

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

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THE REALITY OF GOD

Part 13

By Rayola Kelley

I remember when I first considered Jesus' question to Peter, "But who do you say I am?" I realize that Jesus wanted to know Peter's perspective. We know that Peter got the answer right, but Jesus declared that only the Father could have revealed His correct identity to him (*Matthew 16:13-18*).

Sadly, we are apt to listen and believe what people say about the three persons of the Godhead without testing it according to the Spirit and truth of Scripture. Most people assume that their understanding about God is acceptable, but yet if it is not right on the mark, it will lead people away from the true Jesus and the salvation that is freely offered through Him. To most individuals the idea of possessing a different Jesus is no big deal; yet it is the deciding factor between heaven and hell. You cannot get to heaven with a wrong Jesus, while trying to escape the damnation of hell without the right Jesus. It is that simple. Jesus is the only door in all of creation that will lead one into eternal life (*John 10:7-9*).

In *Revelation 3:8* we are told that the Lord is the keeper of doors for He alone holds the keys. For those who are His people, He is the one who opens the door concerning our understanding, spiritual growth, walk, and the will of God for our lives. He is the one who will make a way or a door for each born-again believer to discover his or her life, purpose, and ultimate destiny.

The reality of doors was brought out to me in a frightening incident a few years ago. There was a heretical preacher whom we had crossed paths with in the past and we were even used to challenge him about the Jesus he possessed. It was clear that we both had a different Jesus, and his

teachings along with the fruits of his life clearly bore the sad fact that his Jesus was not the Jesus of the Bible.

To make a long story short, he discovered he had cancer. As he faced the inevitable, he confidently prepared for his funeral. His wife was sitting with him as he was about to enter through the door of death and face eternity. He began to cry out in a state of panic, "Open the door, open the door!" She tried to reason with him, and calm him, but it was clear that the door he was standing before was not opening for him. Perhaps this man did not recognize the one true door to eternal life in this present world, but as he was about to enter eternity he knew what door he needed to enter, but it was shut to him.



Remember the five foolish virgins who did not have the oil of the Holy Spirit, and as a result missed the bridegroom's call going forth for the virgins to come in to the marriage supper? And, once the wise virgins were inside, the **door** was shut. What happened when the five foolish virgins came to the door, "*Afterward came also the other virgins, saying Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh*" (*Matthew 25:11-13*)

Clearly, there will be another door opened in the future. It will be the heavens itself when Jesus comes for His Church, His Bride. Only those who are prepared to enter into glory will be brought through that door by the Bridegroom. What a glorious time it will be

for those who truly belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, sealed by His Spirit, clothed in humility, and prepared according to their election and by their high calling.

I realize in a politically correct society, the idea of there being one door into eternal life is completely shunned. However, I would like to remind people of another time when there was only one door available to escape the wrath of God. Sadly, only eight people walked through that door. No doubt they were mocked, but when judgment came, those eight souls on the right side of the door were spared. The door was in the ark Noah constructed before the great flood of judgment came upon the face of the world (*Genesis 7:6*).

This is why the Bible is clear that the way to heaven is narrow and few will find it (*Matthew 7:13-14*). It is for this reason we must strive to enter through the door, not stand and admire it, think about it to see how it might benefit us at the present, put it off until we have tasted more of the world, or live in a state of wishful thinking that the Lord will actually come out and just drag us in to spare us from His wrath. The Bible is clear that we are responsible to enter through the door by faith, knowing that His mercy, grace, and life await us on the other side.

Since the Jesus of the Bible is the only door in which man must enter to possess eternal life, people have to get their reality of Him right. I have learned that I need to quit relying on people's description of Jesus. I need to have my personal understanding of Him revealed to me by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God (*John 16:13; 1 John 2:27*). Granted, people can point me in the right direction, encourage me to know Jesus for myself, and even lift Him up to me in the hope that I fall more in love with Him, but unless a matter is imparted as truth to my heart by the Holy Spirit, such

knowledge can end up dying on the cold, lifeless table of carnal understanding.

The question is how do we come to a greater understanding of Jesus? It is simple—we can begin with what Jesus said about Himself. Jesus spoke of who He was in parables, teachings, and examples. He always pointed backward to the shadows and example of the Old Testament to confirm His identity.

I would like to point out a few of these examples to you. The first one I want to bring to your attention is found in *John 3:11-15* where Jesus talked to Nicodemus about what it meant to be born again. The Son of God stated that if He told him of earthly things, and he believed it, will he not believe heavenly truths? Jesus related it to a situation that happened in the wilderness, *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”*

It is important to go back to *Numbers 21* in order to understand the significance of what Jesus was saying. The people of Israel were experiencing great victories on their way to the Promised Land, but the way was hard and the people began to speak against God. We are told that the LORD sent fiery serpents among them who bit them. Since their bite was deadly, people began to die.

The people came to Moses confessing their sin and asking him to intercede on their behalf. God hearkened unto Moses and gave him the antidote. However, for it to work they had to assimilate it by faith. The Lord told Moses to make a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and if a serpent bit someone, all they had to do was look at the serpent on the pole, and he or she would live in spite of the bite.

What a beautiful illustration of the salvation provided by God through His Son. “Brass” represents judgment on sin. The serpent lifted up pointed to the cross of Jesus, where the power (the bite of sin and death) of the serpent, Satan, would be destroyed as Jesus became sin for us and paid the complete price of redemption. It is important to recognize that God did not remove the problem; rather, He

provided a solution (*1 Corinthians 15:54-56; Hebrews 2:14-15*).

Sin has always been a problem since our first parents rebelled against the authority and commandment of God. People would like the temptation of sin taken away so they do not have to make a choice as to the master they will serve. They do not want to enter the one door of salvation by faith; rather, they want Christ’s life handed to them outside of the door so they can still hold onto the world as long as they can, while avoiding facing the character of their wretched selfishness. They want to slide “under the radar” into the kingdom of heaven with all their pride, the old self-life, and practices intact instead of coming by way of the cross of Christ where they exchange the old with the new. They want to receive all the benefits without letting go of their miserable rags that omit a stench to heaven. They will come inside of a church building to sing hymns, rub elbows with other Christians on Sunday mornings, at Bible Studies, and potlucks, but they will not humble themselves to enter through the door of salvation by confessing their sin, admitting they are rightfully lost, and that only Jesus, God’s only Son can save their sinful selves from the eternal damnation that awaits them.

Admittedly, this concerns me! I have sat in churches through the years and wondered just how many people have truly entered through the Door? How many people will find themselves in the same predicament as the five foolish virgins who were not prepared to enter through the door of the bridegroom? How many people will end up being frantic as they pass from this world into the next to only find a closed door?

I want to state at this point that it is not my intention to cause people to doubt their salvation; rather, my goal is to challenge people to be sure they have passed through the door of the one true Jesus into eternal life. We cannot trust our salvation to religious notions, assumptions, associations, and presumptions. The Apostle John’s first epistle is clear that believers can know whether they are saved. They can have assurance that in the end, they will never be ashamed that they put their faith and trust in the Lord and His Word.

Since we live in precarious times in which darkness is consuming the world, we need to possess the light of the Gospel, Jesus Christ. Through the years I have had my personal challenges, but I knew that Jesus was the solution to my challenges, and in the humility of brokenness, godly repentance, and sincere confession, I would sincerely own my life and actions and He would quickly restore any broken fellowship that had occurred (*2 Corinthians 4:5-6*).

This brings me to the second statement Jesus made about Himself. It is found in *John 6:47-50*, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.”*

To understand the significance about the bread from heaven, we need to go back to *Exodus 16*. It was in the wilderness that God rained bread (manna) out of heaven to feed the people of Israel in their pilgrimage to the Promised Land. When the children of Israel saw the small round object that reminded them of hoar frost on the ground, they asked what is it, naming the food from heaven “manna.”

The Father also sent His Son into the world. Shadows were cast, types established, and patterns recorded in the Old Testament so that the Jewish people could recognize their Messiah when He came. However, when He came, the people debated about who He was. *John 1:10-11* summarizes what happened to the Manna from heaven, *“He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”*

When we read about manna from heaven, we can begin to understand more about what it means for Jesus to be our bread from heaven. First it came from God, signifying that it was sufficient to keep the people in their wilderness experience. As spiritual pilgrims, we are walking through the world, which is a spiritual, barren wilderness (*1 Peter 2:11*). To sustain every person spiritually, God has provided the bread from heaven, but how

many people are looking to this bread to sustain them?

The bread came every day except for the Sabbath, and man was to gather enough of it to feed him and his family. It is clear that our life in Christ can only sustain us if we are daily partaking of His Word. We do not live according to the natural bread of this world or our best attempts; we can only live and be sustained by the Bread of Heaven and the milk of His pure Word and the meat of His will in this present world. It is His life being worked in us by faith and obedience that makes the milk pure and sweet, and ensures the integrity of God's will until we enter into His glory.

Those who lightly esteemed the instructions concerning the manna were met with decaying bread and repercussions. Those who fail to partake of the Bread presently being offered, fail to handle His Word properly, and do the will of the Father will pay with their very souls (*Matthew 7:21-23; Romans 1:18; 1 John 2:17*). In fact, the Bible is clear that the wrath of God abides on those who reject His Son and mishandle His Word.

The third reference I want to consider that Jesus made of Himself is found in *Matthew 12:39-41*. This incident involved certain scribes and Pharisees asking Jesus to give them a sign. Keep in mind they were not asking for a sign to believe or confirm Jesus was the Promised One, for they had no intention of believing. When faith is missing from the equation, such requests are presumptuous and intended to put the Lord to a foolish test. (Refer to the incident in *John 4:46-54* to see the contrast as to the importance of motive when it comes to seeking a sign.)

Jesus rebuked them by stating only a wicked generation seeks after a sign. He then said this, "...*there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas; For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here*" (*Matthew 12:39c-41*)

This is not the first time that Jesus referred to the greatest sign that He would give as to His identity: that of His resurrection. He also mentioned this same sign in *John 2:18-22* to some of the Jews who were also seeking a sign.

There are those today who seek after a sign, but it is clear that Jesus stipulated that the greatest sign, the most significant miracle would happen in His resurrection. Sadly, people are not content with the means in which God miraculously brought forth the means of salvation. There are those who think that they are deserving of such salvation so they fail to see the importance of it. They are often seeking the entertainment of signs and wonders so they can ride high on the waves of sensationalism.

The crux of the matter is if we do not believe in our heart the resurrection of Jesus, we will not be saved (*Romans 10: 9-10*). If Jesus had not risen from the grave, our faith would be in vain (*1 Corinthians 15:12-18*). Granted Jesus had to die on the cross in our place and His body put in a tomb, but He was raised up three days later to prove that neither the grave nor death could hold Him. As a result, we serve a living Lord, not a dead, lifeless martyr. The message we proclaim is living and powerful, capable of saving people, and it is the sign that confirms our faith as believers and assures us that when all is said and done, we will not be ashamed or disappointed that we have believed.

As Christians we should be growing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Granted, there are no new revelations of Him outside of the Bible, but since He is eternal, each inspired revelation of the Spirit will possess greater depths that can still be revealed, mysteries that can be uncovered, and grander heights that can be discovered as the person of Jesus Christ takes on greater dimension in our understanding (*Ephesians 1:17-20*). †

PLEASING TO GOD?

"None of us can ever be fully pleasing to God if we are not willing to be well taught in His Word. It does not refer to being well taught in religion. Rather, it is being well taught in the basic concepts necessary to the Christian faith."
— A. W. Tozer

DARE TO BE CHALLENGED Excerpts from J. Gregory Mantle's sermon, "The Blessed Man"

I believe in the old-fashioned genuine call to the ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit—men set apart, picked out by God. You can turn men out of colleges, theological schools and universities as fast as you can turn out carpet-tacks, if you want to; and when you have done it you haven't a preacher, nor a teacher, nor a Christian worker. All this culture and education are good in their place, and I have nothing to say against them; but I am pleading for something more. No man who takes his diploma from any college, seminary or theological school ought to think for a moment that because he does that he is fitted for the ministry. He is never really fitted until the oil of the Holy Spirit has been poured upon him, and drenches him from head to foot.

People recognize the fact that God is with certain men and not with others. God is willing to be with anybody who will pay the price. He will pick you out for your work, whatever it may be, the same as He will pick out a preacher for his work. I believe God wants to pick out every officer in the Church as He did when the twelve Apostles called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said: "Look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom ye may appoint over the business."

What we need to-day in the Church of Jesus Christ is to clean out the folks that are not Christians, and get down to those who have been born again, and filled with the Holy Spirit. If you only have a little clean group of men and women after that order, God can build on that kind of a foundation a superstructure that will be to the praise of His Glory throughout the eternal ages.

The world is looking for mixers, but the Lord Jesus Christ is looking for separators. The world thinks if a man is a good mixer he will come out fine; but if you will look over the records you will find that God's men always come out clean.....There is power...in a life separated unto God, and freshly anointed with the Holy Spirit. †

DARE TO DISCERN Part Three By Jeannette Haley

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” – 1 Corinthians 2:14

Thus far we have touched on how to discern if a person knows the real Jesus or not. People with an antichrist spirit may quote Scriptures, talk about Jesus according to their own definition of who He is, live upright lives, do good works, sing in the choir, sit in church, engage in religious activities, donate money, and yet remain unsaved. Some can even display counterfeit fruit. This is why it is imperative to exercise discernment, pray for wisdom, and know the Bible, from cover to cover, using the Authorized King James Version if at all possible because it is still the most accurate translation from the original manuscripts that we have in print today, is the easiest to read, as well as memorize. (And, as a side note, don't be surprised if it isn't outlawed in America in the not-too-distant future, depending on how much power and control is given to those who hate God, hate Christians, and hate the Bible.)

The Word of God is a powerful discerner, but it does little good if a person takes a verse here and there out of context, turns it into a neat little platitude and sticks it on others as if it was somehow a cure-all Band-Aid. Those who do not know how to use the sword of the Word of God, and how to “rightfully divide it” are about as unfit to discern spirits as a Zorro fan who purchases a sword and enters a fencing contest even though the closest thing to a sword he or she has ever handled is a bread knife. *Hebrews 4:12* tells us what a powerful discerner the Word of God is, “*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*” *2 Timothy 2:15* says, “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of*

truth.” [Emphasis added.] Therefore, in order to rightly discern the intent of the Word of God, a person must study it, comparing Scripture with Scripture, while also availing him or herself to Strong's Concordance, Vine's Word Studies, Smith's Bible Dictionary, and a Halley's Handbook of the Bible. (NOTE: Be sure that you find a pre-1965 edition as the newer editions have removed vital information such as the persecution of Christians by the Roman Catholic Church, and have altered other aspects of Halley's original work.)

A superficial, shallow, and literal reading of the Word of God is akin to the valley of dry bones. What it amounts to is a lifeless pile of disjointed, dry, depressing, dead-letter dogma which desperately needs the living waters of the Holy Spirit. To put it another way a mere surface reading of Scripture is like surfing on the ocean where everything depends on staying “on top” for a smooth ride, while under the surface, the depths with all of its wonders, beauty, and treasures remain undiscovered. The wonders, beauty, and treasures that “Christian surfers” miss are the riches and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in whom “*dwelleth all the fullness of the godhead bodily.*” (*Colossians 2:9*). I am convinced that a surface reading of the Bible produces surface Christians. Consider Who the Word is: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth*” *John 1:1, 2, 14*. Dry bones need to be quickened by the Spirit if they are to come alive. Jesus said, “*It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life*” *John 6:63*. “*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*” *2 Peter 1:20, 21*. [Emphasis added.] The Word of God is spiritually discerned and quickened to our spirit by the Holy Spirit if we are truly born again. God's Word is our spiritual food. Jesus said,

“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. Job said, “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” Job 23:12b.

Christians must be vigilant to discern the spirit behind anything, because it is altogether too easy to get off the “track of truth” by running Scripture through preconceived personal perceptions, divisive dogmas, wayward worldviews, immature imaginations, undisciplined emotions, out-of-bounds opinions formed by misinformation and religious conditioning, and a liberal worldview, not to mention one's pride and prejudice. Is it any wonder then why false teachings floating among Christians are commonplace nowadays and the number of cults is on the rise? The bottom line is, fallen man naturally resents, repudiates, and rejects coming into agreement with God Almighty because of pride. To come into agreement with God means that I am willing to humble myself before Him, pay the price by denying myself the right to my own life, mortify the flesh by “picking up my cross” and determine to believe, trust and follow Him no matter what the cost. Jesus said “*to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away*” *Luke 9:23-25?* [Emphasis added.]

Many years ago when I was young, inexperienced, and zealous for the Lord, I was blessed to be able to meet, and come to know, many powerful evangelists (who, sadly, are a thing of the past in our post-modern American churches), missionaries and other Christian workers. I simply couldn't “get enough” of these people. I took advantage of every speaking engagement they held in my area, and entertained many of them in my home. There was something about them that was “different” from the average churchgoer, and that “something” drew me like a magnet. I discerned that they knew and had experienced God in

ways that I never had. They had authority, power, sobriety, and humility—everything about them was real. Finally, after following one visiting evangelist from one meeting to the next, and watching the power of God in action as healing and salvation were silently and reverently received by people, along with deliverances, I found myself in a home where this evangelist was a guest. Quietly, I popped the question: “Where...um, that is, how... did you get your power?” The whispered answer staggered me, for it came in one word, and that word was, “Suffering.”

After that encounter, I drove home and spent a week wrestling with this aspect of the cost of discipleship and service to the Lord. I desperately wanted what these men and women of God had, but...*suffering* wasn't something I embraced in any way, shape or form. In my spirit I knew that the only way the door to really knowing God would open for me was through total surrender. But, after tossing about on my bed one night, I finally gave in, and said something to this effect, “Lord, if this is the only way to really *know You*, and *serve You* in authority and power, then so be it.” The cowardly “chicken” part of my flesh really wanted to plead, “Lord, I just love You so much and I long to be “great” in Your kingdom, so instead of having to carry the heavy cross of suffering, could you please just make the cross I have to bear out of Styrofoam?” Thankfully, God bears with us in the weakness of the flesh when our hearts are fixed on Him. The truth is Christians who walk about with a “Styrofoam” cross are far removed from experiencing and comprehending *Philippians 3:10, 11* which states, “*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.*” That is identification with Christ. And, I might add, it involves *servitude*.

The question is what is wrong with being a lukewarm “Christian” as long as you have “accepted” Jesus, and believe God loves you, and that you are going to heaven? Vance Havner adequately answers that question in his book, *When God*

Breaks Through. He said, “Our personal problems and our church problems today boil down to the denial of the supreme lordship of Christ. Early Christianity demanded a clean break with the world, the flesh, and the Devil, and that lasted until Constantine became a church member and tried to Christianize paganism and wound up ‘paganizing’ Christianity. The church tried to control the culture. It was ‘Constantinized’ but not Christianized. We have never gotten over that mistake, the mistake of Constantine. And to this day, although Nero is dead, too many church members try to serve two lords. Our churches have been filled with baptized pagans living double lives—fearing the Lord and serving their own gods, drawing nigh God with their mouths and honoring Him with their lips while their hearts are far from Him, calling Him ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not doing what He says.” He also stated, “But it is an authentic mark of the work of the Holy Spirit to truly confess Jesus as Lord, for the old Adam never bows to the lordship of Jesus Christ.”

It is crucial that every born again believer knows how to discern between those who are Christians in name only—those who have “accepted Christ” intellectually but have not been truly born again by His Spirit. People who are genuinely born again have not only received Christ as their Savior, but also as their Lord. Vance Havner nailed it when he wrote, “I think we preachers have unwittingly created an artificial distinction between accepting Jesus as Savior and confessing Him as Lord. We’ve made two things out of it, and it’s not two things; it’s all one thing. A great many people today have the idea that, ‘I can take the free part, salvation. I’ll take Jesus as Savior. I don’t want to go to hell. I’ll take Jesus as Savior. I’ll not take Him as Lord now. I’ll think it over, and maybe sometime at a dedication meeting I’ll go forward and take Him as Lord. In the meantime, if I never do, I’ll go to heaven anyhow. The only thing I’ll lose will be my reward. That’s very strange doctrine. It certainly isn’t New Testament doctrine. Salvation is not a cafeteria line where you go along and take what you want and leave the rest. You don’t get saved on the installment plan with your fingers crossed and inner reservations. You can’t take Jesus on approval like you

buy a stock of goods. To be sure, we may not understand all that’s involved. And all the rest of our lives, fresh areas are opening up that need to be subjected to the lordship of Christ. If we take Jesus for all we know Him to be at that time, God will save us. We don’t have to be theologians. But no one can take Jesus as Savior and at the same time willfully and deliberately and knowingly refuse Him as Lord, and be saved.”

Here is just one example: Years ago when Rayola, Krista and I lived in the Bothell-Kirkland area of Washington, a woman called our office desperate for help. She stated outright that she had demons and was tormented. She also told us that she had been diagnosed as having “Multiple Personality Disorder.” To make a very long story short in light of the subject of the Lordship of Christ, after several sessions of casting out many demons (that each had a different voice), getting her down to the fact that she was a witch who had “married Satan,” she became clear headed enough to understand that only Jesus could save her. She was agreeable to Him being her Savior from tormenting demons. However, when she was told that the Holy Spirit needed to fill the vacancies left by her many demons, and that Jesus had to become her Lord instead of her familiar spirit, she pitched a fit and would have none of it. Wailing and screaming, she blurted out, “No, no! I don’t want to give up the power they give me.” As with so many tormented people like her that we have dealt with through the years, they only want relief from the torment, but not complete deliverance so they can be set free to love, follow, and serve Christ as their Lord. As the saying goes, “Either Christ Jesus is Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all.”

Looking back on that earlier time when I was compelled by an insatiable hunger and thirst for more of God and the reality of His presence in greater ways than the church “culture” had to offer, I realize that it was the Holy Spirit who was drawing me so that I could learn how to discern the difference between that which is of God in Spirit and in Truth, and that which is of the world, the flesh, and counterfeit spirits of the devil. When you become truly born again, you are

under “new management.” Vance Havner explains it this way: “I didn’t understand much about trusting Jesus, but I understood one thing. No theologian had to explain it to me. I understood that I was under new management. That was perfectly clear. I had a new Lord. I believe that the sad state of our Christians in churches today is due to a cheap *believism* that doesn’t believe and a cheap *receivism* that doesn’t receive. After all, the word *Savior* is found only 24 times in the New Testament, and the word *Lord* is applied to Jesus 433 times. He is Lord. A Christian is a believer, a disciple, and a witness. You ought to become all three at the same time and be all three all the rest of the time.” I might add, nowhere in Scripture does it say that *2 Timothy 2:3*, “*Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*” was only written for others living somewhere else on the other side of the world.

Someone may ask, “That is all very fine and well, but how do you discern who is truly born again and who is not?” This is a very good question. If you have some doubts or reservations about someone you meet who claims to be saved, you need to ask the Lord to show you what you are sensing, or perceiving. Perhaps their personality or attitudes rub you the wrong way up front, but, of course, you cannot come to a definitive conclusion based on personality. After all, we all have our good days and bad days. Nevertheless, there are certain indications or signs that give people away as to whether they belong to the Lord or not beginning with what kind of a testimony they have.

When we meet or are introduced to Christians, one of us invariably asks, “Can you tell us your testimony?” What we are looking for is a real salvation experience that includes humbling of self, confession of sin and repentance, believing the Gospel, receiving Christ as Lord and Savior, and a changed life in both attitude and action. Sadly what we often hear is, “I’ve always been a Christian,” or “I was brought up a Christian,” or “I know God loves me” or “I’ve been in such and such church for 40 years,” and sometimes their so-called “testimony” veers off into a confusing

jumble of “spiritual experiences” that make your skin crawl.

It also pays to listen to what professing Christians talk about the most—is it primarily about the Lord Jesus Christ, and what the Scriptures say (in context) or is it about themselves, their religious accomplishments, or what they think they are “destined” for, their favorite “Christian” celebrity or author, or how terribly misunderstood and ill-treated they are? If such people beat the same old drum at every opportunity in order to get attention, gain a following, propose their agendas, or subtly put down a godly leader, you can rightly conclude that discretion on your part is definitely called for. In such a case it becomes evident that the person is exhibiting the wrong motivation, and that you are indeed discerning not only a person who lacks the Holy Spirit, and who needs to be truly born again, but one who is operating under “another spirit.” In such a situation, I usually take note of the nearest exit!

What about discerning fruits? Jesus said, “*Ye shall know them by their fruits*” *Matthew 7:16a*. This means both good fruit and bad fruit. This reminds me of “the good old days” many years ago before man began destroying food by trying to “improve” it for monetary gain and control (that is another subject). Back then when you bit into a big, beautiful, juicy peach, it would be bursting with an indescribable depth of delicious flavor and delightful sweetness. The same held true for other fruits. Nowadays, no matter how lovely peaches may look in a grocery store, or even from some produce stands, when you go to eat them you generally end up with a mouthful of tough, pithy, flavorless blah that isn’t worth a pit. You get my point. It’s all so very disappointing.

The same is true of many professing Christians. Outwardly they seem to have it all together, but in time it is truly the “pits” when you discover that the “good fruit” they appear to put forth lacks substance, is self-serving, and is all show. This reminds me of the dream (more like nightmare) Rayola had recently. She found herself in a church somewhere, but what should have been the sanctuary was all a stage, or platform, and all the people were dressed up as actors and ac-

tresses, who were playing different parts. The whole thing was nothing but a show. While some might blame the record-breaking heatwave for this impressionable dream, the fact remains that this is what many churches have encouraged through lack of discipleship, lack of love for God Almighty, lack of obedience to the Word, and lack of love for truth. A cavalier attitude toward God’s Word, failure to believe and obey it, while putting on a performance so the “show must go on” is nothing but hypocrisy in action. The “fruit” on display may be deceptive to some, but not for those who do know their God, know His Word, know the Holy Spirit, and are discerning. *Hebrews 5:14* is clear, “*But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, [even] those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*”

Bad fruit that is of the world, the flesh, and the devil is listed in *Galatians 5:19-21*, “*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*” How is it that so many churches fail to properly discern these works of the flesh within the local body, and confront them according to biblical instruction? How can the church function as the Body of Christ in purity and power if “PCCP” (Political Correctness of Church Politics) is activated behind the guise of “love” and “tolerance”? How can a local church claim that Christ is its Head if the Body is full of the “old leaven of sin?”

An astute Christian friend sent me the following quote which sums it up well (note the date it was written): The following was written in 1929 by I.M. Haldeman, *A King’s Penknife, or, Why I am Opposed to Modernism*: “Another word flung cheaply at those who stand for the integrity of the Bible, not only as a rule of faith, but practice, is the easy epithet: ‘Narrow.’ There are Christians, even in the pulpit, good enough and wanting to be

faithful to their calling, who shiver whenever the word is uttered in their neighborhood. ... But as I recall the preaching of the Son of God, I find it was along the line of a NARROW positivism: It was he who said: 'Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life.' ... To raise a hue and cry against this as 'divisive;' to appeal to compromise for the sake of 'brotherhood' and 'Christian charity' and to talk about LOVE BEING MORE IMPORTANT IN THE CHURCH THAN CORRECTNESS OF DOCTRINE, IS EMOTIONAL WEAKNESS AND FALLACIOUS FOLLY. ... The word 'toleration' must be cut out of the church vocabulary. You cannot find it in the Bible. It is not a nice word. It is not to be found in good company. It is a word much used by middle-of-the-road men. It has in it, no matter how much dissimulated, the crawling, creeping movement of surrender. ... Why should the Church tolerate men who no longer tolerate the Bible as God gave it to us?"

Even though the list of the works of the flesh in Galatians is, and should be, as obvious to the members of Christ's Body as a dead skunk in the middle of the road, people who pride themselves in their "tolerance" will simply look the other way and "steer around it". After all, it doesn't take much discernment to see the obvious outward sin in the lives of people, but what does take some perception is discerning those fine folks whose underlying belief system of tolerance will lead to compromise with the wrong spirit. Usually people embrace tolerance because it benefits them in some way, but eventually their fruit will tell on them. ✚

GEMS OF WISDOM

"Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right." —C.H. Spurgeon

"We should come to church not anticipating entertainment but expecting the high and holy manifestation of God's presence." - A.W. Tozer

"We go astray when we think that we can do spiritual work without spiritual power." - A.W. Tozer

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

IS THE HOLY SPIRIT STILL SPEAKING TODAY?

Q: *"It is confusing to me why nowadays people hear less [than the Old Testament prophets] even though they have the Holy Spirit inside of them! My thought is that we should hear BETTER now...but what factors may be causing us to hear less today?"*



A: Your observation is correct. With the Holy Spirit in believers, we as Christians should be hearing His voice. After all, Jesus said of those who have ears, they need to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying. However, the way that Jesus poses the statement implies that even though people may have the Holy Spirit in them, it does not mean they will hear what He is saying.

According to *2 Corinthians 2:9-14*, the matters of the Spirit must be properly discerned by comparing the spiritual with the spiritual. In other words, believers must be able to recognize the voice of the Spirit before they can properly discern it. The problem with some Christians is they approach the things of God from a fleshly perspective rather than a spiritual one. We are also instructed to test the spirits in *1 John 4:1*.

Let us first begin with what we know the voice of the Spirit sounds like. His first and foremost voice is the Word of God. He inspired it for our spiritual growth (*2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21*). This is hard for some to accept. They want to literally hear a "voice" from heaven. Sadly, there are many voices out there that we can assume or presume belong to the Holy Spirit, but they are not His voice. The main reason people are led astray by other voices such as logic, pride, the world, and Satan is because they do not know the Word of God.

God is still very much speaking today through His Spirit, but many people think that they should constantly be hearing His voice like the Old Testament prophets. However such a conclusion is incorrect. God did not continually speak to His prophets in the Old Testament. There were days, months, and years between God's speaking to His servants, such as in

the case of Abraham.

This brings us to the main reason why people do not hear the voice of the Spirit. It is because they have failed to assimilate His written Word into their lives through faith and obedience. The Holy Spirit will never speak contrary to the inspired Word of God, nor will He change the intent of it, for it is through the Word the Holy Spirit sanctifies God's people to be made fit for His use (*John 17:17; 2 Timothy 2:19-21; 1 Peter 1:2, 22-23*).

It is for this reason that all voices must be discerned in light of the full counsel of God's Word to see if the voice is the Holy Spirit as a means to determine a proper response. However, it is not unusual to see people being casual toward God's Word, while seeking to hear the "physical" voice of God. They do not want to take the necessary measure in becoming familiar with the voice of God through His Word, and as a result they are not able to discern what God might be saying through His Spirit today.

When I hear people say to me, "If only God would speak to me, I would know what to do" I find that upon questioning them, many fall into the category of unbelief or disobedience towards the written Word of God. If they will not believe and obey the Word of God, what makes them think they would believe and obey His voice if they actually heard it? It is a lot like the rich man in hell in *Luke 16*. He suddenly became an evangelist who wanted Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers about hell. This is what was said, *"Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he (Abraham) said unto him, If they hear not Moses and his prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."* (Parenthesis added.)

Another reason people do not hear the voice of the Holy Spirit is because they are seeking some type of sensationalism, religious hype, or miracles. Jesus said of such people that they belong to the wicked generation (*Matthew 12:39*). Such people are more caught up with experiences

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and entertainment than with truth. The Holy Spirit is not flashy, and He was not given to entertain or ensure goosebumps experiences so Christians can fly high on some sensational ether wave, making them appear ridiculous and insane. He came to empower believers to effectively live the Christian life in order to be witnesses in this dark world (*Acts 1:8*). If He speaks, it is in a still small voice as brought out in the case of Elijah (*1 Kings 19:11-12*). His voice will manifest itself in gentle impressions, nudging, and promptings, but such leadings will always be in line with the person of God and His Word.

The Holy Spirit's main responsibility is to lead a person into all truth about the person, character, and work of Jesus Christ to ensure salvation and spiritual well-being (*John 16:13*). For example, He instills the wisdom from above to discern matters, brings revelation to the written Word so saints can behold the Son in greater measure and fall more in love with Him. He also brings insight into the intent and principles behind the Lord's teachings so a person will be edified in his or her life and grow in truth (*Ephesians 1:17-20*). If a person is not interested in knowing God and doing His will by following Jesus into the life He has for him or her, the Holy Spirit will not only be silent but absent in any affairs.

The final reason people do not hear the Spirit is because they are not prepared to hear Him. According to *Luke 24:47-49* and *Acts 2* the people in the upper room tarried before the Holy Spirit came down in power. Clearly, the ground of their hearts and lives were being prepared in their time of waiting to respond and obey their commission. The Holy Spirit will not land or manifest Himself if the ground of people's hearts is not properly prepared. After all, He is holy and will not land on the unholy or manifest Himself through the profane.

Today the work of the Holy Spirit is either being ignored, shut down, or exploited. He is either misunderstood, feared, or being presented as a sensational entertainer. As a result, He is being grieved because of unbelief, quenched because many succumb to

a wrong spirit, and vexed because rebellious people will never bring glory to the One who deserves all glory. In certain cases, some of these individuals may even be coming close to blaspheming Him, because in ignorance, they either accredit His work to Satan or the devil's work to God. (*Isaiah 63:10; Mathew 12:24-32; Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19*).

Once again it comes down to discerning the Holy Spirit's voice. Christians must be able to hear His voice in spite of the many other voices, and they must be prepared to hear Him with a sincere heart, a desire for the truth, and an active faith.

I hope this answers your question. †

POWERLESS MACHINERY By Archibald Brown (1844-1922)

Alas, what an amount of *powerless machinery we have in the so-called religious world!*

Powerless, because it has no unction of the Spirit.

Powerless, because it is the work of *man*--not the working of God through the man.

Powerless, because it is dry and artificial.

Powerless, because it is done by men who have never "tarried until they were endued with *power* from on high."

Instrumentality is almost worshiped--while the Holy Spirit is well-near ignored! O, I wish that it were more realized by us all, that apart from the blessed Spirit, our acquirements and preparations are nothing, and can do nothing! *God's church is hindered, not helped, by any instrumentality that lacks the Holy Spirit.*

"Lord, clear the church of all the rot and rubbish the devil has imposed on her, and bring us back to apostolic methods."

"He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers—for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," Where do the "*public entertainers*" come in? The Holy Spirit is silent concerning them, and his *silence is eloquence*.

CONCERNING THE GIFTS By Harry Ironside

There are commentators who insist that some of these gifts have absolutely disappeared, but I do not know of any Scripture portion that tells us that. I do not know of any passage that says that the age of miracles has passed and I would not dare to say that the sign gifts all ended with Paul's imprisonment. I know from early church history that this is not true... Therefore I do not think it is correct to take the position that these sign gifts have necessarily disappeared from the church. I do, however, believe that many of the gifts are not often seen today, and I think there is good reason for that. In 2 Corinthians 11:2 the apostle wrote, "I have espoused you... as a chaste virgin to Christ." Paul was writing to a separated company, the affianced bride of the Lamb, and it was the delight of the blessed risen Lord to lavish upon her gift after gift. The Corinthians "[came] behind in no gift,"... However, it seems to me that we can see in the book of Acts that as time went on and the church began to drift a little, and as dissension and other things that grieved the Lord arose, there was more reserve on His part in bestowing gifts. That, I believe, explains the lack of many of these gifts today. The church has gotten so far away from what she should be and there is so much strife, division, worldliness, and carnality that the Lord no longer delights in lavishing His gifts as freely as He did in the beginning.

From: H.A. Ironside – *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12 – 1938.*

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