

Recognizing the Voice of God

I John 4:1

We're continuing in our series on "Hearing From God." Last week we talked about some ways you can hear God speak. One of the ways is God gives us *impressions* in our mind. Now here is the problem - if God gives me impressions, *how do I know when they're really from God.* How do I know I'm not just talking to myself? I've found it very easy to confuse *my desires* with *God's will*. The Bible says *Satan* can talk to us. We can read things and they get put in our mind and we think that it's God, but it's just another magazine article.

So how do you know when it's really God? This may not be a big issue if you're just trying to decide what restaurant to go to after church. But if you're talking about *who to marry* or a *major career change*, this is a major issue. You need to hear from God. God wants to talk to you. So how do I know when it's really God speaking to me?

I John 4:1 says, "Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world." The Greek reads like this, "Don't always believe everything you hear just because somebody says it's a message from God. Test it first to see if it really is." The Bible says we must learn to distinguish God's voice. We've got to figure out if it's really God or not.

I want to give you the seven ways to test an impression. Seven ways to know if it's really God talking to you or not. They form a filter and they're all interrelated. You can't pick and choose. If an impression does not pass all seven of these tests you know it's not from God. You can disqualify it.

Therefore, look with me at these seven tests.

First, does it agree with the Bible? You can write this down: God never contradicts His written Word. Jesus said this in Luke 21:33 says,

"Heaven and earth will pass away but My words will never pass away." **God will never tell you to violate anything in this book. Never. God will never tell you to ignore or disobey anything in this book. He doesn't say one thing one time, and another thing another time. God is consistent. If He said it in the past, He's going to say it in the future. He is never inconsistent.**

Most of God's will for your life is already right here in the Bible. You don't even have to pray about it. Just do what it says. Someone asked, "Do you pray about getting up in the morning and going to church?" **No, I don't. I just get up. I don't pray about giving, I just do it. I don't pray about telling other people the about Jesus, I just do it. Why? Because it's right here in God's Word. When you build your life on this book, you're going to ask the right questions.** If you don't build your life on this book, you're going to miss God's will much of the time.

Second, does it make me more like Christ? Philippians 2:5 says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." The Greek reads like this, "In your lives you must think and act like Jesus Christ."

Jesus is the standard by which we measure everything we do. Romans 8:29 says, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son..." To have *character*, to have *love*, *joy*, *peace*, *patience*, **all the qualities that Jesus had -- in your life.** God would never tell you to do anything that contradicts or would hinder you from reaching that goal.

Paul says this in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." James 3:17 reads like this in the Greek, "The wisdom that comes from God is pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, impartial and sincere." **These are filters that you can use to judge your thought life!**

If you get an idea that's going to promote conflict it's probably not from God. You have to ask yourself, "How is this idea and/or action going to affect other people? Will it hurt them or harm them? Will it

build them up or tear them down? Will it encourage them or discourage them?" Remember, Jesus is our Model!

Third, does it edify the Church? Ephesians 3:10 says, "God's intent is that through the church the manifold wisdom of God who should be made known." If God has genuinely spoken to you, given you an *idea*, or an *impression*, it will life up the body of Christ - the church.

Now, listen carefully, the Bible teaches us that the church is the Bride of Christ, and that Christ loves her. The Bible teaches us that God bought the church with the blood of Christ, and that it is valuable to Him. Whatever you think God is saying to you, if it causes damage to the church it is not from God!

As a believer, God will always lead you to love the church, to support the church, to be involved in the church, to lift up the church. If you don't do this then typically you're going to make a lot of *unnecessary mistakes* in life. **Why?** Because the foundation of your decision making process is all wrong!

Four, is it consistent with how God has shaped me? Ephesians 2:10 reminds us; "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do." Romans 12:6 says, "God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well." Before you were born God planned your life. **God made you for a purpose.** You're not here by accident. You are here for a reason.

The way God designed you reveals your purpose. You were designed a certain way. God has designed you for a *career*, a *ministry*, for *life involving your spiritual gifts*, your heart (*your passions, desires* - some things turn you on, some things you could care less about; some things you love to do, some things you hate to do; some things you're interested in and some things you're bored to tears with). **Some people love accounting and some people can't stand accounting, some people love to mechanics, some people can't stand mechanics.** Some people love to *cook*, some people hate to *cook*. Where do you think you got that emotional makeup? **God gave it to you.** He gave us all different make-ups. **Why?** **He wants His work in this world to get done.** God's will for your life will never contradict how he has basically designed you. If you ever sense a leading in your life that is

contrary to your basic shape, your personality, your experiences, it's probably not from God.

Five, does it concern my responsibility? If it's *not your responsibility* why in the world should God talk to you about it? In John 21:18-22, Jesus is talking to *Peter* and He tells him how he (Peter) was going to die. **He explains that he's going to have to suffer for being a Christian.** Peter turns and points to John and says, "What about him, Lord? Jesus replied, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? As for you, follow me." In other words, Jesus simply says, "That is none of your business, so don't worry about it."

Now watch this - I only have to be concerned about what's going on in my life, I don't have to be concerned about God's will for your life. I can't figure out my own motives most of the time, much less figure out yours. If God is going to talk to you, you need to ask: "Is He really talking to me or is He talking about something else? If it's somebody else, does it concern my responsibility?"

Listen; if God wants to tell me something, why would He need to tell you to tell me? After all, we are still on pretty good speaking terms!

We have been reminded in Romans 14:11-12, "We will all be judged one day not by each other's standards or even by our own, but by the judgment of God. It is to God alone that we shall have to answer for our actions." **When you listen for God to speak to you, you need to listen for God to speak to you, not your son or your wife.** When you listen for God's voice, listen for *yourself*, not for *somebody else*. A lot of well meaning Christians have caused enormous amounts of damage because they thought God was talking to them about what somebody else should do.

Six, is it convicting or is it condemning? Jesus said this in John 3:17, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Paul said this in Romans 8:1, "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to

Christ Jesus.” Listen carefully to this statement: *Conviction* is from God; *condemnation* is from the devil. Conviction points the way to change; condemnation just makes you feel bad.

When God convicts you of sin in your life it is always specific. He will use a *sermon*, a *Bible lesson*, or *an impression*, or *the voice of the Holy Spirit*. And He says, "Here's an attitude, behavior, or something in your life that needs changing." He will always be very specific and put His finger right on it. He will be very specific.

On the other hand, *condemnation*, which comes from the devil, is very vague and very general and basically says, "You're bad. You're not good. You're worthless. You stink. God could never use you." Satan is very *general* and very *cunning* as he plants his thoughts of *condemnation* in your mind.

Listen, God will always give you specific things in your life to deal with. And as we *listen to*, and *obey*, the voice of God, the result will always lead to *confession*, *repentance*, and *forgiveness*. And when that happens the feelings of conviction leave. God is not out to beat you up!

If you are a Christian, if you have put your faith in Jesus Christ and asked Him to forgive all your sins and asked Him to be your savior and Lord, it means this: Everything you've ever done wrong is forgiven. Not just the sins of your past but the ones you're going to do today. And the ones you haven't even thought about tomorrow. They were all nailed on the cross. That's why Jesus said, "It's finished! It's paid for! It's done!"

Seven, do I sense God's peace about it? The Bible reminds us in 1 Corinthians 14:33, "God is not the author of confusion." So if you're *feeling confused* that *confusion* is *not* coming from God. It may be coming from *yourself*, or from *other people*, or from *the enemy*, but it's *not coming from God*.

If you're pressured, if you're stressed out, that pressure and stress are not coming from God. It's coming from inside you, or from the devil, or from some other source. Satan drives us *compulsively* while God's spirit draws us *compassionately, gently*.

There is nothing more vital in your life than you hearing from God. Nothing. Because you were created and made to have a relationship with God and if you miss that you miss the purpose you were made for.

Everyone please stand for prayer.

Father,

I want to hear Your voice. I need Your thoughts in my mind and Your love in my heart. Father; help me to start growing spiritually in You. I don't understand it all but as best as I know how I open my life to You. In Jesus name. Amen."