Hearing the Voice of God

David Wilkerson October 17, 1988

One of the greatest blessings a true believer has is to hear and know the voice of God. It is possible to hear God's voice today as certainly and clearly as did Abraham and Moses — as clearly as did Samuel and David — as clearly as did Paul, Peter, the apostles, and John on the isle of Patmos! God has promised to make His voice clearly known for one last time during these end days. He has given us a promise and a warning about hearing His voice. God is going to bring together a holy, separated remnant into a spiritual Zion and make His voice known to them. "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels" (Hebrews 12:22).

God has this message for all who have been called out: The voice of God that has shaken the earth in past generations will be heard in power again in one last shaking! "Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven" (Hebrews 12:26). Here is God's warning to His holy, believing children, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven" (Hebrews 12:25).

Why is God gathering together a people out of the dead churches? Why is the Spirit crying, "Come out of Babylon, my people! Partake not in her sins!"? It is because God must have a people (a Zion people) in these troubled last days who are not confused or tossed to and fro by the horrible winds of false doctrine. These are sheep who do not follow false teachers, who know their Master's voice. God speaks to them clearly and certainly, and they live by His voice! They are directed by His voice, comforted by His voice, guided in all things by His voice! This is the one great characteristic of a holy people: They are not mistaken about God's voice. They know it — they hear it — they are governed by it. It is sure, steadfast, and unmistakable!

God has always had a people who were guided only by His voice. Adam and Eve "heard the voice of the Lord God..." (Genesis 3:8). It was sin that made them fear and hide from that voice. "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid..." (Genesis 3:10). Abraham became the father of many nations because he heard and obeyed the voice of God. "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Genesis 22:18). "Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Genesis 26:5). Moses did nothing without hearing God's voice: "And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice" (Exodus 19:19). "And the Lord said unto Moses..." (Exodus 19:21). "And Moses said unto the Lord..." (Exodus 19:23). "And the Lord said unto him..." (Exodus 19:24). "And God spake..." (Exodus 20:1). Moses and God spoke to one another as intimate friends.

God has always sought for a people who would honor and fear His voice. God said to Moses: "...Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children" (Deuteronomy 4:10). "And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude [form]; only ye heard a voice" (Deuteronomy 4:12). "Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? (Deuteronomy 4:33). "Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee...thou hearest his words..." (Deuteronomy 4:36). "And ye said...we have heard his voice...we have seen this
day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth" (Deuteronomy 5:24).

Many of God's People Do Not Want the Responsibility of Hearing God's Voice for Themselves.

The children of Israel wanted God's voice filtered through a holy servant. "Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it" (Deuteronomy 5:25-27). God's people haven't changed much today! They are still afraid of the responsibility of being shut in with God to hear His voice! But the Lord wanted every Israelite to know and hear His voice personally. He made them know that He is a talking God: "...We have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and liveth."

It is no wonder that thousands are being led astray. They have put their very lives in the hands of a teacher or a pastor, who then becomes God to them — and whatever he hears or teaches becomes their voice of God! But even holy, meek Moses "spoke unadvisedly with his lips" (Psalm 106:33) and misrepresented God's holiness. Therefore, even if your teacher is as meek and holy as Moses, his voice is not infallible. You need to know and hear God's voice directly to be able to judge what is taught!

Why are thousands thrilling to new gospels that blaspheme the Cross, that teach that the blood of Jesus did not atone for sin? It is because they hear only man's voice. They don't know the true Master's voice — for, if they did, they would be grieving, not shouting, over such false doctrines! Oh, the destruction when God's voice is not known or obeyed. "As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 8:20).

Samuel heard God's voice clearly. What he heard was so clear that "none of His words fell to the ground" (1 Samuel 3:19). "...For the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel" (1 Samuel 3:21-4:1). David heard God speak and he, in turn, spoke with God! God's voice was his joy and life. David said, "God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice..." (Psalm 60:6). "The spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue...the Rock of Israel spake to me..." (2 Samuel 23:2-3).

There are many today who do not believe God still talks to men. They say He speaks only through His Word, that all God ever wants or needs to say is locked up in the canon of the Scriptures. Certainly, God will never speak a word contrary to Scripture, but "God...hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son..." (Hebrews 1:1-2). And His Son is still talking to His children! He said His sheep know His voice and that another's voice they will not heed. We know God spoke to men in old times in the Old Testament. But what of the New Testament? What of the last days?

God spoke to Saul on the road to Damascus: "...Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:3-4). For the rest of his life, Paul testified, "I heard His voice." Before King Agrippa he said, "...I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue...And he said...Rise...for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose..." (Acts 26:14-16). Peter heard and obeyed the voice of God. In prayer, he heard God speak: "And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord...But the voice answered me again from heaven... And this was done three times..." (Acts 11:7-10).

Jesus calls the last Laodicean church to hear His voice and open up: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). This matter of hearing the voice of God is very serious. Let me share with you what I believe the Holy Spirit has revealed to me about hearing His voice.

Not Everyone Who Says, "God Told Me," Has Heard the True Voice of God!

There is a tragic misunderstanding in the church about hearing God's voice. The most common phrase heard in religious circles today is "God told me!" Many so-called prophets begin their words with "Thus saith the Lord!" Paul warns there are many voices clamoring to be heard. "There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world,
and none of them is without signification [meaning]" (1 Corinthians 14:10).

In our hearts are many voices crying out, all of them pretending to be the very voice of God! If you trust any of these voices without trying them all by God's Word, you will be led astray! There is the voice of our flesh, the voice of our stubborn will, the voice of the enemy, and the voice of the world. All of them are sweet, gentle, and promising you "This is God speaking!"

Let me tell you who is sure to be deceived: it is that Christian who thinks he can't be deceived — the one who once truly heard, but now moves by impressions and voices which have not come out of the secret closet. We are not infallible and every word we get is not from God!

Many prophets are crying out, "Thus saith the Lord," when God has not spoken to them at all. They are speaking their own minds — not God's. "And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord God; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord. They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The Lord saith: and the Lord hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The Lord saith it; albeit I have not spoken? Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because ye have spoken vanity and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord God" (Ezekiel 13:1-8).

Not just prophets, but multitudes of believers do not understand that their own desires have spoken. They are convinced it was God's voice while all along it was vanity, a heart-desire pretending to be God's voice. God says, "You've been misled — I have not spoken!"

God does not speak to anyone hiding sin, such as pride, ambition, or lust. "...The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination [revelation], and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart" (Jeremiah 14:14). "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied...they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart.... Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies...they shall not profit this people at all...[they] have perverted the words of the living God...I will forsake you...and cast you out of my presence" (Jeremiah 23:21-40).

No One Can Hear God's Voice With an Idol or Stumbling Block in the Heart!

God's voice will not come to those harboring sin-idols. "These men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the Lord will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols.... I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him" (Ezekiel 14:3-4, 8-10).

"I the Lord have deceived that prophet." These know they are in sin, yet they come seeking to hear God's voice. God will let them hear deceptive words. What they hear will be punishment; it will add to their sorrows. God answers according to your idols! Yes! You will hear voices and prophecies. You will be led to false prophets who will speak pleasant words of peace and prosperity — just what your flesh wants to hear! But it will be a total deception because you wouldn't lay down your pet sin, your favorite idol. You will think God is speaking to you. But it is judgment because you are "estranged from me through [your]...idols" (Ezekiel 14:5).

God's voice is heard only by those shut up with Him in secret prayer. God is very careful to whom He speaks. It is only to those who value His voice so much they shut the whole world out to get alone and wait for Him. God's voice came to Moses when he was shut up alone with Him. The word came to John the Baptist alone in the wilderness.
The voice of God came to Jacob in the desert of Haran. God spoke to Joshua when he went out of the camp, alone, before Jericho. The voice of God came to Paul, alone in the desert. The voice of the Father came to Jesus, alone on the mountain in prayer.

God says to us, "If you want my voice, shut yourself up in the secret closet of prayer. Pray to me in secret and I will reward you." Busyness, lusts, covetousness, and the cares of life choke out the voice of God. Jesus gave us a dreadful warning against becoming too busy to stop and hear His voice. In the parable of the sower, the Word is His voice: "These are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful" (Mark 4:18-19).

I fear there are some reading this right now who have been choking the voice of God. Choke here means "to crowd" or to drown out His voice. God once spoke so clearly to you. It was such a joy to you. You still love Him, but you have less and less time for Him. Your busyness now calls you — your riches, your cares, your problems, and all the other things consuming your time! The voice of God now grows dim. He is calling you, wooing you, warning you: "Keep this up, and you will totally choke and drown out My voice in you!"

You can become so busy, so bogged down with problems and cares, that it would do you no good to hear His voice. Jesus said it would be unfruitful (verse 19). You wouldn't listen now. It would be a wasted voice, having no effect. This person is not a wayside hearer to whom Satan comes and takes away the voice. No! This one has spiritual authority; the Word has already taken root, meaning that the voice was known! Satan has been cast out. But now it is not Satan who is in the way — it is self-imposed busyness. It is running about, rushing here and there, with no quality time left to hide with Him to discern His still, small voice. It is in this hustle and bustle that God's voice is no longer heard. Now, the flesh does all the talking, with human desires taking on a voice. What is desired now becomes God's will to them; what is presumed now passes for discernment. This thorny hearer presumes that every voice is of God and because that voice is so loud, so clear, and so frequent, he thinks it must be God!

I tell you it is not of God and it is not Holy Ghost discernment — unless it was born in the secret closet, out of a deep communion, a broken spirit, and much time spent alone in His presence. I am convinced that all God's people would be able to hear His still, small voice if they simply would lay down sin, idols, and would get shut in with Him alone — and not leave until He speaks!

God is offering us a fresh, life-giving word for each new day.

God is speaking a fresh word every day to all who will hear; but many cannot hear it because their hearts are growing hard. In Hebrews we read, "...Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts..." (Hebrews 3:7-8). God's voice is a "today" voice. It is an up-to-the-minute voice He desires us to hear. Jesus warned us about stony-ground hearers: "These are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended" (Mark 4:16-17). This is the one who loves to hear, who receives all God says with gladness. But the Word does not sink in. God's voice does not change them. They remain unbroken with their hearts turning to stone. Where are the stony hearts? In prison? On the streets? In houses of prostitution? In porno theaters? Sadly, the hardest of hearts can be found in God's house, among those who don't even know they're getting hard!

Let me tell you how Christians develop hard hearts. They refuse to allow God's voice to smash their stubborn will. They hear God's voice in His Word, in preaching, and sometimes even in the still, small voice. Yet, they will not obey it! The Word cannot take root. But there is something even worse. Every day God is calling all His people to the secret closet of prayer because He wants to speak. He wants to talk about obedience, about your problems, to give guidance, to speak about the future. "...I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not" (Jeremiah 7:13). Each time we refuse that call — each time we go instead to our own interests and business, putting other things ahead of God — every time we miss a day of hearing — every day we refuse to listen — our hearts grow colder and colder. Every time we listen to another voice rather than waiting to hear His voice, we grow a little harder.

When we refuse to discipline ourselves to be alone with God to hear His voice, we become strangers to that voice. It is shameful what is happening in so many churches today with so many who can no longer recognize God's voice. The Lord sees them getting hard, but He cares and loves them still. So He turns His Holy Ghost light upon
them, bringing a scorching, penetrating word — a voice of thunder — to wake them up. But the word offends them; the very Word God meant to deliver them offends them and they get angry and dry up! "When the sun comes up they are scorched and wither."

On the other hand, a true believer who hears from God, who knows His voice, can never be offended by it. He knows it is from God and receives it as His very source of life and growth. Those not shut in with God, those who refuse to obey His voice, soon become irritated and afflicted by any strong word demanding even more obedience.

You can grow hard-hearted, wither, and die spiritually by simply staying away from the place God is speaking. If you just come to church, praise God, be good, and do all the right things, you could wither and die even though you love the preaching. You must hear from God yourself. You must hear His voice and be led by Him in a personal way. You must hear His word behind you saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isaiah 30:21).

God's Desire for His Holy Remnant Is That Their Greatest Joy Be the Sound of His Voice.

"He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled" (John 3:29). Our greatest joy should be, "I heard His voice! I stood alone, waiting, and I heard Him speak to me!" In the Song of Solomon, we can hear a last-day bridal-love duet. The bridegroom beckons His betrothed to hide away secretly with Him: "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice" (Song of Solomon 2:14). Then later in the Song, she responds, "It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me...my love, my dove..." (Song of Solomon 5:2).

To those whose hearts have grown cold, who can no longer hear His voice, God has promised to give a new and tender heart if they will repent and turn to Him in faith. A hard heart is not terminal — that is, if you want to change! It is not something God did to you; rather, you did it to yourself by shutting God's Word out. Here is your promise: "And they shall come thither, and they shall take away all the detestable things thereof and all the abominations thereof from thence. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep my ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezekiel 11:18-20). And, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

When the Voice of God Is Not Heard, Men Go Where God Did Not Send Them!

When the voice of God is not heard, men run and labor for Him without a mandate — they are on their own! I've been there: doing good things, taking on challenges, believing fully that I was standing up against the workers of iniquity! I wound up thousands of dollars in debt, weary and disillusioned, crying for help at every turn. I had not been sent by God. I couldn't understand. I was broken, burdened, willing to give up so much. But it was not born out of prayer — it was human compassion! It was not God's way!

But once I said, "No more, Lord! Not a step more, unless You command it — not a move until Your voice is heard!" then whatever money was needed has been there — because God supports what He originates. It is joy with no burden, peace with no begging! The begging in ministries today is a result of men doing good things without being sent by God's voice. Their own desires are being mistaken for God's voice.

Jesus would not make a move except what He heard spoken from heaven. "...I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me..." (John 8:28). "...I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him" (John 8:26). "...The Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.... Whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" (John 12:49-50).

Here are four safeguards for hearing correctly the voice of God:

1. His voice always brings you to Jesus and exposes all sin and lust. John heard His voice and said, "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet" (Revelation 1:17).
2. His presence (or countenance) always accompanies His voice. You will be overwhelmed and overjoyed by the glory of His presence.

3. His voice will give you the scriptural assurance. The Holy Spirit will lead you to confirmation in His Word. Everything God speaks must line up with Scripture at every point.

4. Whatever He speaks will stand before the judgment seat of Christ in its purity and selflessness.

Links