

LED BY THE SPIRIT – 2

Renewed in the spirit of the mind

What we learnt in the first part of this teaching is about the word ‘spirit’ and what it means to be led by a spirit. To be led by *the* spirit of God implies that we are motivated, driven and propelled by godly desires, values and principles. It does not mean we are being directly spoken to by the Holy Spirit, even though we know that God does speak to people even today. We saw that the world has a spirit that leads the people of the flesh, and this is the spirit of greed, the spirit of the fear of tomorrow, the spirit of lust and the spirit of pride. These are opposed to the type of spirit that was in Christ Jesus, which God deposits as a seed in the hearts of every believer. This spirit is the Spirit of Christ and is why we love the word of God and why we want to please Him. It is the reason why you are paying attention to this teaching. To be driven by that Spirit is actually what Paul called being led by the Spirit of God.

Is God’s Voice Always Accurate?

Before I get to going into details about this Spirit of Christ, I want to explain something about the accuracy of the voice of God. You will see why I, as a teacher God’s word, lay less emphasis on people learning to hear the voice of God but more on becoming like God, which is what possessing the Spirit of Christ means. A portion of the gospel according to Matthew will serve well to start this explanation.

In the book of Matthew chapter 19 we read the account of the enquiry of the Pharisees of Jesus concerning the issue of divorce. They wanted to know whether it was “lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all” (vs 3). His reply was that God created them male and female at the beginning, and “for this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.” He explained that they are consequently no longer two but one person in flesh. Therefore, he explained, no one should separate the people that God has joined together in marriage. He by that showed the mind of God concerning divorce as being totally unacceptable except for the case of immorality (vs 9).

Now that was totally new in the ears of the people of Israel and was not in agreement with what Moses had laid down as the *word of God* for them. Moses had permitted them divorce their wives once they were not pleased with her; all that was required was to give a certificate of divorce. It is recorded in Deuteronomy 24. This permission was part of the statutes and judgements which God required of them and which He gave to Moses. Now why should Jesus speak contrary to what was the voice of God? The answer of Jesus is the reason we are referring to this discourse.

He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. Matt 19:8 NASB (...but it was not what God had originally intended. NLT)

Let me get to the point quickly: we can easily see from the above that what we hear is often dependent upon whether our hearts are hard or not. I say it boldly, what God is able to speak to you is dependent upon the state of your heart to receive truth. The accuracy of God's instructions to you is dependent upon the state of your heart not primarily on His original intention. People often make the mistake that 'if God spoke it to me, it must be the whole truth.' Unfortunately it is not so. You who hear it have a lot to do with it. The people of Israel heard they could divorce their wives because their hearts were too hard to accept the truth God actually intended for them to walk in. Hear again the words of Jesus from another discourse:

I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. John 16:12 NASB

God can only speak to you what you can bear. In communicating His will to us, it appears like God goes as high towards the ultimate as we are able to accommodate. This is why He may seem to have changed His mind sometimes when we develop more in our ability to receive things. This is why we move from glory to glory. Sometimes when people are counselled about an issue and they reply, "God hasn't spoken to me about it yet," and they make it seem as if it therefore means that He doesn't want them to do that thing, they are forgetting that it is possible that God hasn't spoken to them because they are unwilling to accept the truth.

Do you think it was for lack of skill in how to hear God that the early church in Jerusalem couldn't understand that the gentiles were equal with them and that God didn't anymore distinguish between Jews and Gentiles? No it wasn't so. It was that their hearts were still too hard to accept such a thing. Hardness of heart is what experience often builds into us. Traditional training and experience makes it hard to accept the new things that God wants to teach us. No wonder the Lord Jesus chose certain words in that discourse in John 16.

True Guidance

*"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will **guide** you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own... He will disclose to you what is to come. John 16:12-13 NASB*

Jesus said here clearly that the Holy Spirit will come to guide us into truth. I checked more than a dozen translations of the Bible, and all but one chose the word guide to explain what the Holy Spirit is meant to do in the life of Christians. He does not 'speak' (like we say) primarily; His duty is to *guide* into truth. He helps us bit by bit with understanding. Through our experiences, through instruction with the word of God, we learn truth by that guidance. Christians are too quick to listen for voices in their 'spirits' or inside their hearts. We thus wish to live by impulse and by intuition; we think that it is the guidance of the Holy Spirit. No, it is not. The Holy Spirit's guidance is the guidance into the knowledge of truth so that we will live a life pleasing to God all the time, and so that when He has to speak, we will be prepared to hear it.

It is interesting to realize that the word 'guide' that Jesus used here for the duty of the Holy Spirit in our lives is the same that was used by the Ethiopian eunuch when he spoke to Philip. Philip had asked him if he understood the scriptures he was reading (Acts 8:30); the man replied, "How could I, unless someone *guides* me?" Of course we can easily understand that what he needed was someone to explain things to him, to make the scriptures clear and meaningful to him. That was the point, and that was what Philip did as he preached Jesus to the man. He guided him into understanding the word of God so that the man himself decided he needed to be baptized. The Holy Spirit was present all the while; He didn't speak to the man directly; He did His guidance through Philip, enlightening the man's heart as Philip spoke to him.

So we see that the Holy Spirit guidance is primarily to help us understand the ways of God. The Holy Spirit does speak as to give specific directions when necessary; He did this in selecting Paul and Barnabas for ministry (Acts 13:2); He did to Philip and through an angel (Acts 8:26, 29), but that is not the primary thing He does in our daily living. These occurrences are mostly related to the performance of ministry, even though they may also occur in daily personal life.

Filled With His Knowledge

This is why I lay my emphasis on building our hearts by the word of God into the place where the will of God becomes a part of our being. That is the only time when accuracy comes into the things we hear, and at such a time God will need to 'speak' less to us because our own thoughts would have been transformed into His thoughts so that our ways would have become the very ways of God. That is what God wants; He does not desire to give instructions to people that cannot cope with the instructions or understand them. His plan is that they will be transformed into His own image by being filled with spiritual wisdom and understanding.

...that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; Col 1:9-10 NASB

The primary voice of God to His children is the voice of understanding; it is not the voice of instructions on every matter of their daily interactions. We are called to know the ways of God and not learn to hear spiritual voices.

Please note that Paul prayed in the portion above to the end that we will increase in the knowledge of God. It is the aim of the life of every Christian. It is as we get to know God more and more that we are able to walk in His will better. No matter how much God speaks directly to us, if He were to do so, it wouldn't do any good unless we have come to understand Him better. Knowing the will of God is by a transformation of our inner lives by the knowledge of His word.

Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God — what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect. Rom 12:2 GNT

I love the way this verse is rendered here. You see that God's will is known after there is an inward transformation. It is that transformation process that I am emphasizing. God wants us to know His will, but He cannot speak that will to a heart that is not transformed. Even if He tried to do so, the un-renewed mind would hear something else and interpret that something else to the heart. Your mind is the decoding centre of your life; it processes information. This is perfectly illustrated in the life of Balaam.

Hearing but Deaf

Balaam was a powerful man in spiritual things. He understood how things operated in the realm of the spirit and therefore he knew he couldn't go where God didn't command, but the allure of the promised money was too great for him (2 Pet 2:15). He kept on praying until he heard God tell him to go where God had said not to go. The story of Balaam is in Numbers 22. Superficial reading will make one wonder why God told him not to go (vs 12), then changed and told him to go (vs 20), and then was angry that he was going (vs 22); He was angry enough to determine to kill him if he passed a certain place (vs 33). All these are confusing to the mind that hasn't yet understood how spiritual things worked. The truth is that Balaam was motivated by money, and that was why he went back to pray to see whether God would let him go. According to Ravi Zacharias, "when God sees you are determined to do something, he might just step aside and second your motion." That was what happened to Balaam. You hear things according to what is your heart. Balaam actually heard God; he was a prophet accustomed to the voice of God. The fact that one claims that he is accustomed to the 'voice' of God doesn't mean the person cannot be deceived. The only protection against deception is a constant cleansing of the heart with the word of God. We are to constantly pray for understanding and continually cleanse our hearts by confession when the word of God exposes something that is wrong in our hearts. That is the way it is supposed to be.

It is unfortunate that we that claim to believe in the manifestation of the Holy Spirit focus so much on practising how to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit that we miss the point. The true voice of the Holy Spirit is easy to perceive to the cleansed heart. Let us focus on cleansing by transformation of our minds.

Sometimes God speaks to us in dreams and visions; I have noticed that interpreting those things require spiritual understanding. I remember a man as he narrated a vision he saw about a particular church. As I heard it I was excited; I thought he had come with a much needed correction for the things that were going on there. To me the interpretation was so clear; it was the correction of God for what was wrong at that time. But when he began to give the interpretation, I was shocked to hear his words. He gave a diametrically opposite

interpretation to what I thought was clear; He essentially encouraged the people to keep on along their path. I was happy he didn't say God told him the interpretation (even though I still wouldn't have believed it because it was so wrong). My opinion was that he got it wrong simply because certain things were not clear to him about ministry, purpose and what mattered in life. I wished I could talk to him. You cannot hear God clearly unless your mind is renewed into that spirit of Christ. I found out that renewing your mind and putting on the spirit of Christ means about the same thing, and that Spirit of Christ we must examine.

Summary, and Next

As I close this page I will like us to read this following portion of the book of Ephesians. Please note the words I have put in bold letters and recall our discussion on some of them. Also I will bring forth a summary on those words after the reading.

*This I say therefore... that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their **mind**, 18 being darkened in their **understanding**, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the **hardness of their heart**; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality.... 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way... that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you **be renewed in the spirit of your mind**, 24 and put on the new self, which **in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.** Eph 4:17-24 NASB*

Unbelievers are **led** by a worldly spirit which is expressed in the futility of their minds; this is in opposition to having the mind or the spirit of Christ. Ignorance and lack of understanding of the things of God is the manifestation of their exclusion from the life of God. We have the life of God and so our lives as Christians are to be different (we are called carnal when we haven't achieved this). We have the seed of God in us, called the new self, and it is in the likeness of God. Our duty as believers is to work on the renewal of our minds until we walk daily by, or being led by, the spirit of Christ. When we do this, the will of God will be normal to us and the voice of the Holy Spirit will be clear when it does come.

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