

Testing the Voices

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Introduction: Series Theme: *Eph. 5:15-17*

¹⁵Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, *but understand what the Lord's will is.*

**God's will motivates us to Hear!*

Review Week 1: Hearing God: Are you Ready?

We compared two people in week 1:

1. The Person who Does not Hear God: The Disposition of Unreceptiveness

- *Our heart condition affects our ability to hear God!*

"For this people's heart has become *calloused*; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes." KJV says "their ears are **dull** of hearing."

Four Hindrances to Hearing

- Prosperity
- A Turned Heart
- Having a Stiff-Neck
- Rebellion

2. The Person Who Hears God: The Disposition of Receptiveness

Is. 66:1-4

²Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. "This is the one I esteem: *he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.*

Three Attitudes of Openness

- Humble** - reflecting a spirit of deference or submission
- Contrite** – grieving and penitent for sin or shortcoming
- Fear of the Lord** - to have a reverential awe

Review Week 2: The Many Voices of God

1. Supernatural Revelation

- Angelic Visitations, Visions, Dreams, Audibles, Whispers

2. The Word of God

- It is the only perfectly objective standard for our lives.

3. Circumstances

- The Doors of Life – Open or Closed – *maybe the most common!*

4. The Outer Witness (*more on this tonight*)

- God may guide you through other people
- God may guide you through the operation of the Gifts of the Spirit

5. The Inner Witness

- The Impression
- The Prompting
- The Loud Thought

Tonight: “Testing the Voices”

- How do I *recognize* God’s voice?
- How do I *distinguish* between Godly counsel and imitations.

Tonight’s Goal: To learn about and apply certain *Voice Tests* to the voices we hear so as to hear God’s voice above all the others.

1. The Three Voice Tests (give you three tests and then show you how they can work)

a. The Concrete Test – The Word of God

2 Tim. 3:16-17 “¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- If the **Voice** or **Counsel** you are hearing does not agree with the Word of God, it does not pass the *Concrete Test*. It fails!!!!
- This is the most essential test!

b. The Character Test

a. What is the *Character* of the person from whom you are receiving counsel?

- i. Are they trustworthy?
- ii. Are they consistent?
- iii. Do **they** hear from God?
- iv. Does the character of their *life* validate their credibility to speak into yours?

Matt. 12:34 “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”

b. **A Warning for the Character Test** – Beware of **posers!**

- i. There may be counselors out there who sound good, but they are merely ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing.’

2 Cor. 11:13-15 “¹³For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.

- ii. **Therefore**, we must also apply the **Concrete** Test with the **Character** Test

c. The Conscience Test

a. *A good Rule of Thumb:* Don’t violate your conscience!!

- i. **The Holy Spirit can and will use your conscience to guide you. The conscience is a gift from God!!**
- ii. It is like an inner red flag, signaling that this is not wise counsel.

b. **Peace** is the mark of the Holy Spirit in your conscience – His imprint of approval

Phil. 4:7 “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

- If the **Conscience** Test is inconclusive, again, appeal to the **Concrete** Test!!

With these Three Tests in mind, let us now look to the Scriptures to see who might be speaking into our lives.

John 10:1-30

¹I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a **thief** and a **robber**. ²The man who enters by the gate is the **shepherd** of his sheep. ³The **watchman** opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a **stranger**; in fact, they will run away from **him** because they do not recognize a **stranger's** voice." ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who ever came before me were **thieves** and **robbers**, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰The **thief** comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

¹¹"I am the good **shepherd**. The good **shepherd** lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The **hired hand** is not the **shepherd** who owns the sheep. So when he sees the **wolf** coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the **wolf** attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a **hired hand** and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴"I am the good **shepherd**; I know my sheep and *my sheep know me*— ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one **shepherd**. ¹⁷The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."

2. Testing the Voices of the Sheep Pen

Pradis: “The imagery of the first two paragraphs is based on the concept of the "sheep pen." It was usually a rough stone or mud-brick structure, only partially roofed, if covered at all, or very often a cave in the hills. It had only one opening through which the sheep could pass when they came in for the night. The pen served for the protection of the sheep against thieves and wild beasts.

a. The Voice of the Other Sheep – this is the voice we here most often

- It comes in three forms: **bah, baah, baaah**

a. **Neutral** – the voice that is neither good nor evil, neither right nor wrong, just superfluous, unneeded

b. **Unwise**

Proverbs 10:14 “Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin.”

Proverbs 14:7 “Stay away from a foolish man, for you will not find knowledge on his lips.”

c. **Wise**

Proverbs 15:22 “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

Proverbs 11:14 “Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.” (KJV)

Proverbs 15:2 “The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.

We need to learn how to distinguish Godly counsel (Bahh) from ungodly counsel (Baaah)!!

EX. I can't decide if I should date this person? Friend, what do you think?

APP. Apply the Tests: Concrete: Is it Biblical? Character: Is the other sheep trustworthy? Is my conscience clear?

b. The Voice of the **Stranger**

⁵“But they will never follow a *stranger*; in fact, they will run away from *him* because they do not recognize a *stranger's* voice.”

a. **Stranger** – another's; not one's own; foreign, alien; other; a stranger to the things of God

i. They are a stranger b/c they are not of the same fold. They are not spiritually discerned!! They may have good advice, but you must weigh it by the tests.

1 Cor. 2:14 “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

b. **This is the voice of the unbeliever.**

ILL. Pradis: A pen frequently held several flocks; and when the time came to go out to morning pasture, each shepherd separated his sheep from the others by his peculiar call. Instead of driving them, he led them so that they followed him as a unit. Wherever they went, the shepherd preceded them to provide guidance to the most advantageous pasturage and guardianship against possible danger.

The sheep refused to follow a stranger because his voice was *unfamiliar*. In fact, if a stranger should use the shepherd's call and imitate his tone, the flock would instantly detect the difference and would scatter in *panic*.

APP. Strangers (unbelievers) speak an entirely different *language* when it comes to decision-making. **What** does Jesus tell us to do when confronted by a ‘Stranger’ (advice)? Run!!!

c. The Voice of the Hired Hand

“¹²The *hired hand* is not the *shepherd* who owns the sheep. So when he sees the *wolf* coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the *wolf* attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a *hired hand* and cares nothing for the sheep.”

- a. This is the voice of an imposter! A false shepherd, more concerned about his own interests (safety) than yours. He is not willing to sacrifice for you.

ILL. This person’s counsel/advice may be shaded by their own interests & motives.

APP. A simple question here will suffice: “Do they have anything to gain by the advice they are giving me?”

d. The Voice of the Thief, the Robber, and the Wolf

- a. **Pradis:** "Thief" and "robber" are different in meaning. "Thief" (*kleptes*) implies subtlety and trickery; "robber" (*lestes*) connotes violence and plundering. The latter term was sometimes used of bandits or guerrillas. The purpose of both was exploitation; neither was concerned for the welfare of the sheep.
- b. These three are all enemies – they also do not have your best interest in mind. Instead, only your worst – “Steal, kill, destroy”
- c. They prey upon the weak to satisfy their own appetites.

ILL. How do you recognize a *thief*, a *robber*, or a *wolf*? **Jesus:** “The man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and robber.”

- All three enemies will try to enter ‘around’ the gate, by subverting, twisting, or **sidestepping** the Word of Truth.

APP. So apply the Concrete or Character Tests!!!

e. The Voice of the Shepherd – the one voice the sheep must learn to recognize

- a. **This is the Voice of God.** The one true shepherd is the one who lays his life down for the sheep (10:17)
 - i. **Please Note:** This ‘laying down’ a *wholly voluntary act*. Jesus had full power and authority to avoid death. He had already walked (escaped) through large crowds untouched, *and* had at his disposal legions of angels!!

- b. The Shepherd is also the gate. (physically laid down...)

ILL. What is the significance of Jesus saying “I lay down my life for the sheep? “It was customary, after all the sheep had been counted and brought into the pen, that the shepherd lay down across the doorway so that no intruder—man or beast—could enter without his knowledge. *The shepherd became the door*. The emphatic singular pronoun “I” (*ego*) emphasizes that the shepherd is the sole determiner of who enters the fold and who is excluded. It parallels the later statement: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”

- c. **Vs. 14** “I *know* my sheep and my sheep *know* me.”

- i. Know (*ginosko*) – implies *relationship*, trust, intimacy

d. Listening to and following the *Good Shepherd* will lead you to the one place you want to go – abundant life (vs.10)

APP. With the Voice of the Shepherd, all **three tests** are passed here without hesitation!!!

Conclusion:

- Three conditions which, when in place, will facilitate our hearing God's voice above the others:
 - **Proximity** – Are you near God? *Are you in the fold?*
 - **Priorities** – Are your priorities ordered correctly?
 - **Permission** – Does God have permission to speak into your life?