

Introduction

One of the things that I have tried to do is humbly recognize my humanity, imperfections, and weaknesses. I have strengths and abilities that God has given me, but I also have weak areas. I have the ability to hear clearly from God, and at the same time, I can miss it. There have been times where God has spoken so clearly and I was flowing in the prophetic. On a walk with Karen one day, the Holy Spirit began to give me the exact questions that would be asked by the small group leader the next day. Karen and I discussed the answers that we would give to those questions. Lo and behold, when we attended the small group meeting the next night, those exact questions were asked. Sometimes I hear very clearly. At other times, I seem to get nothing when I ask the Lord for His counsel, or miss it completely. Therefore, I recognize my ability to miss it, and I test to confirm the things that I hear.

The apostle Peter was no different from me. In Matthew 16, Jesus had just asked the disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus responded, saying, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” Peter had clearly heard from the Father. But then in the next paragraph, Jesus was telling the disciples that He was going to go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, be killed, and raised up on the third day. “Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.’ But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.’” Jesus was not calling Peter, Satan, but He was telling Peter that his thoughts had been clouded by his own interests, and had been influenced by Satan.

(Matt 16:15–23) “He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” {16} Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” {17} And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven....{21} From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. {22} Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." {23} But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.”

In our passage today Paul asks the question, “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” The answer in our text is that the natural man does not understand or know the mind of the Lord, while believers have the mind of the Lord because God gives them His Spirit. One of the common questions that I get asked is how do we know if it is our own thoughts or if it is the Holy Spirit speaking to us. Our passage today tells us that believers have the Spirit of God, and therefore have the mind of Christ. At the conclusion of our message, I want to look at some practical ways to know when these thoughts and impressions are from God, and when we may have missed it. Like Peter, we can hear the Lord, but we can also miss it. Therefore, we must be careful and discerning about the things we think are from God.

Who has the mind of the Lord?

1. The natural man does not know the mind of the Lord
2. The spiritual man has the mind of Christ

(1 Cor 2:6–16) “Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; {7} but we speak God’s

wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; {8} the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; {9} but just as it is written, “THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.” {10} For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. {11} For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. {12} Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, {13} which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. {14} But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. {15} But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. {16} **For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM?** But we have the mind of Christ.”

1. The natural man does not know the mind of the Lord

Paul gave a contrast between the way those who are perishing see the word of the cross and how those who are being saved see it. For the unbeliever, the word of the cross is foolishness, but to the believer, it is the wisdom and power of God. When Paul came to Corinth, he did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom to proclaim the testimony of God. Paul preached the word of the cross, and he preached in demonstration of the Spirit and power, so that the faith of the believers would rest on the power of God.

(1 Cor 2:1–5) “And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. {2} For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. {3} I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, {4} and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, {5} so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”

Even though Paul did not preach the wisdom of men, he did speak wisdom. Paul wrote, “Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away, but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory.” Paul spoke wisdom to those who are mature. The Greek word for mature is *telios* (Strong’s G5046), which literally means to arrive at a point in the distance, to reach a goal, to be perfect, or mature. Normally, this word is used to describe maturity. Paul proclaimed, admonished, and taught every man with all wisdom so that he could present every man complete (*teleios*) or mature in Christ. We see that idea in Hebrews 5:14, where solid food is for the mature (*teleios*), who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. In 1 Corinthians 2:6, a contrast is being made between those who had rejected the message of the cross and Jesus, the Messiah, and those who had believed and embraced the gospel message. The gospel message is understood by all that receive Christ, and is not necessarily speaking about spiritual maturity. Paul will address spiritual maturity in chapter three. He is just making a distinction between the men and rulers of this age, who rejected the gospel message, and those that accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

(1 Cor 2:6–7) “Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature (teleios); a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; {7} but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory.”

(Col 1:28) “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete (teleios) in Christ.”

(Heb 5:14) “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

The wisdom that Paul spoke was not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away. The wisdom that Paul spoke was in a mystery; it was the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory. God’s plan of salvation had been spoken of in the Old Testament, both in the Law and in the prophets, but it had been hidden. The Greek word for mystery is *mysterion* (Strong’s G3466), which comes from *muo*, to shut the mouth. It means something that has been hidden not disclosed, or a secret. In this case, God’s plan of salvation was not a secret; it had just not been understood. When mystery is used in the Scriptures, it most often refers to God’s plan to include the Gentiles. Even though God told Abraham he would be a father of nations, this had not been fully understood. In Ephesians 3:3–6, Paul mentioned that God gave him revelation about this mystery, and he gives us understanding about it. He said, “the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. In this case, Paul is probably not referring to the specific plan of God to include the Gentiles, but is referring to God’s plan of salvation to all men through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus.

(Eph 3:3–6) “that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. {4} By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, {5} which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; {6} to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,”

The wisdom that Paul spoke was not understood by the rulers of this age. Worldly men, those without Christ, did not understand this hidden wisdom. If the rulers of this age had understood God’s wisdom, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. They rejected the word of the cross and Jesus, who was the Messiah, who had come to die for the sins of the world. They regarded the word of the cross as foolishness.

(1 Cor 2:8) “the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;”

2. The spiritual man has the mind of Christ

In verse nine, Paul transitions into saying who has the mind of God. He quotes Isaiah 64:4, “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.” The first part refers to the mystery of the gospel, which had not been revealed to people, even though it had been spoken of by Moses

and the prophets. The transition is the last phrase, “all that God has prepared for those who love Him.” The wisdom of God and the mind of Christ has been revealed to the spiritual man, those who love God.

(1 Cor 2: 9) “but just as it is written, “THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.”

(Isa 64:4) “For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear, nor has the eye seen a God besides You, who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him.”

How was the wisdom of God revealed to those who love God? It was revealed through the Spirit. The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, searches all things, even the depths of God. Paul uses the natural to explain the spiritual. In the natural, no one knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man. In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. In order for man to know the thoughts of God, it must be revealed to him by the Spirit of God.

(1 Cor 2:10–11) “For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. {11} For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.”

The good news for believers is that we are given the Spirit of God when we believe the message of the cross and receive Christ into our lives. Paul said, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.” Believers are given the Holy Spirit when they believe, and because they have the Holy Spirit, they can know the thoughts of God, the things freely given to us by God.

(1 Cor 2:12) “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,”

In Ephesians 1:13-14, God tells us that “after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.” When a person believes the gospel message, he is sealed with the Holy Spirit, who is given to us as a pledge of inheritance. The Holy Spirit is not just given as a pledge and does not just seal us; the Holy Spirit does much more for us.

(Eph 1:13–14) “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, {14} who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

- The Holy Spirit distributes gifts (1 Cor 12:11).
- The Holy Spirit comforts us (Acts 9:31).
- The Holy Spirit leads us in truth (John 16:13).
- The Holy Spirit intercedes for us (Rom 8:27).
- The Holy Spirit leads us (Rom 8:14).
- The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8).

- The Holy Spirit teaches us and reminds us of things (John 14:26).
- The Holy Spirit bears fruit in our lives (Gal 5:22-23).
- The Holy Spirit fellowships with us (2 Cor 13:14).
- The Holy Spirit empowers us (Acts 1:8, Luke 24:49).
- The Holy Spirit emboldens us (Acts 4:29-31).

In our text today, the Holy Spirit, who is part of the Godhead, and knows the thoughts of God, discloses to us the mind of God. The Holy Spirit gives us the wisdom of God. The Holy Spirit gives us access to the thoughts of God so that we can know the things freely given to us by God.

(1 Cor 2:12) “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,”

How does the Holy Spirit reveal the mind of God to us? We are not given the wisdom of God by studying philosophers or debating with the philosophers. We are not taught by human wisdom. God’s wisdom is taught to us by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual thoughts that we combine with spiritual words. He does it in a natural, but supernatural way. In our natural way, we have a thought, and then we speak it. When the Holy Spirit speaks to us, He gives us thoughts in a similar manner. The Holy Spirit gives us thoughts, impressions, ideas, dreams, pictures, and visions. At times, the Holy Spirit may speak audibly, but that is not common. The most common way for the Holy Spirit to reveal the thoughts of God is through spiritual thoughts.

(1 Cor 2:13) “which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.”

Believers have the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit speaks to us, and gives us mind of Christ. On the other hand, the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. The natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit so he rejects it.

(1 Cor 2:14–15) “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. {15} But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.”

Paul also said that they do not understand the things of the Spirit because they are spiritually appraised. The Greek word is *anakrino* (Strong’s G350), which means to be examined, judged, interrogated, questioned, investigated, or scrutinized. He contrasts that with those who are spiritual, that is believers, who appraise all things, but are not appraised by others. Christians are to examine, judge, and discern all things. Believers can do this because they have the Spirit of God to help them discern and judge. Unbelievers do not have the Spirit of God and therefore cannot spiritually discern things.

The Amplified Bible, which expounds on some of the words and phrases, helps us understand what Paul is communicating. It reads:

(1 Cor 2:14–15) (AMP) “But the natural, nonspiritual man does not accept or welcome or admit into his heart the gifts and teachings and revelations of the Spirit of God, for they are folly (meaningless nonsense) to him; and he is incapable of knowing them [of progressively recognizing, understanding, and becoming better acquainted with them] because they are

spiritually discerned and estimated and appreciated. {15} But the spiritual man tries all things [he examines, investigates, inquires into, questions, and discerns all things], yet is himself to be put on trial and judged by no one [he can read the meaning of everything, but no one can properly discern or appraise or get an insight into him].”

Conclusion and Application

Paul concludes this section by asking the question, “Who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him?” Paul has answered that question in the passage, and concludes with, “But we have the mind of Christ.” The unbeliever does not have the Spirit of God so he cannot understand or accept the things of the Spirit. Believers are given the Spirit of God, and the Spirit knows the mind of God, and gives us God’s thoughts. Because of the Holy Spirit, we have the mind of the Lord.

(1 Cor 2:16) “For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.”

I want to finish today by looking at some applications. The biggest question that people have struggled with is how to know when it is their own human thoughts and when it is the Holy Spirit speaking to you. So, I want to give some practical applications and answers. These are just some of the ways, and it is by no means an exhaustive or complete list. We need to test the things that we are receiving.

In Mark and Patti Virkler’s book, *Dialogue With God*, Chapter 7 is entitled, “How Can I Know For Sure It Is God’s Voice.” That is a great question. He opens that chapter with two illustrations that firmly planted in his mind the conviction of the need for testing. The first illustration was about a man in his church who had the gift of prophecy and was highly respected by the members. This man supposedly had a “revelation” from the Lord that his marriage was not of God since he and his wife were not believers when they got married. Therefore, he was “told by the Lord” that he was to divorce his wife and marry this other woman. Mark went to the man’s house to see if what he had heard was true. The man confirmed the “revelation” and his intentions. Mark wrote, “I shared with him from Scripture that God hated divorce and that his ‘leading’ violated both the letter and the spirit of the Word. Therefore, I felt he was being deceived. He rejected my words, insisting that he knew the Lord’s voice and that was that. As directed in the Bible, I returned to him a few days later with the other two elders, who confirmed my position and shared more Scripture contrary to his ‘leading.’ He responded by showing us Biblical examples and verses (all out of context) that supported his ‘revelation.’ We met with him many times during the next two or three months, seeking to draw him out of his deception. However, he grew increasingly arrogant and self-righteous. Finally, we had no choice but to bring the issue before the entire body. He presented his ‘revelation’ to them and they unanimously assured him that he was in error. But he responded, ‘I don’t care. I am going to do it anyway.’ He walked out in his pride, bringing destruction into not only his own life, but also the lives of his wife and children and the young woman who believed his ‘revelation’ that she was to be his wife in the Lord.”

The second illustration that Mark gives is of a word of knowledge that he had received about a man in his church. The ‘revelation’ that he received was that this certain man was having an affair with his secretary. After checking it out with Charles, another elder in the church who he highly respected, they prayed over that word for a couple of days. Then, Charles got a word that it was a lying spirit trying to deceive Mark and cause destruction in the body. Mark heeded the

discernment and wise counsel from his fellow elder. After several days that impression that Mark had received went away. Mark blessed God for giving him wise spiritual counselors, which had prevented him from making a costly mistake. Mark acknowledged his own need for testing the things we receive from the Lord. All of us can miss it at times, and we all need to test the words we receive. We also need to test the words that others give us.

Many years ago, our worship leader told me of an incident involving a woman that was part of the church that his father was pastoring. A woman in their church who got a “word from the Lord” that she was to divorce her husband and marry this other man. In many ways this was very similar to Mark Virkler’s example. His father explained God’s heart for marriage. He shared Scripture with her about marriage and divorce. Her response was that God told her to do this. She disregarded the counsel of the pastor, and the other leaders in the church. The woman divorced her husband, and brought tremendous damage to the congregation. A few years later, this same woman divorced the man that she had said the Lord had told her to marry, and she married another man.

In 1 Corinthians 14, we are exhorted to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially prophecy. Prophecy edifies the church, and things that edify the whole body are to be eagerly sought after. At the same time, Paul gave instructions to the church on how the gifts were to be administered. Things were to be done in order, one at a time. Others were to be silent while someone was prophesying, so that all could hear. Paul also instructed the church to judge the prophetic utterances. The fact that prophecies need to be judged infers that we can miss it at times. All of us can miss it, and we need to submit prophetic words to others to judge them.

(1 Cor 14:1-4, 29) “Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.... {3} But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. {4} One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.... {29} Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.”

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5 that we are not to quench the Spirit or despise prophetic utterances. We should not despise prophetic utterances; instead, we should earnestly desire them. But, after telling us not to despise them, Paul instructs us to examine everything carefully, and to hold fast to that which is good. Prophetic utterances need to be examined carefully. We can all miss it at times. When someone misses it, we let it go. When it is good and of the Lord, we are to hold fast to it. We are to examine everything carefully. The dreams, visions, thoughts, impressions, and revelations that we receive should all be examined carefully. When we do not examine things carefully, there can be serious consequences. Individual lives, marriages, families, churches, and communities can all be negatively impacted by words that are not examined carefully.

(1 Thess 5:19-21) “Do not quench the Spirit; {20} do not despise prophetic utterances. {21} But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good;”

How do we test and carefully examine our thoughts, impressions, dreams, revelations, and prophecies? There are a number of ways that we should test words.

1. Test by the Word of God

In 2 Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is inspired by God, or “God-breathed.” The word of God is good for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. The word of God has been given to us for reproof and correction. The Word of God should be our first test.

(2 Tim 3:16-17) “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; {17} so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

When we hear a prophetic word (or any other word), we should run it through the filter of God’s word. When someone has this voice telling them to abort their baby and end their unwanted pregnancy, they should look to see what Scripture says about that matter. God is very concerned for the unborn. He forms them in the womb. He knows the number of days allotted to them before there is yet one. We must search the Scriptures and then submit to the Scriptures.

A number of years ago a woman gave a prophetic word at our church that we should not be telling others about Jesus. Instead, we needed to be focused internally on relationships. While what the woman shared about developing good relationships within a church is very important, it is not exclusive to other commands in Scripture. We are to preach the gospel, and to make disciples, and both of these require relationships. If we tell someone not to preach the gospel to others, we are violating Jesus’ commands to us to preach. Afterwards, I went to the lady and explained that the word she gave was not from the Lord. I did it privately, and very gently. I did not want to discourage her from prophesying, but to learn from it. I shared that she had prophetic gifting, but that it needed to be developed. I shared with the woman that a better way for her to proceed would be to run her “prophetic words” through Karen, or one of the other leaders. If they felt it was a word from the Lord, they would affirm her. The lady was offended by the gentle correction, and withdrew from our church.

One problem with testing prophecy by the Word of God is our lack of knowledge of the Scriptures. Studies by George Barna show that the church does not have a Biblical worldview. This can be overcome by developing a good reading program. There are many different daily reading programs that help people to read through the Bible in a year. This problem can also be overcome by learning to study, and being part of a small group that studies the Word of God.

2. Test by the Wisdom of God

In James 3:13-18, we find two sources of wisdom: the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. James gives us some characteristics of worldly wisdom. He also gives us seven characteristics of the wisdom of God. He said if there is bitter jealousy or selfish ambition, it is not from God, but is earthly, natural, and demonic. When we hear a word, what is the motivation behind that word? Where does that word take us? What will be the end result? The wisdom of the world will bring disorder and every evil thing.

(James 3:13-16) “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. {14} But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. {15} This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. {16} For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”

James also tells us that God's wisdom results in good behavior. We are told, "you will know them by their fruit." This is very true. Good doctrine results in good behavior. God's wisdom brings forth good fruit. James also says that it is done in the gentleness of wisdom.

(James 3:13) "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom."

Next, James gives us seven characteristics of God's wisdom. First, he says that it is pure. Second, it is peaceable. Third, it is gentle. Fourth, it is reasonable. Fifth, it is full of mercy and good fruits. Sixth, it is unwavering. Seventh, it is without hypocrisy. When we hear something, we must ask ourselves questions based on these characteristics. Is this pure? Is it peaceable? Does it promote peace? Will it yield, produce, or make peace? Does it bring together people or divide people? Is this gentle? Is this reasonable? God's ways are reasonable. Is it full of mercy, or does it bring condemnation and judgment? These are the kinds of questions we must ask to discern if something is from God.

(James 3:17-18) "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. {18} And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

A number of years ago, a company had some plans to develop a business in another city. There were a number of Christians involved in the company, and they had asked me for my support. I liked their product, but I had a problem with their methods. I saw that some things were not being done ethically, and because of this I shied away from any involvement with them. Their methods did not reflect the purity that James mentioned. I also saw the company focusing on developing future facilities, when they did not have their first one up and running. I had lots of red flags warning me against being involved in the company. We need to test with God's wisdom.

3. Test by Those in Authority

God's word teaches us to submit and to obey those in authority. God places people in authority over us to protect us. Authorities are ministers of God for our good. Leaders must give account for those that God places under their authority. It is a serious matter. They are charged by God to do what is in the best interest for the person, and they will have to give account. We should run things by those who have spiritual authority over us.

A few years ago, a young man asked me for one of my daughter's hand in marriage. He told me that the Lord told him that he was to marry her, move to North Dakota, and he would be hired as a pastor up there. I told him no. First, the plan was not reasonable. He had no education. He had no training. He had no experience. He had no job skills. He had no way of providing for himself, much less my daughter. There was nothing reasonable about what he said. His parents agreed with me. They were not in agreement with what their son said he had heard. The young man was not in agreement with what I shared with him. He said he had to obey God, not me or his parents. I was not willing to give my daughter's hand to him. I gave him a reasonable plan. He should go to school. He should begin getting theological training. We would help him learn to preach and pastor. We would give him opportunities to gain knowledge and experience. The young man withdrew from church, having rejected the counsel he had received. This young man rejected his

parent's authority, his pastor's spiritual authority, and showed no regard for his girlfriend's parent's authority.

(Rom 13:1-6) "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. {2} Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. {3} For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; {4} for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. {5} Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. {6} For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing."

(Heb 13:17a) "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account...."

4. Test the Spirit of the Prophetic Word

We should test the spirit of the things we receive. On March 21, 2011, Terry Jones, pastor of the Dove World Outreach Center in Gainesville, Florida, and some of his followers, held a mock trial of the Koran and set a copy on fire as a "punishment" for "crimes against humanity." Then, on September 11, 2013, Jones held a protest in which the ISIS flag and hundreds of Korans were burned. He defended his actions by the Word of God. In Acts 19, the church at Ephesus did burn books of magic and witchcraft. New believers repented of their involvement in the occult and witchcraft, and brought their own books together and burned them. In Mr. Jones' case, this was not an act of repentance, but an act to draw public attention, and to condemn Muslims and the Quran. The context of the passage in Acts is repentance. The essence or spirit of the act by Mr. Jones was quite different. He was not repenting of his involvement with Islam and the Quran. It was a public demonstration against Islam and the Quran. His actions did bring him attention, but it also brought strife and unrest. It was not sown in peace and it did not yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness. I believe there was selfish ambition at the root of it. Do I believe that Islam is a false religion? Yes. Do I believe the Quran misleads people? Yes. I believe that Jesus is the Way, the Life, and the Truth. There is no other way. But I also believe that his actions were not the best way to share the gospel message with the Muslim world.

(Acts 19:19) "And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver."

5. Test by the Prophetic Purpose

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14 that there are three purposes for prophetic words: edification, exhortation, and consolation. When we hear a word, we should look to see if the word edifies. Does it edify us? Does it edify others? Does the word exhort us or others in following God? Does the word console or comfort others? If the word does not do one of these three things, it may not be something that we should share with others. This does not mean that it is not from the Lord; it may or may not be from the Lord. I have heard many things from God that were just for me. The Holy Spirit has shared things with me that I needed to be aware of, prepare for, or to pray about. They were not to share with others. But, if a word tears down, rather than builds up someone,

there is a chance that this was not from the Lord. He gives us prophetic words to encourage and edify others, not to tear them down.

(1 Cor 14:3) “But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.”

Many years ago, a leader in our church told me that he had a prophetic ministry like Jeremiah, to tear down and pluck up. Therefore, he felt the freedom to judge and correct others. While God gave Jeremiah a prophetic ministry to the nations, that is not the normal calling for prophets today. The normal ministry of prophets is to edify, exhort, and comfort. Much of what this brother said were judgmental and condemning words. He was not hearing clearly from the Lord. He was immature in the things of the Lord, and needed to be mentored in his prophetic gifting.

(Jer 1:10) “See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

6. Test by our Friends

Solomon said “faithful are the wounds of a friend. I believe it is important to have a few friends that we trust that we can share things with. Our true friends care about us. They don’t want us to come in harms’ way. True friends are willing to tell us when they think we have missed it. It is important to give those kinds of friends the freedom to share the truth in love with us. Our responses and openness to both their affirmation and reproofs are very important.

Our spouse should be one of those friends that help us stay accountable. We should also use other friends who are mature and spiritually discerning. An immature or a less discerning person, even though they are a friend, would not be as reliable to bounce things off of.

(Pr 27:6) “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”

7. Test by the Heart

Sometimes we will get a word about something, and we test it by the Word of God, and it checks out just fine. We share it with our authorities, and they are okay with it. Then, we look at the motivations and fruit of it, and it checks out fine. One further test that each of us have is our hearts. John wrote that if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God. We must ask ourselves, “How do I feel about this? Do I have peace and confidence in my heart, or do I have a hesitancy and a lack of peace?” If our heart condemns us, I would consider that as a warning light, and would hold off acting upon it until I had further confirmation from the Lord.

(1 John 3:19-21) “We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him {20} in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. {21} Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;”

There is a reason that I have put this last. Some people do something if they feel good about it. Our emotions and feelings can deceive us. Jeremiah wrote that “the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick.” Therefore, we should run things through the Word of God, our authorities, and through others before we just do what we feel is okay.

(Jer 17:9) “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?”

Prayer

Father God, thank You for the Holy Spirit. Thank You for giving us Your mind and thoughts, and for speaking to us. Lord, we do not want to be like the days of Eli, when the word of the Lord was rare, and visions were infrequent (1 Sam 3:1). We want to be Your friends, and we want to freely receive from you the things You have for us. Holy Spirit, give us a sensitivity to Your voice and Your spiritual thoughts. Help us to be tuned in to You so that we hear clearly. Help us to grow in our ability to hear from You, and to minister in the Spirit. Help us to be a prophetic people. We earnestly desire spiritual gifts, and especially that we would prophesy. Help us to walk in humility, and to examine carefully the things that we receive. We want to be led by the Spirit, and to walk in the Spirit, and to also walk in truth. I ask these things in Jesus’ name.

Q & A

- How does the Lord most often speak to you?
- What are things that you do to help you listen to the Lord?
- Who do you run things through when you think you have heard a word from the Lord?
- Name a time when you heard clearly from the Lord about something.
- Were there any points or applications that stood out to you?

Introduction (Matt 16:15–23, 1 Cor 2:6–16)

- 1. The natural man does not know the mind of the Lord** (1 Cor 2:1–8, Col 1:28, Heb 5:14, Eph 3:3–6)

- 2. The spiritual man has the mind of Christ** (1 Cor 2: 9-16, Is 64:4, Eph 1:13-14, 1 Cor 12:11, Acts 9:31, John 16:13, Rom 8:27, 8:14, John 16:8, 14:26, Gal 5:22-23, 2 Cor 13:14, Acts 1:8, Luke 24:49)

Conclusion and Application (1 Cor 2:16, 1 Cor 14:1-4, 29, 1 Thess 5:19-21)

1. Test by the Word of God (2 Tim 3:16-17)
2. Test by the Wisdom of God (James 3:13-18)
3. Test by Those in Authority (Rom 13:1-6, Heb 13:17)
4. Test the Spirit of the Prophetic Word (Acts 19:19)
5. Test by the Prophetic Purpose (1 Cor 14:3, Jer 1:10)
6. Test by our Friends (Pr 27:6)
7. Test by the Heart (1 John 3:19-21, Jer 17:9)