening and responding is vital in a relationship with God. Although God does not always use the sound of a human voice, he always speaks clearly through his Word. To receive his messages, we must be ready to listen and to act upon what he tells us. Like Samuel, be ready to say "Here I am" when God calls you to action.

One would naturally expect an audible message from God to be given to the priest Eli and not to the child Samuel. Eli was older and more experienced, and he held the proper position. But God's chain of command is based on faith, not on age or position. In finding faithful followers, God may use unexpected channels. Be prepared for the Lord to work at any place, at any time, and through anyone he chooses.

### John 10:1-5

"I assure you, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber!"

For a shepherd enters through the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they recognize his voice. They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't recognize his voice."

At night, sheep were often gathered into a sheep pen to protect them from thieves, weather, or wild animals. The sheep pens were caves, sheds, or open areas surrounded by walls made of stones or branches. The shepherd often slept in the pen to protect the sheep. Just as a shepherd cares for his sheep, Jesus, the good shepherd, cares for his flock (those who follow him). The prophet Ezekiel, in predicting the coming of the Messiah, called him a shepherd (Ezekiel 34:23).

### **God gives instruction in righteousness**

#### **2 Tim. 3:16-17**

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.

The Bible is not a collection of stories, fables, myths, or merely human ideas about God. It is not a human book.

Through the Holy Spirit, God revealed his person and plan to certain believers, who wrote down his message for his people (2 Peter 1:20-21).

This process is known as *inspiration*. The writers wrote from their own personal, historical, and cultural contexts. Although they used their own minds, talents, language, and style, they wrote what God wanted them to write.

### John 15:16

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

Jesus made the first choice—to love and to die for us, to invite us to live with him forever. We make the next choice—to accept or reject his offer. Without *his* choice, we would have no choice to make.

**The Holy Spirit will bring to remembrance the word of God.**

### John 14:26

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

Jesus promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would help them remember what he had been teaching them. This promise ensures the validity of the New Testament.

The disciples were eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and teachings, and the Holy Spirit helped them remember without taking away their individual perspectives.

We can be confident that the Gospels are accurate records of what Jesus taught and did (see 1 Cor. 2:10-14).

The Holy Spirit can help us in the same way. As we study the Bible, we can trust him to plant truth in our mind, convince us of God's will, and remind us when we stray from it.

### **The Holy Spirit guides you into truth**

**John 16:13**

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

In his last moments with his disciples, Jesus (1) warned them about further persecution, (2) told them where, when, and why he was going, and (3) assured them that they would not be left alone, but that the Spirit would come.

Jesus knew what lay ahead, and he did not want the disciples' faith shaken or destroyed. God wants you to know you are not alone. You have the Holy Spirit to comfort you, teach you truth, and help you.

### **The voice of God will exhort you.**

**Jude 1:3**

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Jude emphasizes the important relationship between correct doctrine and true faith. The truth of the Bible must not be compromised, because it gives us the real facts about Jesus and salvation.

The Bible is inspired by God and should never be twisted or manipulated; when it is, we can become confused over right and wrong and lose sight of the only path that leads to eternal life.

Before writing about salvation, then, Jude felt he had to set his readers back on the right track, calling them back to the basics of their faith. Then the way to salvation would be clearer. *Saints* refers to all believers.

### Romans 12:1

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

When sacrificing an animal according to God's law, a priest would kill the animal, cut it in pieces, and place it on the altar.

Sacrifice was important, but even in the Old Testament God made it clear that obedience from the heart was much more important (see 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 40:6; Amos 5:21-24).

God wants us to offer ourselves, not animals, as *living* sacrifices—daily laying aside our own desires to follow him, putting all our energy and resources at his disposal and trusting him to guide us. We do this out of gratitude that our sins have been forgiven.

**God's voice will comfort us.**

### John 14:16

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever;

Jesus was soon going to leave the disciples, but he would remain with them. How could this be? The Counselor—the Spirit of God himself—would come after Jesus was gone to care for and guide the disciples.

The regenerating power of the Spirit came on the disciples just before Jesus' ascension (John 20:22), and the Spirit was poured out on all the believers at Pentecost (Acts 2), shortly after Jesus ascended to heaven.

The Holy Spirit is the very presence of God within us and all believers, helping us live as God wants and building Christ's church on earth. By faith we can appropriate the Spirit's power each day.

The word translated *Counselor* combines the ideas of comfort and counsel. The Holy Spirit is a powerful person on our side, working for and with us.

### Psalm 32:4

For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.

Death casts a frightening shadow over us because we are entirely helpless in its presence.

We can struggle with other enemies—pain, suffering, disease, injury—but strength and courage cannot overcome death. It has the final word. Only one person can walk with us through death's dark valley and bring us safely to the other side—the God of life, our shepherd. Because life is uncertain, we should follow this shepherd who offers us eternal comfort.

**God's voice will rebuke and reprove you.**

### Titus 1:13

This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith;

Paul warned Titus to be on the lookout for people who teach wrong doctrines and lead others into error. Some false teachers are simply confused—they speak their misguided opinions without checking them against the Bible. Others have evil motives—they pretend to be Christians only because they can get more money (“dishonest gain”), additional business, or a feeling of power from being a leader in the church.

Jesus and the apostles repeatedly warned against false teachers (see Mark 13:22; Acts 20:29; 2 Thes. 2:3-12; 2 Peter 3:3-7) because their teachings attack the foundations of truth and integrity upon which the Christian faith is built.

You can recognize false teachers because they will

- (1) Focus more attention on themselves than on Christ;
- (2) Ask you to do something that will compromise or dilute your faith;
- (3) De-emphasize the divine nature of Christ or the inspiration of the Bible; or
- (4) Urge believers to make decisions based more on human judgment than on prayer and Biblical guidelines.

**2 Tim. 4:2**

**Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.**

Be prepared in season and out of season” means to always be ready to serve God in any situation, whether or not it is convenient. Be sensitive to the opportunities God gives you.

Paul told Timothy to “correct, rebuke and encourage.” It is difficult to accept correction, to be told we have to change. But no matter how much the truth hurts, we must be willing to listen to it so we can more fully obey God.

### **The voice of God will convict of sin.**

#### **Romans 6:1-2**

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

If God loves to forgive, why not give him more to forgive? If forgiveness is guaranteed, do we have the freedom to sin as much as we want?

Paul’s forceful answer is *By no means!* Such an attitude—deciding ahead of time to take advantage of God—shows that a person does not understand the seriousness of sin.

God’s forgiveness does not make sin less serious; his Son’s death for sin shows us the dreadful seriousness of sin. Jesus paid with his life so we could be forgiven. The availability of God’s mercy must not become an excuse for careless living and moral laxness.

### **The voice of God leads you to salvation.**

#### **Romans 10:9-10**

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt

be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

These verses give you the beautiful answer—salvation is as close as your own mouth and heart. People think it must be a complicated process, but it is not. If we believe in our hearts and say with our mouths that Christ is the risen Lord, we will be saved.

### 2 Tim. 3:15

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Timothy was one of the first second-generation Christians: he became a Christian not because an evangelist preached a powerful sermon, but because his mother and grandmother taught him the Holy Scriptures when he was a small child (2 Tim. 1:5).

A parent's work is vitally important. At home and in church, we should realize that teaching small children is both an opportunity and a responsibility. Jesus wanted little children to come to him (Matthew 19:13-15).

Like Timothy's mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois, do your part in leading children to Christ.

For Timothy, the "holy Scriptures" was the Old Testament—Genesis to Malachi. The Old Testament is important because it points to Jesus Christ. At the same time, faith in Christ makes the whole Bible intelligible.

**God's voice assures you of the heavenly father's love toward you.**

**1 John 3:1**

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

As believers, our self-worth is based on the fact that God loves us and calls us his children. We are his children *now*, not just sometime in the distant future. Knowing that we are his children should encourage us to live as Jesus did.

**Jeremiah 31:3**

The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

God reaches toward his people with kindness motivated by deep and everlasting love. He is eager to do the best for them if they will only let him.

After many words of warning about sin, this reminder of God's magnificent love is a breath of fresh air. Rather than thinking of God with dread, look carefully and see him lovingly drawing us toward himself.

**The voice of God will warn you.**

**Ephes. 6:4**

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The purpose of parental discipline is to help children grow, not to exasperate and provoke them to anger or discouragement (see also Col. 3:21).

Parenting is not easy—it takes lots of patience to raise children in a loving, Christ-honoring manner. But frustration and anger should not be causes for discipline. Instead, parents should act in love, treating their children as Jesus treats the people he loves. This is vital to children's development and to their understanding of what Christ is like.

### **The voice of God will edify you.**

**Ephes. 4:12**

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Our oneness in Christ does not destroy our individuality. The Holy Spirit has given each Christian special gifts for building up the church. Now that we have these gifts, it is crucial to use them.

If you know what your gifts are, look for opportunities to serve. If you don't know, ask God to show you, perhaps with the help of your minister or Christian friends. Then, as you begin to recognize your special area of service, use your gifts to strengthen and encourage the church.

God has given his church an enormous responsibility—to make disciples in every nation (Matthew 28:18-20). This involves preaching, teaching, healing, nurturing, giving, administering, building, and many other tasks. If we had to fulfill this command as individuals, we might as well give up without trying—it would be impossible.

But God calls us as members of his body. Some of us can do one task; some can do another.

Together we can obey God more fully than any of us could alone. It is a human tendency to overestimate what we can do by ourselves and to underestimate what we can do as a group. But as the body of Christ, we can accomplish more together than we would dream possible working by ourselves.

Working together, the church can express the fullness of Christ (see the note on +Ephes. 3:19).

**The voice of God will increase your faith.**

**Romans 10:17**

Yet faith comes from listening to this message of good news—the Good News about Christ.

**The voice of God will cause you to triumph in Christ.**

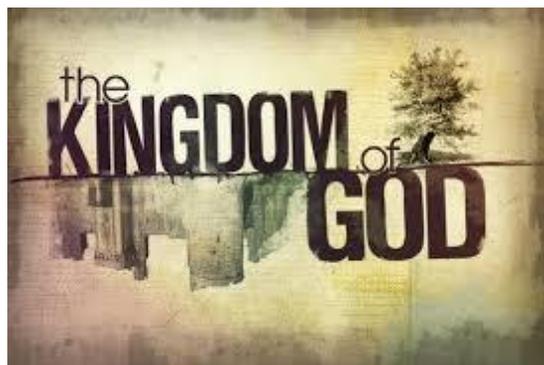
**2 Cor. 2:14**

But thanks be to God, who made us his captives and leads us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now wherever we go he uses us to tell others about the Lord and to spread the Good News like a sweet perfume.

In a Roman triumphal procession, the Roman general would display his treasures and captives amidst a cloud of incense burned for the gods. To the victors, the aroma was sweet; to the captives in the parade, it was the smell of slavery and death. When Christians preach the gospel, it is good

news to some and repulsive news to others. Believers recognize the life-giving fragrance of the message. To nonbelievers, however, it smells foul, like death—their own.

## Chapter 6



### Entering the Kingdom of God

#### John 3:1-7

After dark one evening, a Jewish religious leader named Nicodemus, a Pharisee, came to speak with Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are proof enough that God is with you."

Jesus replied, "I assure you, unless you are born again, you can never see the Kingdom of God."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

Jesus replied, "The truth is, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives new life from heaven. So don't be surprised at my statement that you must be born again."

Nicodemus came to Jesus personally, although he could have sent one of his assistants. He wanted to examine Jesus for himself to separate fact from rumor. Perhaps Nicodemus was afraid of what his peers, the Pharisees, would say about his visit, so he came after dark.

Later, when he understood that Jesus was truly the Messiah, he spoke up boldly in his defense (John 7:50-51). Like Nicodemus, we must examine Jesus for ourselves—others cannot do it for us. Then, if we believe he is who he says, we will want to speak up for him.

What did Nicodemus know about the kingdom? From the Bible he knew it would be ruled by God, it would be restored on earth, and it would incorporate God's people. Jesus revealed to this devout Pharisee that the kingdom would come to the whole world (John 3:16), not just the Jews, and that Nicodemus wouldn't be a part of it unless he was personally born again (John 3:5).

This was a revolutionary concept: the kingdom is personal, not national or ethnic, and its entrance requirements are repentance and spiritual rebirth. Jesus later taught that God's kingdom has *already begun* in the hearts of believers (Luke 17:21). It will be fully realized when Jesus returns again to judge the world and abolish evil forever (Rev. 21; Rev. 22).

“Of water and the Spirit” could refer to (1) the contrast between physical birth (water) and spiritual birth (Spirit), or (2) being regenerated by the Spirit and signifying that rebirth by Christian baptism.

The water may also represent the cleansing action of God's Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). Nicodemus undoubtedly would have been familiar with God's promise in Ezekiel 36:25-26. Jesus was explaining the importance of a spiritual rebirth, saying that people don't enter the kingdom by living a better life, but by being spiritually reborn.

Who is the Holy Spirit? God is three persons in one—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God became a man in Jesus so that Jesus could die for our sins.

Jesus rose from the dead to offer salvation to all people through spiritual renewal and rebirth. When Jesus ascended into heaven, his physical presence left the earth, but he promised to send the Holy Spirit so that his spiritual presence would still be among mankind (see Luke 24:49).

### **Confess God's kingdom within you.**

#### **Matthew 10:32**

"If anyone acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will openly acknowledge that person before my Father in heaven.

Jesus did not come to bring the kind of peace that glosses over deep differences just for the sake of superficial harmony. Conflict and disagreement will arise between those who choose to follow Christ and those who don't. Yet we can look forward to the day when all conflict will be resolved.

#### **1 John 4:15**

All who proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God.

With God living in us through Christ, we have no reason to fear this day, because we have been saved from punishment. Instead, we can look forward to the day of judgment, because it will mean the end of sin and the beginning of a face-to-face relationship with Jesus Christ.

## The results of the kingdom of God in you

Luke 17:21

You won't be able to say, 'Here it is!' or 'It's over there!' For the Kingdom of God is among you."

The Pharisees asked when God's kingdom would come, not knowing that it had already arrived. The kingdom of God is not like an earthly kingdom with geographical boundaries.

Instead, it begins with the work of God's Spirit in people's lives and in relationships. Still today we must resist looking to institutions or programs for evidence of the progress of God's kingdom. Instead, we should look for what God is doing in people's hearts.

## How to enter into the kingdom of God

James 1:22

And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don't obey, you are only fooling yourself.

It is important to listen to what God's Word says, but it is much more important to obey it, to *do* what it says. We can measure the effectiveness of our Bible study time by the effect it has on our behavior and attitudes. Do you put into action what you have studied?

Romans 10:9-10

**For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.**

In order to be saved, you must confess, believe and accept Jesus as Lord.

**Those who are born again hear the voice of Jesus, the shepherd.**

**John 10:4**

After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they recognize his voice.

**John 10:7**

So he explained it to them. "I assure you, I am the gate for the sheep," he said.

At night, sheep were often gathered into a sheep pen to protect them from thieves, weather, or wild animals. The sheep pens were caves, sheds, or open areas surrounded by walls made of stones or branches. The shepherd often slept in the pen to protect the sheep.

Just as a shepherd cares for his sheep, Jesus, the good shepherd, cares for his flock (those who follow him). The prophet Ezekiel, in predicting the coming of the Messiah, called him a shepherd (Ezekiel 34:23).

**John 10:27**

**My sheep recognize my voice; I know them, and they follow me.**

Just as a shepherd protects his sheep, Jesus protects his people from eternal harm. While believers can expect to suffer on earth, Satan cannot harm their souls or take away their eternal life with God. There are many reasons to be afraid here on earth because this is the devil's domain (1 Peter 5:8). But if you choose to follow Jesus, he will give you everlasting safety.

## 1 John 1:9

But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.

Confession is supposed to free us to enjoy fellowship with Christ. It should ease our consciences and lighten our cares. But some Christians do not understand how it works.

They feel so guilty that they confess the same sins over and over; then they wonder if they might have forgotten something. Other Christians believe that God forgives them when they confess, but if they died with unconfessed sins, they would be forever lost.

These Christians do not understand that God *wants* to forgive us. He allowed his beloved Son to die just so he could offer us pardon. When we come to Christ, he forgives all the sins we have committed or will ever commit.

We don't need to confess the sins of the past all over again, and we don't need to fear that God will reject us if we don't keep our slate perfectly clean. Of course we should continue to confess our sins, but not because failure to do so will make us lose our salvation. Our relationship with Christ is secure. Instead, we should confess so that we can enjoy maximum fellowship and joy with him.

True confession also involves a commitment not to continue in sin. We wouldn't be genuinely confessing our sins to God if we planned to commit them again and just wanted temporary forgiveness. We should also pray for strength to defeat temptation the next time we face it.

If God has forgiven us for our sins because of Christ's death, why must we confess our sins? In admitting our sins and receiving Christ's cleansing, we are:

- (1) Agreeing with God that our sin truly is sin and that we are willing to turn from it,
- (2) Ensuring that we don't conceal our sins from him and consequently from ourselves, and
- (3) Recognizing our tendency to sin and relying on his power to overcome it.

### **Effectual fervent prayer is heard**

#### **James 5:16**

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results.

Christ has made it possible for us to go directly to God for forgiveness. But confessing our sins to each other still has an important place in the life of the church.

- (1) If we have sinned against an individual, we must ask him or her to forgive us.
- (2) If our sin has affected the church, we must confess it publicly.
- (3) If we need loving support as we struggle with a sin, we should confess that sin to those who are able to provide that support.
- (4) If, after confessing a private sin to God, we still don't feel his forgiveness, we may wish to confess that sin to a fellow believer and hear him or her assure us of God's pardon.

In Christ's kingdom, every believer is a priest to other believers (1 Peter 2:9).

### **Citizenship in God's kingdom depends on love.**

#### **1 John 4:7-8**

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God—for God is love.

Everyone believes that love is important, but love is usually thought of as a feeling. In reality, love is a choice and an action, as 1 Cor. 13:4-7 shows. God is the source of our love: he loved us enough to sacrifice his Son for us. Jesus is our example of what it means to love; everything he did in life and death was supremely loving.

The Holy Spirit gives us the power to love; he lives in our hearts and makes us more and more like Christ.

God's love always involves a choice and an action, and our love should be like his. How well do you display your love for God in the choices you make and the actions you take?

#### **1 John 4:17**

And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we are like Christ here in this world.

The day of judgment is that time when all people will appear before Christ and be held accountable for their actions. With God living in us through Christ, we have no reason to fear this day, because we have

been saved from punishment. Instead, we can look forward to the day of judgment, because it will mean the end of sin and the beginning of a face-to-face relationship with Jesus Christ.

### Mark 12:30-31

And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, your entire mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."

God's laws are not burdensome. They can be reduced to two simple principles: love God and love others. These commands are from the Old Testament (Deut. 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

When you love God completely and care for others as you care for yourself, then you have fulfilled the intent of the Ten Commandments and the other Old Testament laws. According to Jesus, these two commandments summarize all God's laws.

Let them rule your thoughts, decisions, and actions. When you are uncertain about what to do, ask yourself which course of action best demonstrates love for God and love for others.

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