

Hearing
the
Lord's Voice

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Scripture quotations are taken from the *New King James Version* of the Bible, unless otherwise noted. Words in brackets are the literal translation of Hebrew or Greek.

Throughout the Scripture quotations, words are italicized for added emphasis.



1 w The Nature of the Lord's Voice

Introduction

According to the Lord's own words in John 10:27, His sheep hear His voice and they follow Him. Thus, as believers, we need to understand what it means to follow our Shepherd by hearing His voice and inner speaking. His voice in us is a present reality and touches the details of our daily life. As we hear His voice and go along with it, we become partakers of the Lord, and God's economy of conforming us to the image of His Son progresses in us.

Our God is a living, talking, and speaking God. He even identifies Himself as the Word. Concerning the Lord Jesus, John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He is the *logos*, or Word. That means Christ as the Word is God's speech and utterance. Now this One as the *logos* has entered into our being. He comes into us as the Word, with His voice and speaking. Therefore, we need to understand the nature of His voice.

***The Nature of the Lord's Voice
under the Old Covenant***

The ten words written on tablets of stone

To fully appreciate the nature of the Lord's voice under the new covenant, we need to see the nature of His voice under the old covenant. In Old Testament times under the old covenant, God did speak. His voice was there. One of the ways God spoke was in the ten words written on the tablets of stone, that is, in the ten commandments. In Deuteronomy 10:4, most of the Bible translations (at least in the margin) do not say "ten commandments" but "ten words." God spoke ten words that revealed His nature and the kind of God He is.

The kind of commands we give reveals the kind of persons we are. For example, if I am a loose person, my commands will be loose. If I am a strict person, my commands will be strict. The kind of person I am will be expressed in the kind of commandments I give. Thus, the kind of God we have is revealed in His commandments. That God would command, "You shall have no other gods before Me," indicates that He wants our affection exclusively. God wants our heart. Similarly, the fact that He would command, "You shall not kill," reveals that our

God is a God of life and love. He gives His commandments to reveal something of what kind of God He is and what kind of nature He has. The ten commandments also reveal how much we fall short of what God is. They reveal to us that we are sinners and that we need Christ. Accordingly, they lead us to Christ.

The main point under the old covenant was that when God spoke, His voice was written in the tablets of stone. Though under the old covenant His voice was true and revealed His holy and loving nature, it could not supply the life that His voice can now supply under the new covenant (cf. Gal. 3:21; John 5:24-25).

In the holy of holies

Exodus 25 gives us another picture of how God spoke under the old covenant. This chapter records that He spoke in the holy of holies, where He met with man from above the blood-sprinkled mercy seat and between the two cherubim. There, He came to meet with the children of Israel. God said to Moses, “There I will meet with you, and I will speak with you . . .” (Exo. 25:22). Thus, the words of God were coming forth in the holy of holies. This place of God’s speaking was known in the Old Testament as the oracle of God (1 Kings 8:6 ASV).

Under the old covenant, God's speaking was there in the ten words on the tablets of stone, and His speaking was there in the holy of holies. Both these instances of God's speaking revealed His holiness and glory. Nevertheless, the Lord's voice under the old covenant was not yet of the nature of an *inward* communication of Himself. Rather, God's speaking during the Old Testament period was of the nature of an *outward* communication of His desires and will.

In many portions and ways through the prophets

Hebrews 1:1 also gives a good summary of the nature of God's speaking under the old covenant: "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets. . . ." God spoke in many different ways in the Old Testament. For example, sometimes He spoke in a vision, sometimes in a dream. God spoke to Daniel and to King Nebuchadnezzar in these ways.

We see then that under the old covenant God was speaking in many different ways: through the law in the tablets of stone, in the speaking-place from above the mercy seat, through visions, through dreams, through prophets receiving a word from the Lord and speaking it

to the people. In all these ways, the people had to depend primarily upon another person, such as a prophet, to hear God's direct speaking. Thus, the kind of speaking under the old covenant, although true and proper, was still outward in nature.

***The Nature of the Lord's Voice
under the New Covenant***

In His Son

Under the new covenant the speaking of the Lord, or the voice of the Lord, is of a different nature. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, ¹ "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us [*in the*] Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the [universe]." *The New Translation* by J. N. Darby omits the definite article, "the," in the phrase "in the Son." This omission is in keeping with the structure of the literal Greek text. Thus, it reads "in Son." This same grammatical construction is found in John 4:24 with the words "God is Spirit." The definite article is absent in both cases. In Hebrews 1:1, the phrase "the prophets" has the definite article. Thus, in verse 2 you

would expect to read, “has at the last of these days spoken to us in *the Son*.” But it does not say *the Son*; it says “in Son,” or “in a Son.” This is because in the Greek language when the nature of something is being emphasized, the definite article is usually omitted. Here the emphasis is on the nature of Christ as a Son. God’s speaking now, under the new covenant, is of the nature of a son’s relationship with a father.

The description of Christ as “a Son” implies a relationship of life and love. First, a son is one who has the life of his father. For example, I have two sons. They have my life. I begat them. Thus, being a son has to do with a life-relationship. When the writer of Hebrews says that God has spoken to us in a Son, this means that God’s speaking to us is bound up in our life-relationship and fellowship with the Son. It reveals that the nature of God’s voice in us is related to our participation in and enjoyment of the life of the Son. In other words, the more we learn how to enjoy and partake of Christ Himself as life, the more we will hear the Lord’s voice. It may even be said that the Lord’s voice in us is a life-voice, as John 5:25-26 reveals: ²⁵ “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself.”

Second, a son not only has a life-relationship, but also a love-relationship. Love is the realm in which the Son of God lives and exists. The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father. To say that God has spoken to us “in a Son” definitely implies that God’s speaking in us is related to our love-relationship with the Lord. As we enjoy the fellowship of life, and as we cultivate a love-relationship with Him in our heart, we will spontaneously become acquainted with His voice in us (cf. 1 John 5:2-4). Out of the flow of life and love comes much inner speaking. To know the Lord as life and love is to know His voice in us. This is the nature of the Lord’s voice under the new covenant.

Upon the tablets of the heart

Christ as the *Word/logos* (John 1:1) dwelling within us speaks in the form of spiritual writing upon our hearts. Indeed, this is one of the main distinguishing marks of the new covenant in contrast with the old covenant. God’s law is no longer being written on tablets of stone but on the fleshly tablets of our hearts. In 2 Corinthians 3:3 Paul says, “you are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is,

of the heart.” Thus, to know the Lord’s voice within us is to understand the way in which His voice manifests itself — by the Spirit’s writing upon our hearts.

The subject of the Spirit’s writing is *the law of God* as it is described by the Lord Himself in Matthew 5—7. Paul describes this same subject in Romans 8:4-5: ⁴ “That *the righteous requirement of the law* might be fulfilled *in us* who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit, the things of the spirit.” The righteous requirement of the law is what the Lord taught in Matthew 5—7 in what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount. Now this uplifted law is being written upon our hearts by the Spirit. It is this Spirit-writing that constitutes the Lord’s voice within us.

The evidence of our hearing the Lord’s voice is both the consciousness we have within our hearts as well as the inclination of our hearts. For example, the very consciousness and prompting in us forbidding us to take a certain course of action or hold a certain attitude is His speaking within. The consciousness itself is the Lord’s voice. This kind of consciousness may also be understood as a consciousness of life, because the nature of the consciousness is an inner awareness that is being sup-

plied to us by the life of God. If we cooperate with this consciousness, or in other words, if we listen to the Lord's voice within, and by faith obey His forbidding feeling, we will unlock the floodgate of the Spirit of life into our whole being. It is important to know that His voice always comes with the supply of His presence and grace.

The uniqueness of the new covenant relationship with the Lord is this: it is not keeping outward commands, but discovering His voice as an inner consciousness. Thus, it is not being outwardly *told* what to do; it is being *prompted* from within concerning what to do. So, expect the Lord's voice to come from within you. And the way you will discover His voice is by His inner operation that manifests itself by inward promptings.

Recently, I became acquainted with the most basic function of the IBM computer. When I turned the computer on, I discovered a little blinking "C" at the bottom of the screen referred to as the "C" prompt. The "C" prompt looks something like this: C:\>. The appearance of this "C" prompt on the screen tells you that the computer is operating and is prompting you to enter a command. Indeed, the prompt is the computer's way of speaking to you; it is the computer's voice. Of course, when you enter a command, you open up a wealth of information on the screen. An entire computer world can instantly be available to you by simply responding to the "prompt."

In the same way, we as believers, indwelt by the life of God, have promptings within us. These promptings are the Lord's way of speaking to us. They *are* the Lord's voice. They are telling us that God is operating in us to open up all the riches of His life to our inward parts. However, to get the benefit of God's life within we need to respond properly to the prompting. In our daily life, when we say "Amen" to the prompting within and go along with it, we are obeying the voice of the Lord.

This prompting is what Paul refers to in Philippians 2:12-14: ¹² "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. ¹⁴ Do all things without murmuring and [reasoning]." In the first part of verse 12, Paul mentions the term *obey*. The word "obey" in Greek is a compound word formed by the two words "hear" and "under." Thus, to obey means "to be under a hearing." Hearing the Lord's voice is integral to obeying or following Him, even as He indicated in John 10:27: "My sheep *hear* My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."

To hear the Lord under the new covenant means to recognize promptings within our heart. The prompting is God Himself operating within us. When we respond

positively to the prompting, we actually obey Him. Now, it is at the point of obeying Him that we need to see the difference between Old Testament and New Testament obedience. Old Testament obedience is man responding to the outward law of God without the supply of life that is necessary to carry it out (Gal. 3:21). New Testament obedience is man responding to God from the very responses and promptings produced by God Himself! These responses are inwardly produced by God Himself out of the riches and supply of His grace.

First, it is by grace that God authors and produces within us the promptings to Himself. Second, He supplies grace once again at every point that we obey His voice and respond to His inner promptings. This is what is meant in John 1:16: “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace *for* grace” (or, “grace *in exchange for* grace”). When we obey by saying “Amen” to His speaking, we are not merely carrying out an act of obedience from our own energy or strength; we are exchanging the grace of His promptings for a fresh supply of grace to work out those promptings in our practical experience. Obedience under the new covenant is a step of faith to open ourselves to the flow of God’s grace to once again supply us with Himself. Thus, to hear His voice is not to come under a demand of the law. Rather, it is to hear a call to enjoy a fresh supply of grace.

The Lord's voice is located in the region of our heart. Hebrews 3:7-8 tells us, ⁷ "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness.'" The voice of God speaks in our hearts. When the Lord is speaking we can either constrict and harden our heart so that it is not soft and pliable to His voice, or we can hear His voice and soften our heart and go along with that voice. This is the way we interact with the Lord's voice under the new covenant.

Imparted and written upon our inward parts

Further development of the truth concerning the Lord's voice is found in Hebrews 8:10-11: ¹⁰ "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will [impart] My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ¹¹ None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." These two verses are a quotation from Jeremiah 31:33-34. Again, the uniqueness of the new covenant is in the imparting of His laws into our mind and the actual inscribing of them on our heart. This

shows that the voice of the Lord is in our thoughts and in our heart. His voice is in our desires, in our feelings, in that inner operation of being prompted with an impulse concerning something. His voice is also in the inclination of our will. The Lord's voice under the new covenant is directly present within the heart of every believer. This is the nature of His speaking.

Sometimes the Lord's voice comes in the form of a question, such as, What are you doing here? or, Where are you going? For example, one day the prophet Elijah was sulking because Jezebel was seeking his life (1 Kings 19:2). Yes, Elijah was truly a mighty man of God. He had already caused fire from heaven to come down and consume an offering, thus exposing the falseness of the prophets of Baal and exonerating and vindicating the living God (1 Kings 18:19-39). But when he heard the report that Jezebel wanted to kill him, he ran for his life. Eventually, his flight ended with his hiding in a cave.

In 1 Kings 19:9-13, we read the details of the story of Elijah's encounter with the Lord's voice: ⁹ "And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' ¹⁰ So he said, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn

down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.’¹¹ Then He said, ‘Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.’ And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake;¹² and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.¹³ So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And suddenly a voice came to him, and said, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” This story illustrates how the Lord is in the still small voice. In the original Hebrew language it says, “a delicate whispering voice.” The Lord was in that whisper. God’s speaking was in that still small voice, and it was in the form of a question, “What are you doing here?”

Maybe you have found yourself in “a cave” at some time. Perhaps you went to the cave of a movie theater, and while you were watching all the defiling things on the screen, there arose a consciousness within you in the form of a question, “What are you doing here?” You can be sure that that was God talking to you. That is the way His voice speaks — right inside of you.

In Genesis 3, God approached Adam in the same way. After Adam had hidden himself from the presence of the Lord, God came to him, asking the question, “Where are you?” Of course, God already knew where Adam was, but He still needed to ask *him* the question.

Sometimes in our lives, when we are living for vanity, while we are in our own little world with our own self-centered goals and aims, there comes a consciousness within us with words that form in our own thoughts saying, “Where am I? What am I doing with my life? Where will my life end up?” It may seem like our own mind talking, but we must realize that God’s voice comes to us as He is writing it into our consciousness — into our own thoughts and heart. God is talking to us through our own consciousness. This way of speaking is according to the new covenant. He is not merely talking to us, but He is infusing and supplying into us the very thing He is speaking about.

We probably do not realize how much of the voice of the Lord we, as believers, actually have in our daily life. For example, you may remember someone during the day. Perhaps as you are washing the dishes, you think about that person. Actually it is the Lord speaking to you, putting that person on your heart so that you would pray for him or give him a phone call.

In his letters to the churches and to individuals, Paul describes his experiences of having the Lord's speaking. In 2 Timothy 1:3-5 Paul says, ³ "I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I *remember* you in my prayers night and day, ⁴ greatly desiring to see you, [*remembering*] your tears, that I may be filled with joy, ⁵ when I call to *remembrance* the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also." Paul illustrates in these verses that the Lord's voice speaking to him is in and through his thoughts. It is in the normal avenues and channels of his being. This corresponds to God's new covenant way of imparting His laws into our mind and inscribing them upon our heart.

When we understand this new covenant way of God's speaking, we must confess that we all have heard more of His voice in our daily life than we realized. For example, God's speaking has come to us many times in the form of desires within us. We may have a desire to go to the church meeting. That very desire within us is God's speaking in the form of an inclination inscribed on our heart. Thus, we could see how simple and intimate is the Lord's voice *to* us and *in* us under the new covenant.

Through our environment

Often in our experience the Lord's voice in us encounters a deaf or indifferent ear. When this occurs, the Lord has a way to turn up the volume of His speaking. According to the Scriptures, His way is to use our environment and circumstances to intensify His inner speaking. This is the spiritual principle of discipline and chastisement in the lives of all God's children (cf. Heb. 12:5-9). The effect that God's discipline has on our ability to hear the Lord's voice is exemplified in Isaiah 30:20-21:²⁰ "And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers.²¹ Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left."

When the Lord gives us the bread of *adversity* and the water of *affliction*, He is doing so in order to get our attention, that we may hear His voice. Adversity and affliction are described as teachers that are not hidden in a corner anymore. Indeed, our eyes will see our teachers. These teachers are different from brothers and sisters giving us outward instructions. They are like personal tutors that are able to get our attention so that we will

listen to the Lord. They are sent by God when all else seems to fail. Under God's sovereignty, the environments of adversity and affliction are used by Him to attain one end — our hearing of the Lord's voice.

The effectiveness of environmental discipline in our lives is evidenced by the fact that we eventually do hear a voice behind us saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when we turn to the right or when we turn to the left. This voice keeps us on the straight and narrow way of experiencing Christ. Our tendency is to be side-tracked, turning aside either to the right or to the left. The right and left represent evil, the flesh, the world, or our own independent way (cf. Prov. 4:23-27). If we have learned from our teachers of adversity and affliction, when we are again tempted to turn off the road to the right or left, *we will hear* the Lord speaking through our consciousness, "This is the way (Christ), walk in it (Him)" (cf. Col. 2:6). All of God's discipline in our lives has this one goal — that we would hear the Lord's voice and follow Him.

In the New Testament, Revelation 3:19-20 reveals this same principle of discipline used by God to secure our inner attention to hear His voice. Here the Lord says, ¹⁹ "As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. Therefore be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I

will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” The Lord gives a little rebuking and a little discipline to turn up the volume of His voice. He has already been speaking in us, even standing at the door and knocking; but we have not heard His voice. Now He knocks a little harder through rebuke and discipline. When He says, “If anyone hears My voice,” it is as though He is saying, “I spoke to you in a whisper, in a still small voice, but you closed your ears to Me by your reasoning mind. Your own self-centered desires deafened and muffled My voice. But now, through discipline, I have secured my goal in your life. You hear My voice and are opening the door, and I am coming into your life to set up an inner table where we can feast together — you with Me and I with you.”

May the Holy Spirit cause us all to become warm within, so that we all can say, “Lord, thank You that Your voice is so intimate in me all day long.” Begin thanking Him for His voice even though you have not obeyed it. Simply say, “Thank You for speaking. Thank You for this consciousness. Thank You, Lord, that You have been speaking in me even though I did not listen. As we begin in this way to enjoy Him and partake of Him, we will find within us godly desires, a Spirit-wrought willingness, and inclinations toward the things of God, which

come from God Himself operating in our being. By learning to follow this inner operation, we become, in reality, one of His sheep who hear His voice and follow Him in daily life. This is what it means to experience God's economy, and this is the pathway to God's eternal purpose of conformity to the image of Christ. Amen!

2 w Understanding the Lord's Voice

Hearing and understanding the Lord's voice is a vital and integral part of our daily Christian life. We are actually participating in Christ's own experience described in Isaiah 50:4-5: ⁴ "The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. *He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned.* ⁵ *The Lord God has opened My ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away.*" The Lord Himself needed to have His ear awakened morning by morning in order to live an obedient life in His humanity. The Lord lives His life in us today in the same way that He lived His life on the earth. Indeed, His human life is being reproduced in us by the Spirit. Thus, we should become more familiar with this aspect of His life, so that we can hear and understand His voice in us.

The Lord's Voice Is Like an Inner Drawing

The Lord's voice in us is described in John's Gospel as an inner drawing. In John 6:37 the Lord says, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." Then again in verses 44-45 He says, ⁴⁴ "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me *draws him*; and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore *everyone who has heard* and learned from the Father comes to Me." Thus, to hear God and be taught by God is, in essence, to experience an inward drawing toward the Lord Jesus. That is, this inward speaking is experienced as an attraction toward Christ. This inner drawing indicates His direct speaking to us.

Although I did not realize it at the time, I experienced this inward speaking when I first came to the Lord. After hearing the gospel for the first time, there was a constant inner drawing in me toward Christ. This drawing expressed itself in my curiosity toward the Bible and church history. It also expressed itself through my interest in the girl that later became my wife. She spoke to me about the Lord in a way I had never heard before. The Lord was drawing me to Himself, and this drawing *was* His speaking to me.

The Greek word for draw is *helkuo*, and may be properly understood as a gentle inner persuasion. It is something in you that attracts and persuades you toward the Lord and the things of the Lord. It is the same kind of experience spoken of in Jeremiah 31:3: “The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have *drawn* you.’ ” Thus, the manner of the Lord’s speaking is that gentle persuasion of love that draws our hearts to Him.

The speaking of the Lord under the new covenant is an inward drawing resulting from a divine operation in our being. The drawing *is* His speaking. Even though we are sometimes indifferent to that inner drawing, it is still there in us. We can run away from it or we can nurture it. Whatever measure of drawing to the Lord we may have, it is deserving of our thanksgiving. We should say, “Thank You, Lord, for the desire that I find in myself for You.” Even a little bit of desire in us for the Lord should be considered His speaking.

His speaking manifests itself by an inward drawing. In other words, He does not normally speak with audible words, telling us what to do or not to do. Rather, He actually imparts into us the very substance and reality of His speaking. For example, if He is speaking to us about

“willingness” in an area of our lives, He will incline our hearts and draw our hearts in that area. Philippians 2:12-13 makes this clear: ¹² “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ *for it is God who works in you both to will and to do* for His good pleasure.” God Himself operates within to produce the willingness and the working. This illustrates that understanding the Lord’s voice is related to understanding His drawing from within our hearts.

The Old Testament example of the Shulammitte maiden’s request to her bridegroom expresses the same kind of drawing spoken of in the New Testament. In Song of Songs 1:4 the maiden says, “Draw me; we will run after thee” (ASV). When the Lord draws us, we will run after Him. We can be sure that when we find within us that gentle inner drawing toward the Lord, that itself *is* the Lord’s speaking to us. By grace He works within us to impart the very reality of the words He speaks. When He calls us to Himself, He makes us feel an inward drawing toward Him, even as He declares in John 12:32: “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, *will draw all [men] to Myself.*”

The Lord's Voice Is Like an Inner Knowing

According to the verses in John 10 that speak so clearly about the Lord's voice, we observe that His voice in our experience is like an inner knowing. John 10:4-5 says, ⁴ "And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for *they know his voice*. ⁵ Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, *for they do not know the voice of strangers.*" Also, in verse 14 the Lord says, "I am the good shepherd; and *I know My sheep, and am known by My own.*" This inner knowing of the Lord's voice is similar to experiencing an inner drawing, in that we are moved and touched from within. In our experience there is a deep inner consciousness and conviction. That is, the Lord's voice is written into our very consciousness.

For example, when we received Christ into us, it was because we were convinced by this inner knowing that we should receive Him. *Outwardly*, we may have *heard* a preacher sharing the gospel, or we may have *read* a tract explaining to our mind the way of salvation. But *inwardly* we *knew* that receiving Christ was the right thing to do. This inner knowing to follow the Lord as our Shepherd is simply His voice speaking in our consciousness.

This inner knowing has a long history. It goes back to eternity past and stretches forward to eternity future. In John 10:3 the Lord says, “the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep *by name* and leads them out.” We must see that the reason He can call His own sheep by name is because in eternity past we were given by the Father to the Son *by name*. He knows us by name. In fact, we were all personal gifts given by the Father to the Son. In John 10:27-29 the Lord says, ²⁷ “My sheep hear My voice, and *I know them*, and they follow Me. ²⁸ And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ *My Father, who has given them to Me*, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.” These verses in John 10 (together with Hebrews 13:20-21, which tells us about the Lord being the great Shepherd of the sheep in the blood of an eternal covenant) show us something of the substance of our inner knowing of the Lord. Namely, that our inner knowing of His voice *today*, in time, is our response to the Father and the Son’s *eternal* knowing of us. Thus, we can confidently say that we know Him because He first knew us (cf. Gal. 4:9).

The Son willingly took us by name, and then in the eternal covenant He agreed to shepherd us all the way — out of eternity past, through time with all the problems of sin, the

flesh, the world, and the devil, and into eternity future. Overcoming all obstacles, He would bring us through, fully conformed to His image.

Furthermore, this inner knowing is a reality to us as Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” The Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are children of God is an inner knowing and consciousness. This is His way of speaking to us in the most intimate and personal manner. Instead of hearing an outward voice, something apart from us, we have an inner consciousness of His abiding presence. This is how we understand the Lord’s voice.

The Lord’s Voice Is Like an Inner Infusion and Supply

The Lord’s voice under the new covenant comes as an inner infusion and supply. Galatians 3:21 says, “Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! *For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.*” God’s voice under the old covenant was indeed correct and proper in itself, but as an outward law it could not give life. It could not infuse and supply life. It could only tell you what to do. No doubt, the law given by Moses

accurately defined our condition, but it could not supply life to carry it out. But John 1:17 says, “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth [or, reality] came through Jesus Christ.” Grace and reality coming through Jesus Christ is different from an outward law being handed to us. Grace and reality is the Lord Himself in person coming to us to infuse His very life into our being.

The law was *given* but grace *came*. There is a big difference. For example, I can communicate with you in two ways. I can send you a letter or I can come in person to communicate with you. The law given by Moses is like receiving a communication by letter, but grace and reality coming through Jesus Christ is, in fact, receiving a communication from Christ Himself in person. When He comes in person, we receive direct infusion and supply. This supply is the new covenant way God speaks to us. His speaking to us is His simultaneous supply into us. Jesus said in John 6:63, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. *The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*” The very words themselves *are* spirit and life. Words and speaking mean infusion and supply.

Furthermore, this speaking is not merely an intermittent or sporadic speaking but a constant supply of life

in our being. For example, we experience an inner infusion of love toward our relatives to pray for their salvation. The love we feel for them is God's way of speaking to us about them. God did not come and outwardly tell us to love our relatives and pray for them. He does not do it that way. Rather, He wells up within us with compassion and burden. The compassion and burden *are* the Lord's voice, because His voice comes with the infusion and supply of what He wants us to do. Thus, as we learn to read the feelings within our heart, we are learning to hear the Lord's voice.

Often, His voice comes like a little seed planted within our hearts, in the form of a thought or burden. If we would pay more attention to those burdens, and fan them by prayer, we would discover the voice of God in our daily life in an increasing way. On the contrary, if we consider His speaking as merely an objective, outward voice, we may miss the hundreds of times God desires to subjectively and inwardly fulfill something within us.

Paul refers to this inward teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4:9: "But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another." The phrase "taught by God" in Greek is a compound word which literally means God-taught (*theodidaktos*). In other words, we are intuitively

God-taught to love one another. According to 1 Thessalonians 4:8 this inward God-kind of teaching is coming from a present and continuous supply of the Holy Spirit.

There is within us a speaking which is teaching us about our relationships with one another. However, the teaching comes in the form of an infusion of the Holy Spirit, rather than in the form of an outward demand. We are all God-taught. This indicates that we have His voice speaking in us about loving one another. John 6:45 says, “they shall *all* be taught by God,” and Hebrews 8:11 indicates that these taught ones include the least to the greatest of the saints. This tells us that we all have His voice, and we all can experience the infusion and supply of His voice and speaking.

The Lord’s Voice Is Like an Inner Inclination

The fact that the Lord’s voice infuses and supplies us with love for Him, godly desires, willingness to obey Him, and the ability to go along with Him reveals that His voice is like an inner inclination in our being. That is, He puts His inclinations into us. This is the nature of His speaking. It is not hearing an audible voice; neither is it waiting for a vision; nor is it reading some words that appear before our eyes in a ticker-tape fashion. Rather,

the normal voice of the Son speaking in us comes as a supplied feeling of life written into our consciousness. This feeling is an inner inclination or inner tendency. It may even be considered as an inner bias or disposition. It is definitely the bent and leaning of our mind, emotion, and will. For example, there may be an inclination or desire within you to spend more time with the Lord. You have a leaning in that direction. It is not an overpowering feeling; nevertheless you seem to be bent in the direction of desiring more time in your daily life to spend with the Lord. That inclination is the voice of the Son of God, not speaking audibly in your ears, but speaking in your inner consciousness by an infused tendency. The tendency carries with it a fresh supply of grace. Thus, whenever you go along with that tendency and obey it, you discover that the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ is present there with you, backing up that tendency with fresh and available grace.

The apostle Paul mentions this inner inclination in Romans 8:5-6: ⁵ “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” The American Standard Version translates verse 6, “For the *mind* of the flesh is

death; but the *mind* of the Spirit is life and peace.” *The Concordant Literal New Testament* translates it, “For the *disposition* of the flesh is death, yet the *disposition* of the spirit is life and peace.” *The Emphasized Bible* by Rotherham translates the same verse, “For *what is preferred* by the flesh is death, whereas *what is preferred* by the spirit is life and peace.” All of these translations attempt to capture the depth of the Greek word *phronema* used here by Paul.

This New Testament word *phronema*, according to the Greek lexicons, means the *bent or direction of the mind, emotions, and will*. In other words, it refers to the inclination of all the faculties of our inner being. Romans 8:6 tells us that the very source of this bent and inclination is the Spirit. It is the Spirit that produces a Spirit-inclined disposition in us that registers a consciousness of “life and peace.” In fact, this is one of the major things the Spirit accomplishes in us — inclining our inner being toward the things of God.

When we experience these inclinations toward God and the things of God, it causes us to worship Him because we realize that the very thing He is inclining us to, He Himself does. It is all grace! For example, He wants us to love Him, so He Himself imparts into us the love whereby we can love Him. We discover that the love

of God is something poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). Another inclination that we discover in our experience is a desire to share Christ with others. We gradually begin to realize that the inclination itself *is* the Lord's voice in us, prompting us to preach the gospel. There are also the times when we may wake up in the morning with a few words of a hymn or spiritual song. We are then inclined to go to our hymnal to find the rest of the words of that song. When we do, we are face-to-face with God's specific words or speaking to us for that day. How many times have you been inwardly directed to a devotional book, such as *Daily Light*, only to find the word, the line, or the verse that met your need at that moment?

To hear the sweet sound of the Lord's voice in our daily life we need to look for and follow the Spirit-produced inclinations. Our following these inclinations will issue in the sense of life and peace within. Again, under the new covenant His speaking does not normally come to us as an audible voice, but it comes in the line of a verse, in the words of a song, in the fellowship with another member of the Body, in a message we heard from the Word, or in the growing burden we feel in our hearts. As we open ourselves to live out of the source of the Spirit (Rom. 8:4-5), we will increasingly be made aware of our

heart's inclinations (Rom. 8:6). It is in those inclinations that we will find the Lord's voice for our daily life.

3 w Being Compatible with the Lord's Voice

The Lord's Voice and the Lord's Life

To properly understand the nature of the Lord's *voice* in us, it is necessary to identify it with the Lord's *life* in us. Indeed, the Lord's indwelling life is the manner of His speaking in us. The Lord, who is declared to be the Word, the *logos*, in John 1:1, is simultaneously described in verse 4 by the words, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." The Lord Jesus as the Word is the One who *is* life and *gives* life. It is this life, which has entered into us through regeneration, that becomes His speaking in us. In experience His voice and His life are virtually the same thing. It is His life that speaks and talks in us all day long. Thus, hearing the Lord's voice and obeying it is the same as being compatible with His life.

The Lord's voice can be described as a life-voice. John 5:25-26 clearly reveals this: ²⁵ "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear

will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself.” Hebrews 1:1-2a also declares, ¹ “God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us [in] His Son.”

Understanding life-consciousness

To understand the Lord’s voice as a life-voice, we must understand the main characteristic of the Lord’s life in us. This characteristic is revealed in Romans 8:10 which says, “And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (cf. Col. 3:4). First, Christ, who is our life, is not in us merely in a general way, but He is in us in a specific way. Indeed, He is dwelling and living in our spirit. It is our human spirit that has become the residence of the Lord’s life. Second, with the Lord’s life in us, there is the corresponding consciousness that belongs to that life. Every kind of life has a life-consciousness. This is true about the nature of animal life and human life, as well as the divine life. Every life has its own kind of consciousness. We may say that the consciousness is the inherent voice of the life. The consciousness of life is the intrinsic speaking of that life.

Consciousness, in relation to life, means having an

awareness of something, a recognition or a perception of something. It means to come to know something experientially. Any particular kind of life brings with it its own kind of awareness. For example, in a cat's life we can observe cat-consciousness. Cat life simply brings with it a consciousness and an awareness that is unique to that life. Kittens especially have a vivid imagination. The kind of life they have gives them the kind of consciousness that causes them to flit and dart around as though something were attacking them. This consciousness is due to their cat life. We observe this consciousness in any kind of animal, whether it be a dog, a bird, or a fish. Its particular kind of life gives it a corresponding consciousness that, in turn, expresses itself in some kind of animal behavior. The principle is very clear — with every kind of life, there is a consciousness that goes with that life.

When relating this principle of life-consciousness to human life, there are two main aspects to consider. First, in relation to the physical life in our bodies, we have the normal physical senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching or feeling. These specific senses have their source in the various organs of our physical life — our eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and our entire body with its inherent ability to touch or feel. For example, because our body can feel a cold temperature, that very feeling is

a form of speaking to us. In other words, we do not need to read a sign telling us, “You’re cold.” Rather, we feel cold, and the feeling itself of being cold is the voice of physical life speaking to us to put on a jacket. Thus, we may say that physical life with its senses has its own unique consciousness. Each consciousness coming from physical life is the voice of physical life speaking to our body. We have often heard such remarks as, “My stomach is telling me I am hungry.” What is this, but the recognition that physical life with its physical consciousness does communicate to us.

Second, when considering human life, we must also observe our psychological life. Psychological life in the Bible is called soul-life, from the Greek word *psuche*. Everyone has soul-life. The soul can be identified in many verses in the Bible as that faculty that includes the mind, the emotions, and the will. Because we have a soul, we have the consciousness of soul-life — we think with our intellect, or mind; we feel with our emotion; and we choose with our will, or volition. For example, we can get embarrassed and become self-conscious. We can think thoughts that make us either depressed or happy. In other words, because we have soul-life we experience the consciousness that comes with that kind of life. Our psychological life definitely has its own kind of con-

sciousness. Surely, we can recognize that not only does our psychological life have its consciousness, but that consciousness *is* its voice communicating to us.

Furthermore, an additional part of our psychological life is our conscience. Our conscience is a deeper inner consciousness. We all have this in common due to possessing psychological life. Who can deny that they have the voice of conscience? The Greek word for conscience is *suneidesis*. This compound word is composed of the prepōsition “with” and a root word meaning “to know.” Thus, by analyzing conscience etymologically, we have a clear definition of the word — to know with. Conscience means a “knowing with” or an “inner consciousness.” This knowing comes from psychological life.

In the same way, when the divine life enters into us, it comes into us with a definite consciousness. In fact, because the life of God is the highest form of life, it has the highest consciousness. God’s life is exceedingly rich in consciousness and feeling. If animal life and human life have consciousness, how much more does the divine life! Because the divine life is a Person in us and not merely an impersonal substance, we begin to experience the rich feelings of God. His love, His joy, His peace, and His compassions stir us from deep within. The apostle

Paul clearly depicts these stirrings in Philippians 1:8: “For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all [in] the [inward parts] of Jesus Christ.” With Paul those “inward parts of Jesus Christ” were the compassions and affections of Christ that he experienced as a life-consciousness within him. Paul was indwelt with Christ as his life (Col. 3:4), and by his own personal experience he knew the rich feelings of Christ that came from His indwelling life.

Not only did Paul have this life-consciousness, but every born-again believer has such a consciousness as well. Romans 8:10 declares, “And if Christ is in you . . . the Spirit is life.” First Corinthians 15:45b says, “The last Adam [Christ] became a life-giving [Spirit]”; and 1 Corinthians 6:17 says, “But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.” This means that Christ as the life-giving Spirit now dwells in our regenerated human spirit, making our spirit life. Thus, our spirit is life because Christ, the life-giver, lives there. This helps us to realize the location of the life-consciousness within us. It is in our spirit! Consequently, not only is our spirit life, but our spirit is the source from which every kind of life-consciousness flows into our being (cf. John 7:37-39; 10:10).

At this point we need to make the connection between having and experiencing the Lord’s *life* and hearing the Lord’s *voice*. This connection is presented by the

Lord Himself in John 10:10b and 16 as well as John 10:27-28: ^{10b} “I have come that they may have *life*, and that they may have it more abundantly. . . . ¹⁶ And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My *voice*; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. . . . ²⁷ My sheep hear My *voice*, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸ And I give them eternal *life*, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” By these verses we can see *the way* the Lord’s voice is experienced by us. It is by the Lord’s life that we experience His voice. It is a life-voice!

Compatibility with the Lord’s life

As we apprehend how hearing the Lord’s voice is interrelated with knowing the Lord’s life, it is important to learn compatibility with the Lord’s life. Hearing the Lord and being one with His speaking is the same as being compatible with His life. Indeed, following the Lord in our daily life is a matter of always remaining compatible with His life. As regenerated believers we have Another life in us that has Another feeling and Another consciousness. As we experience His life, we discover different kinds of responses within us that are according to His life.

These responses tell us how to remain compatible.

If we do not remain compatible with the Lord's life in any area, we will sense an inward awkwardness and lack. For example, in Colossians 3:15 Paul says, "And let the peace of [Christ] rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful." If I do not let the peace of Christ make the decision in my heart when I am tempted to engage in argumentative talk with another brother in the Body, I am not compatible with the feeling or registration of the Lord's life in me at that moment. As a result of not remaining compatible, we feel the effects within ourselves. We may sense that we are at odds with the Lord. Even *we* do not feel quite normal in our demeanor or inward posture.

On those occasions the Lord is not speaking to us with a loud-speaker out of the heavens; rather, He manifests His voice by the feeling or registration of His life. The Lord instantly feels a certain way within us, producing either the sense of "life and peace," which is compatible with His life, or a sense of "death," which indicates that something in our talking, our attitude, or our behavior does not match the nature of His life within. Romans 8:6 says, "The mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace" (ASV). The mind of the flesh in our experience is the consciousness of death, and the

mind of the Spirit is the consciousness of life and peace. Of course, the richer and deeper our fellowship with the Lord is — the more we drink of Him as the Spirit day by day — the richer and deeper will be our sensitivity to the consciousness of His life. This means each of us will be one of His sheep that are compatible with His life-voice.

Experiencing Compatibility

The meaning of compatibility

Being compatible with the Lord's voice and life simply means being agreeable with Him on His terms. It means always being harmonious with His registrations of life and peace within us in our daily life. It is by living compatibly with Him that we grow in life, spontaneously being changed and transformed into His image. Thus, not only do we enjoy Him in a general way; but as we enjoy Him we grow rich in the consciousness of that life. We learn to specifically recognize His inner approval or disapproval in our walk. In other words, we seek to make that life happy and satisfied all day long. Whenever that life is not happy and satisfied, we quickly care for it to make it happy again.

As a believer in Christ I may know doctrinally,

according to the truth in Romans 8:1, that “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” Yet why do I still feel condemned? Why do I feel “out of sorts” within? If I am not under the law but under grace, then why do I experience discomfort and awkwardness within when I take a certain course of action? These kinds of questions have troubled many believers for years. The answer to this problem is actually quite simple. Yes, we are positionally “in Christ,” and therefore we are justified persons and there is no condemnation. Yet whenever we do things out of harmony with the Lord’s life, *we feel* the responses and reactions of Christ within our being, because He is, in fact, “*our life*” (Col. 3:4).

God’s salvation over us includes not only justification; it also includes regeneration. Justification refers to our secure standing before God, based upon the blood of Christ. Regeneration refers to the life of God that we have received into our spirit making us one spirit with the Lord. Justification is positional, whereas regeneration is dispositional. Regeneration is a matter of the divine life entering into us and inwardly guiding us throughout our life. Whenever we pursue a course of action that is not compatible with His life, our regenerated state gives us trouble. That is, we cannot remain inwardly content,

because we are at odds with His life. His life within cannot change its life-consciousness. We are just simply incompatible at that point. Our standing has not changed, but our present condition is incompatible. This disturbance of our inward harmony *is* the Lord's voice in us speaking to us to get us back on course with the divine life. He is not condemning us, but rather He is loving us by inwardly steering us back to Himself. Hallelujah!

The basis of compatibility

The basis of our being compatible with the Lord's voice is our life-union with Him in spirit. This union is expressed in John 14:19 which says, "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also." We live because He lives. It is that simple. First Corinthians 6:17 reveals that this union with the Lord is in the realm of our spirit. We are joined to the Lord and are one spirit with Him. This joining is the basis of the Lord's utterance in John 14:19, "Because I live, you will live also." He lives within us in our spirit, and we also live in union with Him. We can know and experience the very consciousness of His life within us. Thus, our life-union issues in a life-consciousness. It is by the life-consciousness that we

learn to be compatible with His life-voice.

This experiential reality is also expressed in John 4:14: “But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into [eternal] life.” When the Lord said, “the water that I shall give him *will become in him a fountain of water*,” He was referring to our life-union with Him. When we receive Christ, an artesian well is established in the deepest part of our being, in our spirit. When this life-union, or inner well, springs up within us, it produces the consciousness of His life in the many facets of our daily life — from our inner thinking and motives to our outward behavior and deeds. Again, it is this life-consciousness that is the Lord’s voice. When we go along with this consciousness we are being compatible with His voice.

Ephesians 2:5 says, “even when we were dead in trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).” To be dead in offenses means being a person without feeling, having no proper spiritual consciousness. The definition of a dead person is a person without any consciousness. Apart from regeneration there is no basis or ground to be compatible with the Lord. But, when we are born again, we are regenerated with Another life and we are made alive

together with Christ. And because we are alive together with Him by a new birth, we possess His life-consciousness within us. It is our being “alive together with Christ” in a life-union that provides the basis for being compatible with the Lord’s voice moment by moment.

The anointing and being compatible

Being compatible with the Lord’s voice is further described by the apostle John in his teaching on the anointing. In 1 John 2:20 and 27 we read, ²⁰ “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. . . .” ²⁷ But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.” The word anointing is a verbal form of the noun the Anointed One. Anointing in Greek is *chrisma* and simply refers to the movement and action of the Anointed One, Christ (*Christos*).

The apostle John says, “the same anointing teaches you.” This means the movement and action of the Lord within us has the ability to communicate to us and teach us. Thus, the way in which we hear the Lord’s voice is by the anointing. This kind of speaking does not come in the

form of plain words written on a page. Rather, it is an inner movement of the Anointed One within us. The anointing abides *in* us. This anointing should *not* be thought of as an extraordinary gift that a few spiritual people possess. The anointing is simply the movement and inner activity of Christ Himself in all of His redeemed and regenerated children.

In our daily experience the anointing teaches us by giving us an inner knowing. This teaching is by the life movement and consciousness within us. This is a different kind of teaching from the Old Testament law of letters written on tablets of stone. The anointing is a kind of teaching that comes out of our fellowship with the Lord and our inner sensitivity to Him.

Compatibility in negative experiences

We may liken the teaching of the anointing to our being taught in the physical realm. For example, if we walk into a room in which the temperature is one hundred degrees, the presence of heat teaches us to take off our jacket. There is no need to read a sign saying, "Take off your jacket." The presence of heat automatically teaches us to take off our jacket. It is the *presence* of something that teaches, not a teaching by audible words or outward

letters of instruction. We can say that the temperature itself teaches us with the voice of a “felt presence.” The anointing works in the same way within us. The anointing is the presence of a Person moving within us. Thus, whenever we are taking a certain course of action that is not compatible with the Lord, we sense a bothering or troubling within. We lose our normal inward poise of peace. For example, you are about to complain to your husband because you are right and he is wrong about something he did or did not do. But as you actually launch into your argument, the more you speak, the more there is the presence of “heat.” You feel uncomfortable, you feel awkward, you lose your peace, and you yourself sense that what you are saying is not compatible with your insides.

Just as heat will teach you to take off your jacket, so the presence of the anointing teaches you to stop talking in a complaining way. The reason you are unable to keep talking is not because someone is telling you not to talk that way to your husband. You cannot talk because *you* have an inward forbidding. You are just not free and at liberty to speak that way anymore. This kind of experience is the anointing teaching you. The anointing’s voice made it clear that your words were not compatible with the Lord. This kind of experience is not an occasion for

taking condemning thoughts and accusations about yourself before God. No! This is not a matter of condemnation. Rather, it is an occasion for learning to be compatible with the Lord's life in your speaking and attitude.

Compatibility in neutral matters

Learning to be compatible by following the anointing applies not only in negative matters; the anointing is also operating in our lives in the face of neutral matters where sin and the flesh are not involved. Sometimes we are faced with decisions of guidance related to what we should do or where we should go. The apostle Paul bears testimony to this in his own life in 2 Corinthians 2:12-14: ¹² "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, ¹³ I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia. ¹⁴ Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." Paul had an open door to preach the gospel, but in his spirit he did not find the rest to do so. This means *the lack of rest* in his spirit *was* the Lord's voice indicating to him that to preach the gospel in Troas at that juncture was not compatible with the Lord's mind.

Luke records a similar experience of Paul's in Acts 16:6-7, ⁶ "Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. ⁷ After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them." In both instances, the anointing of the Spirit spoke in a way to "forbid" and "not permit" as they were proceeding to preach the Word. No doubt, Paul's fellowship with the Lord was rich and deep, and his inward parts were sensitive to hear the Lord's voice manifesting itself not by outward words but by an inward restraint.

Intimacy and Compatibility

To understand what it means to live a life of compatibility with the Lord, we need to consider the example of the Lord's human living. What we see in the Lord's relationship with the Father is that His compatibility with the Father came out of His intimacy with the Father. John 1:18 reveals that the only begotten Son is "[into] the bosom of the Father." This shows His intimacy in fellowship with the Father. John 15:9-10 indicates that He was abiding in the Father's love. It was out of this kind of love-intimacy the Lord had with the Father that He

lived a life of complete compatibility with the Father's life and will.

The Lord's example reveals the principle by which we can live day by day being compatible with His voice. It is simple. Compatibility with the divine life comes by cultivating a life of intimacy. We all recognize that this is true in the marriage life. How is a wife compatible with her husband? How does she live to please her husband? The compatibility of a wife with her husband is dependent upon her intimacy with her husband. Her intimacy with her husband creates and nurtures the desire to please him.

The Holy Spirit's terms in the New Testament for compatibility are "pleasing" and "well pleasing." John 8:28-29 says, ²⁸ "Then Jesus said to them, 'When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. ²⁹ And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that *please* Him.' " In other words, the reason for His compatibility with the Father was that He heard the Father's voice because of His life of intimacy with the Father. He was sensitive to what the Father *taught* Him, not only because the Father was with Him all the time, but because He was always abiding in the Father's love. This

was the reason there was such a constant supply coming from Him. He lived in the Father and was always doing that which was compatible with the Father.

According to the prophecy about the Lord's life in Isaiah 50:4-5, the Father woke Him morning by morning and opened His ear to hear His voice. Then we observe in the Gospels the way He lived His life from morning to night — where He went, whom He saw, whom He prayed for, whom He related to, how He went about His daily life. He always did the things that pleased the Father. His intimacy with the Father was the factor that supplied the ability to live a compatible life with the Father.

By observing the Lord's life of intimacy and compatibility with the Father in the Gospels, we discover the nature of the life that is now dwelling in us. It is a life that thrives on intimacy with the Father (cf. Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15). It is a life that always desires to prove, by testing, what is well pleasing to the Lord (cf. Eph. 5:10). It is a life that knows compatibility with the Father's life-voice in all the details of daily life (cf. Eph. 4:20-21). Now this life is living in us. Hallelujah!

May the Lord grant to us multiplied grace in our spirit, so that the love of God, the grace of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit would be our daily portion (2 Cor. 13:14). As we inwardly merge with the intimacy

in the Triune God, we will not only abide in His love, but we will develop a finer and more delicate sensitivity to the consciousness of life within us. It is by the love of God and the grace of Christ flowing in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit that we can be a person that is compatible with the Lord's voice. Amen!

4 w The Requirement of the Lord's Voice

Understanding the Requirement of Life

We have observed that with every kind of life there is a corresponding consciousness that is intrinsically part of that life. The presence of life *is* the presence of consciousness. The consciousness of any form of life may also be considered as an inherent law of that life. Thus, the inherent law requires it to behave in a particular way. For example, the law of the cat life requires it to chase mice. The law of the dog life requires it to bark. The law of the bird life requires it to fly. We can see that with every kind of life there is a law that *requires* and even *demands* it to behave according to the law of its life.

With our physical life there is also a law. For example, the law of our physical life requires us to sleep. The requirement to sleep is built into our physical life. There is no need to go to school to learn how to sleep. Sleep is not something taught. Sleep is a requirement and demand of physical life. Thus, because we have physical life, inherently and automatically we require sleep.

By these examples we can see that there is a fixed principle related to life: with every kind of life there is a law of that life requiring it to behave in a certain way. Dogs barking, cats chasing mice, human beings needing sleep, stomachs feeling hungry are simply the requirements of these respective lives. These requirements are not outward legalities or something imposed from without; rather, they are inherent demands from within the life.

To understand the requirement of the Lord's voice in us, it is necessary to understand the requirement of His indwelling life. Under the new covenant God's speaking is in His Son (Heb. 1:2). The Son comes into us by imparting His life into us. And He speaks by the vitality and force of the Spirit giving us life and inclining our very being in the way He wants us to go (Ezek. 36:26-27). The Lord's speaking is not normally of the nature of an audible voice. Rather, the nature of the Lord's voice is a life-voice (John 10:27-28). In our experience the requirement of the Lord's voice is synonymous with the requirement of the Lord's life. Thus, we need to understand the requirement of life.

The basic principle in knowing and discerning the Lord's life is that we become progressively acquainted with *the requirement of that life*. Through regeneration Christ now lives in us as *our* life (Col. 3:4). On one hand,

since His life is His life, it is going to react and behave according to its own nature. On the other hand, since His life is also *our life*, we are going to experience the reactions of that life, especially when we go against its nature. To live incompatibly with the Lord's life is to live a frustrated and miserable Christian life. We cannot change the way His life reacts. His life, reacting from within our spirit (Rom. 8:10), is like a compass that always points in one direction. Whatever way you turn the compass, the arrow points north. Similarly, regardless of how we may reason and argue with the Lord's life, we cannot change its nature. It is eternally destined to react and behave according to the life that is in Christ Jesus. Thus, to live compatibly with His life is to go along with the requirement of that life.

It is important at this juncture to point out the difference between outward demand and inward requirement. There is a difference. The former is related to the letter of the law and brings in bondage; the latter is related to the Spirit of life that brings in freedom. Outward demand is accompanied with condemnation, but inward requirement is accompanied with grace and life-supply. When you are controlled by outward demand, as in Romans 7, you end in failure. But when you are controlled by the inward requirement of life, you experience God's inner

operation, as in Romans 8 and Philippians 2:12-13.

The requirement of life is what Romans 8:2 identifies as *the law* of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. The law of gravity requires objects to be pulled downward. This law always behaves in this particular way. In the same way, the life of Christ within us requires that it behave in a certain way. This is why the apostle Paul speaks of “*the law* of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” It is because the law of the Spirit of life *is* the law inherent in the divine life. The law of life is simply the requirement of that life. In other words, when the divine life enters into our being, it brings with it its own requirements. Paul says in Romans 8:4, “that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to [spirit].” Thus, when we walk according to spirit something is fulfilled in us. It is not fulfilled *by* us, but *in* us. The righteous requirement of the law is now fulfilled in Christ. Christ did not come to destroy the law or the prophets; He came to fulfill (cf. Matt. 5:17). He not only fulfilled the law, but He uplifted the law of God to its true source — the life of God.

According to the Lord’s teaching in Matthew 5—7, the law of letters is superseded by the law of life. He revealed that what God was after was not mere outward righteousness and performance, but an inward life that

touches our lives at the level of motive, lust, reaction, and disposition. It is this deeper life-level that the Lord came to fulfill in us. Therefore, the righteous requirement of the law that is fulfilled in us is none other than the life-requirement of a Person living and operating in us. For example, to live a life of not looking upon a woman to lust after her is not merely an outward demand of the law. It is the inner requirement of the life of Christ within (Matt. 5:27-30). His life demands holiness and purity. He is not merely giving us an outward law, but He is describing the nature of His life within. For this reason, when we indulge our lusts we sense inward turmoil and conflict. This is the effect of being incompatible with the requirement of His life.

In the same way, if we do not go along with the requirement of sleep, our outward, physical life feels the effect. Physical life will automatically feel the effects of sleep loss. Not being compatible with the law of our physical life that requires sleep will surely weaken and fatigue us. Similarly, as believers we have “the life of God” dwelling within us (Eph. 4:18; Rom. 8:9-11). Inherent in the life are its requirements. Whenever we go against those requirements, we feel the effects upon our inner life. Understanding the principle of the requirement of life is crucial to properly discern the Lord’s speaking

and voice in us. His voice is a life-voice. Thus, to hear His voice is to learn to be compatible with the requirement of His life.

The Word defines the life within us

To better know and understand the requirement of God's life in our lives, we need to read the Bible. The Word of God defines for us the specific areas related to the requirement of life. In fact, we may consider the New Testament letters as a record of the life of God practically lived out in the lives of the saints. Thus, if we are not clear about what the Lord is doing in us according to our own consciousness of life, we can read the explanation and definition of life in the Word and become clearer about our own inner registrations. For example, in Ephesians 4:17-19, the apostle Paul describes how the ungodly world is "alienated from *the life of God.*" He then contrasts this with the believers by saying in verses 20 and 21, ²⁰"But you have not so learned Christ, ²¹if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus." To learn Christ, according to these verses, is to learn that the inner requirement of His life is a requirement to put off the old manner of life with its lusts and deceit (v.22). Thus, when we are tempted to go back to

our old life of sin, we will discover that there is something *constant and unchanging* in our being. That something is *His life* with its demand and requirement to deal with our old manner of life. Although we may not quickly heed the inward prodding of life to put off an old habit or indulgence, every time we go to the Bible we will be faced with verse after verse that in one way or another defines the divine life's requirement to deal with our old manner of life. Thus, the outward, written Word (*logos*) will always confirm the inward, spoken word (*rhema*), and vice versa.

In our Christian life we need to learn to livē compatibly with the law or requirement of the divine life. If that requirement or demand is vague to us, God has given us His Word to define and describe it. In other words, there has already been a laboratory experience of the divine life in the apostles' lives, and the record has been preserved for us in their writings. For example, within the pages of the New Testament, Paul wrote and even admonished saints in a certain way. This is because he was speaking according to the knowledge he had of the requirements of the divine life. He knew that the life in him was the same life dwelling in all the saints, having the same kind of requirements. Thus, he wrote to them according to his knowledge and experience of that life. He was able to

address their problems in a way that led them to know the Lord as life, rather than to merely change their outward behavior.

Thank God that the Word of God explains and defines the life of God within us. We become increasingly clear about the requirement of the divine life in our daily living by prayerfully reading the Word. Hebrews 4:12 tells us, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” If we are confused and our feelings are undefined, the Word will divide our soul and spirit and bring in the clarity that we need to better correspond with His life. The closer we stay to the Word, the clearer we will be concerning the Lord’s life-voice within us.

Examples of the requirement of life

An example of the requirement of life operating in our life is found in Colossians 3:3-5: ³“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. ⁵Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil de-

sire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” From verses 3 and 4 we know assuredly that Christ is our life. Then in verse 5 Paul specifically defines the requirement of that life by speaking in the imperative mood. He says, “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth.” Paul speaks in the imperative mood when he is dealing with something that he knows is an inner requirement of life. When Paul speaks in the imperative, “Put to death,” he is not doing so as a law-giver under the old covenant, but as a life-identifier under the new covenant.

To speak in the imperative mood (the mood of command or entreaty) in the New Testament is always based upon facts that already exist in the indicative mood (the mood of fact). The requirements of life are facts that exist in us because of our spirit-union with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). Thus, in Colossians 3:3 Paul says, “You died” and “Your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Our being dead and our life being hidden are both facts expressed in the indicative mood. This kind of speaking identifies the facts that are true of every believer’s inner life. Then Paul changes to the imperative mood by saying, “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth.” In moving from the indicative to the imperative mood, Paul does not leave the realm of the spirit and life. Rather, he affirms *what is true* in the Spirit (indicative) and equally

affirms *what is required* by the Spirit (imperative).

This is what we mean by the requirement of life or the demand of life. It is simply knowing that the Lord's voice in us will always be according to the nature of His life. If the nature of His life is one that died to sin and to the old man (Rom. 6:2-11 uses over 10 indicatives), then the requirement of His life in us will always be an inner imperative (Rom. 6:12-13 uses 2 imperatives). Thus, Paul says, "*Therefore do not let sin reign* in your mortal body," and "*Present yourselves* to God as being alive from the dead." In other words, the requirement or imperative of life demands that we deal with sin reigning in our lives and that we live a life wholly given to the Lord. This kind of demand is not an outward demand of the law on our flesh; rather, it is an inward demand originating from the life in our spirit.

In experience, this inward demand is like an inward necessity. It is the necessity of life. Once the life of God indwells us, it is necessary for that life to feel at home in every part of our being. Indeed, it yearns for compatibility (James 4:5). It is like a fish that finds its compatibility in the element of water. If we go along with the life-requirements, then our inner being will be full of peace and joy. But if we go against them, we will suffer the consequences of not being compatible with the life of

God within. If we have heard his life-voice as an inner imperative for us to break with sin, and we respond to that voice in obedience, we will discover the life-supply of the Spirit coming to us to strengthen us to carry out the obedience.

The requirement to deal with our moral life

In Colossians 3, the requirement of life is to deal with our moral life. Things such as fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and greediness are specifically mentioned by Paul. All of these things are totally incompatible with the Lord's indwelling life. Thus, the life within will always move us to deal with these things in our lives. The life requirement will never change to become more tolerant toward fornication and uncleanness. It will constantly demand that we deal with these things by the Spirit. How we interact with the requirement of life will issue either in the sense of death or in the sense of life. Paul states this fact in Romans 8:13: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Just as much as our body demands sleep, the life of God in us demands that we stay far away from anything immoral (1 Cor. 6:18). Any inordinate relationship, any pornographic material, anything suggestive on the televi-

sion, any loose or coarse talking and joking — any provision we make to fulfill the lust of the flesh — must be crucified if we are to live compatibly with the requirement of His life-voice (Rom. 13:14; Gal 5:24-25). If we want to be inwardly bright and shining, if we want to be full of life, full of desires for God, and full of love for the church life and God’s eternal purpose, then we need to be strict with the requirement of life. This means we are governed inwardly to always do the things that please Christ *our life*. Whenever we go along with His requirements in our moral life, there is always a supply of grace and refreshment to our inner man. God is happy and we are happy!

*The requirement of life to prove
what is well pleasing to the Lord*

When Paul spoke the words in Ephesians 5:10, “Proving what is [well pleasing] to the Lord,” he was appealing to the saints to care for the requirement of their inner life. In the context of Ephesians 5, the requirement of life is related to dealings with the Lord over our social life, our community life, our friends and associates. This is confirmed in verses 11-12: ¹¹ “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose

them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.” Thus, according to these verses, there is in our experience a proving of what is well pleasing to the Lord, and this proving has to do with what we allow ourselves to participate in.

The apostle Peter spoke in the same way to the saints in 1 Peter 4:1b-4: ^{1b} “for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. ³ For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles — when we walked in licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. ⁴ In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.” The word “they” in verse 4 refers to the old social crowd. They think it is strange that you do not run with them anymore into the same sinful and fleshly life.

The requirement of life will operate in us to prove or test what kind of social life matches the Lord’s life within us. Also, the fact that the word “proving” in Ephesians 5:10 is in the present tense indicates that learning to be compatible with the Lord’s life-voice is a day-by-day matter. It may also imply that we will pass through some experiences in which we will learn the requirement of life

by trial and error, that is, by the negative effect the wrong associations have upon us. It is like going down a dead-end street many times and discovering by experience that it is a dead end. After a few times of trial and error, the effect will be that we will no longer go down that dead-end street, because we proved by experience that it is a dead end.

In the same way, when we touch the life of God, there is a requirement in that life to have a new community life and a new social life. This new social life is a life in “the new man” (Col. 3:10), which is the church, the Body of Christ. It is a life *in* the Body, *for* the Body, and *with* the Body. The life in us is a life with a Body-consciousness in it. Thus, the requirement in that life is to adjust our living so that it is well pleasing to the Lord. That is why participating in the unfruitful works of darkness will always end, spiritually speaking, on a dead-end street. The effect upon us is death. Again, it works like our physical life. When I am not going along with the demand of sleep, I am tired and weak; my physical life feels the effects. A law is in operation — the law of physical life that requires sleep. In the same way, the life of God requires light and not darkness. Stay in the light, live in the light, and fellowship in the light. By caring for and heeding this requirement of life, we will prove what is

well pleasing to the Lord right within ourselves.

The requirement of life and being God-taught

In 1 Thessalonians 4:9 we see another example of the requirement of life operating automatically within us. In this verse Paul says, “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.” Here Paul directly appealed to what he knew already existed within the saints. Because the divine life was dwelling in them, he could simply identify the divine activity in their inner being. They were taught by God. The phrase “taught by God” in the original Greek is actually a compound word and is better translated “God-taught” (*theodidaktos*). It is a compound word similar to what is found in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is [God-breathed]” (*theopneustos*). “God-breathed” describes the inner nature of the Bible.

To be God-taught refers to being taught in our spirit, or more specifically, in the intuition of our spirit. The intuition of our spirit is an immediate sensitivity and perception that originates from Christ being our life in spirit (Col. 3:4; Rom. 8:10). Thus, to be God-taught to love one another is simply to learn to recognize God’s

love resident within us. This love has not only been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, but it spontaneously reacts within us as a deep inner affection toward the needs of others (Rom. 5:5 and 1 John 3:17). First John 3:14 says, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.” Thus, we can see that loving one another is a requirement of the divine life.

Again, we can use the example of our physical body. We are, so to speak, *body-taught* to eat and sleep. Eating and sleeping are not legalities for us to learn or keep, but are demands which originate from and belong to the physical life in our bodies. Thus, we are body-taught to eat and sleep. Our body speaks to us by the demand and requirement of its life. In the same way, the Lord’s speaking in us is by the demand and requirement of His life. That life will require us to deal with the selfishness that might cause us to shut up our affections toward the needy. Thus, the more we experience His life flowing out of our spirit, the more we will be God-taught about so many things in our daily life (John 4:14; Rom. 8:5). We will increasingly hear His life-voice.

The requirement of life and “within the law of Christ”

When Paul was speaking to the believers in Corinth about his relationship to the law, he made a revealing statement that has become a window into his inner life. In 1 Corinthians 9:20-21 he says,²⁰ “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law toward God but *under [or, within] the law of Christ*—that I might win those outside the law” (RSV).

In verse 21, Paul’s statements indicate that he did not want to risk being misunderstood about his relationship to the law of God. He carefully qualifies himself when he talks about being without law. He did not want to give the impression in his speaking that he was a lawless person. Perhaps some would think that since believers are under grace and not under law, they have a license to live loosely and even to sin without compunction (Rom. 6:15). This kind of thinking and practice is known as antinomianism (against law), and has surfaced in the history of the church during the periods when the grace of God was being strongly revealed and proclaimed. This was especially a problem at the time of the Reformation under Luther and also with the evangelical awakening

under Wesley and Whitefield.

When Paul says that he was not without law to God but *under* or *within the law of Christ*, he was referring to the requirement of the law of life within his being. He was saying in effect, “I am regulated and controlled by a higher law — the law written by the Spirit into my mind and on my heart under the new covenant (Heb. 8:10-11; 2 Cor. 3:3, 6). It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that set me free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). It is the inner ruling of what the apostle Paul calls “the righteous requirement of the law,” and it is being fulfilled *in* me as I live and walk according to spirit (Rom. 8:4). It is the reality of the uplifted law of God revealed in the Sermon on the Mount. This uplifted law was not destroyed but fulfilled in Christ and is now being reproduced in me by His indwelling life (Matt. 5:17; Rom. 7:4, 6).

To be “under the law of Christ” simply means “within law *in relation to* Christ.” That is, in our union and fellowship with the Lord’s life, we automatically come under the requirement of that life. In experience this requirement will manifest itself as an ethical imperative in our daily affairs. We discover that in the Lord’s life there is a higher principle and a higher law. In our living, this higher law issues in going the second mile and turning the other cheek — dealing not merely with our

actions, but with our reactions.

To be *under* or *within the law of Christ* means living by the law of life. The Lord's speaking by these life-impulses is finer and more exacting than the outward law. He does not give one inch to the mind of our flesh with its imaginations and independent thinking. He does not give us any space to entertain bitterness toward anyone. He does not allow any room for our tongue to gossip. Rather, the life in us requires that we enter into its very nature of divine love and forgiveness. So we are brought to another level. The life within us requires us to talk on the higher plane of giving grace and building up (Eph. 4:29-30).

The requirement of life is the same as the consciousness of life or the sense of life. We are not going to change the life of God within us. The life requires actions and reactions that are compatible with its nature. We may ignore or refuse to pay attention to the voice of these life-demands for a long period of time, but eventually we will realize that the requirement of His voice does not change and will not change. He will bring us back to the place from where we have fallen (Rev. 2:5, 7). We will hear Him speaking to us once again, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says . . ." May the Lord grant us much grace to recognize more quickly and more regularly His life-voice as we learn to enjoy Him and follow

Him in the details of our daily life.

The requirement of life and our own conscience

In understanding the requirement of life in our experience, we need to see how it is related to our conscience. Learning to hear the voice of conscience is the proper way for a believer to learn to hear the Lord's life-voice within. This is a crucial principle in our Christian life. The reason for this lies in the fact that our conscience is interrelated with our regenerated spirit (cf. Rom. 9:1 with 8:16). In other words, if our conscience is not clear, our spirit cannot properly be released. Our conscience may even be regarded as the leading function of our spirit. In his own life, Paul maintained this principle of keeping a clear conscience. He testifies in Acts 24:15-16: ¹⁵ "I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. ¹⁶ This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men." Paul exercised himself to keep his conscience clear so that his relationship with the Lord would be up to date and also so that he would be ready for the judgment seat of Christ at the resurrection of the righteous. Thus, it is important to have a relationship with the Lord that is governed by the

voice of conscience.

The voice of conscience is God's appointed means for man to learn to be inwardly regulated (Rom. 2:14-15). The conscience approves or disapproves our actions and words (Rom. 13:4-7). The basic lesson of learning to live by the Lord's voice in us is to learn to listen to the voice of our own conscience (cf. 2 Tim. 1:3 with Rom. 1:9). If we do not practice this, how could we discern the requirement of the Lord's life in us? Therefore, in our daily life when the Lord is teaching us to hear His voice, the first lessons we learn are to pay attention to the voice of our own conscience. For example, Paul called upon his conscience as a witness in Romans 9:1 when he was about to make a statement that sounded like a lie (Rom. 9:2-3). Thus, learning to speak the truth with others and learning to communicate accurately, without exaggeration, are all conscience matters that affect our inner life. When we follow the requirement of our own conscience by obeying it over matters pertaining to right and wrong, we will be inwardly genuine and exercised to learn the requirement of the Lord's life in other areas related to the intuition of our spirit (2 Cor. 2:12-13).

Experiences of dealing with our conscience may vary from believer to believer according to the kind of knowledge that has been built up within each one. Some knowledge we have received may not be so proper or

accurate according to basic truths revealed in Scripture; nevertheless, this knowledge has shaped our conscience a certain way (1 Cor. 8:4-12). The apostle Paul addresses this matter both in 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14. In Romans 14:6-9 Paul says, ⁶ “He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. ⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.” These verses reveal that we always need to behave ourselves according to “the present state” of our conscience. In other words, we need to care for whatever requirement or speaking there is in our conscience, even if the knowledge in our conscience is incomplete or inadequate.

In the above verses from Romans 14, Paul gives us some practical examples of various kinds of requirements in a believer’s conscience. These examples show how the requirement coming from the voice of conscience is present, even when the conscience is weak because of

inadequate knowledge. One person's relationship with the Lord is bound up with his regarding "the day." That is, his conscience is peaceful when he religiously observes a certain day as a special day for the Lord. Another person is peaceful in his relationship with the Lord when he abstains from eating meat. In other words, his having a good conscience to fellowship with the Lord is also bound up with his keeping the requirement of his conscience to refrain from eating meat. Although both of these believers possess inadequate knowledge, they can still live to the Lord and be in the reality of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

Paul further explains this spiritual phenomenon in Romans 14:22-23: ²² "Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³ But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin." Thus, if a believer doubts when he eats, due to inadequate knowledge in his conscience, it is better not to eat in that state of heart and mind. This shows that our relationship with the Lord is definitely related to the requirement of our conscience. To be a person living to the Lord we must heed the requirement of conscience.

Learning to recognize and go along with the voice of conscience is the gateway to knowing the Lord's voice in

our daily life. As we spend more time in the Word, letting the Bible identify and define the requirement of life, we will become more sensitive to the Lord's inner speaking in us. Not only so, but as we by faith obey the requirement of life in our moral life, in our personal life, in our attitudes, and in our relationships, we will progressively learn to intimately know the voice of the One who said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life" (John 10:27-28a).

5 w Comprehension and the Lord's Voice

The Lord's Voice Is in Our Comprehension

One of the chief ways the Lord's voice comes to us under the new covenant is in our comprehension of God's plan in the Scriptures. Indeed, our comprehension of God's plan is His way of speaking to us. When the Lord said in Hebrews 8:10 that He would impart His laws into our mind, He was revealing to us the way He speaks. He speaks through comprehension. Thus, to understand and comprehend God's eternal desires and purposes is a great thing in every believer's life. In Matthew 13:14-17 the Lord said, ¹⁴ "And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not *understand*, and seeing you will see and not perceive; ¹⁵ for the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should *understand* with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them.' ¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; ¹⁷ for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear,

and did not hear it.”

The word “understand” in the above verses is the Greek word *sunimi*. This word may be defined as *perceive, understand, or comprehend*. All of these definitions are acceptable in English. The point to be observed is that comprehension in divine things is not merely *our* comprehension. It is a manifestation of His voice speaking in us. Luke 24:44-45 says, ⁴⁴ “Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ ⁴⁵ And *He opened their understanding*, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” The Lord is the opener of our mind to comprehend the Scriptures. All spiritual understanding comes from Him (Col. 1:9). Paul recommended that Timothy consider and think over what he had said to him, because Paul knew that in the process of considering, the Lord would come in and *give* him understanding and comprehension (2 Tim. 2:7).

Comprehension is a vehicle of the Lord’s voice. Because of this, it is important to know what it means to “comprehend” in the biblical sense. The Greek word for comprehend is a compound word that means “putting things together in a way that causes you to grasp or

understand something.” For example, the disciples did not understand the Scriptures until the Lord opened their mind to comprehend them. It was when He opened up the Old Testament, book by book, and unveiled *Himself as its focus* that they were able to comprehend the Scriptures. At that point, they could put everything together. That is, they understood and comprehended the central meaning of the Scriptures.

To be able to put everything together and properly comprehend the Scriptures, we all need to know that the focus of God’s speaking is Christ (Heb. 1:1-2)! Christ is the Word, the *logos* (John 1:1), God’s unique utterance embodied in one Person. When we see Christ as all in all, then we truly begin to comprehend the Scriptures. Furthermore, with this comprehension we are able to know the Lord’s speaking. Our comprehension of the proper focus of the Scriptures becomes the factor of the Lord’s speaking, and this speaking automatically gives us discernment concerning all other voices and speakings which are not the Lord’s.

The apostle Paul in Ephesians 3:2-11 unveils that God’s speaking comes through the proper comprehension of His eternal purpose. In verses 3-4 he says, ³ “how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words, ⁴ by which, when you read,

you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.)” Paul had a comprehension of the mystery of Christ. This was one of the main reasons why he had so much of the Lord’s speaking — he comprehended the central focus of God’s heart’s desire. That desire, as Paul unfolds it in Ephesians 3, is centered in Christ being expressed through the church to display God’s manifold wisdom to the universe. In Ephesians 3:11 it is called “the eternal purpose” or “the purpose of the ages.” Comprehending or understanding this purpose constitutes the main subject of all the Lord’s speaking.

Along this line I must give a personal testimony. Several years ago, I was in a meeting listening to the Word of God being ministered. The brother speaking drew a diagram on the blackboard that showed eternity past and eternity future. He said, “God had a plan in eternity past, and what He planned in eternity past was for eternity future.” The brother went on to explain that God created the heavens and the earth with His eternal plan in view. He further explained why there are animals, and why God created a sun and a moon. He shared that now in the period called “time” God is working out His purpose which He made in eternity past for eternity future. He then took the verses in Ephesians 3:9-11 and pointed out that God’s purpose is now being worked out *through the church* (v. 10). Then he simply indicated

from verse 11 that the church is God's eternal purpose, which is being accomplished in Christ Jesus.

What impressed me was the phrase "the eternal purpose." It put everything together for me. In just a few minutes I was able, for the first time, to comprehend the whole Bible. I saw that from Genesis to Revelation, God is working out a plan that is according to the good pleasure of His will (Eph. 1:5). That plan, which is now being realized *through the church*, is the same as God's expressed desire to have many sons conformed to the image of His Firstborn Son (Rom. 8:29). It is also the same as God's desire to have a habitation for Himself that consummates in the holy city, New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2). This revelation unified the Old Testament and the New Testament into one organic whole. From that point to this day, I can testify that God's voice and speaking in my daily life has been clear about many things. The reason for this is that His voice has come to me through my comprehension of His eternal purpose. Hallelujah!

I had gone through seven years of Bible college and seminary, studied the biblical languages, theology, Old and New Testament introduction, and more. But I was never able to put the Bible together as a whole. Everything up to that time was an accumulation of Bible knowledge, without my understanding what it was all for. I will never forget the day when the understanding came.

I can only describe it as having been given an expansive and enlarged view of the Bible and the entire universe. It was truly the Lord's voice coming through my comprehension of His purpose and plan.

Every Christian who will enter into the apostles' comprehension of Scripture will never be void of God's speaking. The comprehension of God's purpose is itself a mandate of the Lord's voice to carry out His purpose on this earth today. Paul says in Ephesians 1:8-10, ⁸ "which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, ⁹ having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, ¹⁰ that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in Him."

These verses are a testimony of Paul's own comprehension of God's purpose. God's full salvation came to Paul "in all wisdom and prudence." For Paul this simply meant God had made known to him the mystery of His will. That is, he was able to comprehend God's eternal purpose. His comprehension was "unto" something. That something is explained in verse 10 as a heading up of all things in Christ. To Paul, his comprehension of God's purpose was not for mere doctrinal knowledge. It was "*unto* the economy [administration] of the fullness of

the times to head up all things in Christ.” In other words, to the apostle Paul, comprehension actually becomes the Lord’s voice to us for a practical working out of His administration to head up all things in Christ, both the things in the heavens and the things on the earth.

If today we are believers who comprehend something of God’s eternal purpose with the church — if indeed the Holy Spirit has enlightened us by the written Word of God to be able to put it all together — then that in itself is His voice speaking to us to take steps for a practical working out of the church life on this earth. Our comprehension of God’s plan in His Word *is* His speaking to us today. Hebrews 3:7-8 says, ⁷ “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness.’ ” May the Lord be merciful to us all in these perilous times that we would both hear and understand His voice.

By paying attention to those inner stirrings within us, which are drawing us to Himself, we will be alert to His desires over us. By being one of His sheep who possess that inner knowing peculiar to every child of God, we will follow Him into His one flock (John 10:16). By enjoying His grace in a daily way, we will know His voice, not as a legal demand but as an infusion and supply of Himself. By learning to recognize in our daily walk the inclinations

of the Spirit, we will find the Lord's voice in the details of our daily life. And finally, by the comprehension of His purpose we will be faithful to say Amen! to His present speaking and voice, and carry out with Him a heading up of the universe by the practical recovery of a *Christ-filled church life*.

Comprehending God's Plan

To comprehend God's plan in this universe is to know that God has one will, one purpose, and one economy. God is uniquely one. His will is one, His purpose is one, and His economy is one. The Lord's voice in our daily life is directly related to our comprehension of this one will, one purpose, and one economy. This comprehension will give clarity to the Lord's voice about so many things, not only in this universe but also in our daily living. Being under the revelation of such a will, purpose, and economy spontaneously generates in us the Lord's speaking. His speaking then becomes the discernment we need as a believer. Knowing God's one will, one purpose, and one economy will cause us to know God's voice about the meaning of our human existence and also the meaning of our Christian life.

One will

In Ephesians 5:17 Paul says, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” The word understand in this verse simply means to comprehend. In other words, the will of the Lord is not something we cannot comprehend or something we cannot know; rather, the will of the Lord is something we can grasp and understand with our mind.

Again, in Ephesians 5:15 Paul says, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise.” In the original Greek, the word *carefully* means *accurately* (*akribos*). This means to have a walk that is accurate in its aim and goal. In other words, do not be unwise; that is, do not be a person without an accurate understanding of the will of the Lord. As believers our walk should be accurate according to God’s one unique will.

Then Ephesians 5:16 says, “redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” The context of this verse shows us that “redeeming the time” is not just having the right priorities and learning how to order and schedule our lives properly. A lot of people can do that without God. Here, redeeming the time is directly related to our having an understanding of what the will of the Lord is. The result of this understanding is that we interact with our daily life in such a way that it becomes one opportunity after another to live out the will of the Lord. Even the

word “time,” according to the Greek meaning, emphasizes time in the sense of opportunity. Redeem the opportunities — every kind of situation — because the days are evil. The tide of this age is evil, away from God, indifferent toward God’s revealed will. Do not be unwise, but be wise. By walking accurately, or carefully, with an understanding of what the will of the Lord is, we can be wise and redeem all the time and opportunities in our life.

When it comes to the will of God in our lives, many of us have thought that His will is something we have to find through a long or difficult process. It has been in the realm of something we were looking for and trying to find. Have not most seeking Christians said or prayed at some point in their life, “I want to know what the will of God is for my life”?

Two aspects of God’s will

It is important to distinguish between two aspects of God’s will. First, there is the aspect of God’s will related to personal matters in our lives. Paul expressed this aspect in Romans 1:10 when he said, “making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in *the will of God* to come to you.” On this occasion Paul was

referring to the will of God concerning his travel plans. This aspect of God's will is not always immediately understood by us; however, it is made known under the Lord's specific leading in our lives.

The second aspect of God's will is actually the main and primary one. It has to do with the revealed will of God that we can understand, or comprehend. It is this aspect of the will of the Lord that Paul refers to in Ephesians 5:17. Understanding this will can cause our daily life to be accurate and in harmony with His goal and purpose. And not only so, we can have this will of God so fixed in our being that it becomes the controlling factor of our life.

It was by this principle of the revealed will of God that Noah, Abraham, and Moses lived. They all understood what the will of God was. God's will was an ark in Noah's day. God's will in Abraham's day was the good land and the city whose Architect and Maker is God. Abraham was controlled by this vision. God's will in Moses' day was the tabernacle. This revealed will caused him to forsake Egypt and suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Moses had revelation, and this was the factor that controlled him. He was motivated by the vision of God's will for His dwelling place, the tabernacle.

In the same way, as believers today, we need to know

what God's revealed will is. Knowing and understanding the one unique will of the Lord will not only give meaning to our lives, but it will also bring the dimension of God's eternal purpose into our daily life.

*The Lord Himself coming to do
the one will of the Father*

When the Lord Himself was on this earth, He lived and moved with a clear understanding of the one unique will of the Father. In John 6:38-40 the Lord said, ³⁸ "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰ And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

These verses reveal that to the Lord Jesus the will of the Father was one unique will. It was a singular will that the Lord should come and redeem all the ones given to Him by the Father. Then following redemption, He should impart His very life and nature into them in order to indwell them, filling them up with Himself and transforming them into His image. And ultimately the final step would be realized — they would be raised up in the

last day. To raise them up in the last day means that resurrection life reaches its goal of final glorification with all the redeemed ones completely conformed to the image of the Firstborn Son (Rom. 8:29-30). This was the one unique will that the Lord came down from heaven to do and accomplish.

The one will behind the universe

When we touch the matter of God's one unique will, we are touching something in this universe that is related to His good pleasure. Ephesians 1:4-5 says, ⁴ "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to [sonship through] Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." Here the Father's will is a revealed will, a tangible and understandable one. It is clearly defined as being sonship. This sonship begins when you and I merge with the Son of God by receiving Him and becoming one spirit with Him. Then this process of sonship continues as we enjoy the unsearchable riches of Christ in our daily lives. By this enjoyment He saturates our being from center to circumference to make us persons who express a living like the apostle Paul's — "For to me, *to live is Christ,*" and "*Christ is all and in all*" (Phil. 1:21; Col. 3:11).

The controlling will of the whole Bible is that we would be transformed and conformed to the image of God's Son (Rom. 8:29). From Genesis to Revelation we see that this one unique will was not only behind the creation of the universe, but it is also controlling the whole universe at this moment in time (Rev. 4:11).

Before there was an earth — before creation, before the foundation of the world — according to Ephesians 1:4, God had a will originating from His good pleasure. The very fact that Ephesians 1:4 mentions the word “foundation” indicates that God had a will with a design and a plan to execute it. When God created the universe, He laid a foundation because He wanted to build something. His desire was to build a habitation for Himself, together with His Firstborn Son and all of us as the many brothers conformed to His Son's image (Rom. 8:29 and Heb. 2:10-11).

What a privilege as a human being to be able to live on this earth understanding what the will of the Lord is! What dignity for our humanity — that we can live out the good pleasure of the Father's will. This really restores and uplifts our human life. We are not living aimlessly or in vanity, without a goal or purpose; but we are persons created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28) and being transformed into that image from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18). This is the one unique will that we have all been

destined to understand and experience.

One purpose

Along with the *one will* behind the universe, there is also *one purpose* that governs God's desire for man. In Romans 8:28-29 the apostle Paul says, ²⁸ "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren." In verse 28 everything is working together for good, because we are loving the Lord. We are just staying in His presence loving Him.

We are also those who are called according to purpose. In some of the translations the word purpose is preceded by either "His" or "the," meaning His purpose or the purpose. And you will notice that *His* or *the* are both in italics. Whenever we are reading any translation of the Bible, if there are words in italics, it means the original Greek text does not have those words. They are supplied by the translator who feels that if he translated the Greek into English without some qualifying words, it would not make much sense. Of course, when we talk about purpose here, it surely is His purpose. So "His" is a legitimate insertion into the text. However, it is best to

take the Word of God as it actually is; otherwise, we may miss something. The Holy Spirit used this language in order to express the divine thoughts, and it is accurate to the Holy Spirit and to the divine economy to the utmost degree. So, in the original text, *His* and *the* are not there. The text actually says, “called according to purpose.”

Called according to purpose

The words “according to” come from the Greek preposition *kata*. We are called according to something. “According to” immediately lines us up with some kind of standard or measuring device. For example, if I am on a building site watching the workmen putting a roof on, I no doubt will observe how they carefully place all the pieces of plywood according to the precise measurements. Everything has to be according to the exact specifications. So, whenever we read the words “according to,” it means that some kind of standard measurement is involved.

Brothers and sisters, we have been called. That means God called us. That means God got our attention. One day He called me. How did He call me? He called me through a girl, who eventually became my wife. I liked this girl. I was attracted to her. But I didn’t realize

that through her, God was coming to me and calling me. Do you know how He called me? He got my attention. I was not seeking God. But God called me by living out His life in another person. I was not looking for Him. I just liked a girl, and God came to me through her. I found Christ, and He called me to Himself.

God had called me, saved me, and justified me. I was born again. Yet even then, I did not know what I was called according to. But later I discovered that I was called, saved, and regenerated “according to purpose.” There is only one purpose. In this entire universe, from the divine point of view, nothing can be considered as purpose except the one unique purpose that God has given to man. Praise the Lord, we all have been called according to purpose.

“Good” is conformity to the image of His Son

Purpose is defined in Romans 8:29: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren.” There is the purpose. It is conformity to the image of God’s Son. We can also see that the Holy Spirit uses the preceding verse, Romans 8:28, in a way that shows us that there is one purpose of God in this

universe. And you and I have the distinction and the honor and the royal privilege to be on the earth to live out His one unique purpose for which He created all things.

There is one will in the universe — the Father’s will of sonship. And there is one corresponding purpose — conformity to the image of His Son. This is what is “good” in Romans 8:28. Conformity to the Son is the highest good! That is good in God’s dictionary. It is a unique kind of process involving our spirit and our soul and our body. This process begins when we receive Christ. He was outside of us, but He comes in and now we are joined to Him. Through this regeneration we become one spirit with Him. We have an inner union, an inner marriage. We have a supply, we have a center, and we have a source. We have God Himself living in our spirit.

Now, God’s design, His will, and His purpose is that this Christ, who came into our spirit, will progressively spread and saturate *His* being into *our* soul — into our mind, our emotions, and our will. This saturating takes place little by little, day after day, through our relationships, through our problems, through our daily living. Through all these things and behind them all is God’s goal for us to be conformed to the image of His Son. This is purpose and this is the unique will of God — Christ permeating our being.

So Paul says, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God.” But we all know in our lives that many things may happen that are not good. We may go through some kind of problem — a financial problem, a relationship problem, some situation that pulls the rug out from underneath our feet and causes us to reel. We cannot say it is good. It does not seem good to us! We do not like what we are going through. We do not like to go through these kinds of experiences. Yet Paul says, “all things work together for good.” Why would he say such a radical thing? How could it be good? It is good to those loving God.

Experiencing “purpose” by loving God

Romans 8:28 says that “to those who love God” all things work together for good. Loving God is an exercise of our spirit. It is contacting Him. And this exercise causes our spirit to rise and be filled up with Christ. In this way He saturates our being. For example, we may pray, “Lord, I’ve come to the end of my resources. I can’t live through this. I can’t meet this. I can’t face this. But, Lord, I sink myself into You once again. I open to You and take You as my life and supply. Lord, I’m not complaining; I’m not living with a feeling of being treated unfairly or getting a bad break in life. There is no such thing in my

thought, because ‘all things’ are avenues to lead me to experience more of the riches of Christ.”

These riches of Christ include His sufferings and His crucifying life. Romans 8:36 says, “For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” None of us naturally want to be slaughtered. But verse 37 says, “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” Though we may be brought low, by His life we are raised up again with Jesus. Amen. We rise with more of Christ wrought into our being. We come up with more of a renewal of our mind. Experiencing Christ is our unique goal. This is what everything is for. So, ultimately, all things are working together for good, and the good is this process of conformity to the image of God’s Son. This is the purpose. Hallelujah! This shows us, so clearly, that we are called according to purpose.

One economy

In this universe there is only one will and one purpose, and there is also only one economy (*oikonomia*). In 1 Timothy 1:3 Paul wanted Timothy to charge others to teach according to this one economy: “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia — remain in Ephesus that you may charge some [not to teach differently].” “To

teach differently” comes from a compound Greek word *heterodidaskaleo*. This word signifies something finer than merely teaching false doctrines. In the context, teaching differently means to emphasize something different from God’s one economy.

There are many things in the Bible. There are good biographies, genealogies, historical facts, and various kinds of doctrines. As a teacher of the Bible, you can pick up a particular subject that you like and emphasize that. But Paul is burdened to charge certain ones not to emphasize the wrong thing, that is, not to teach differently from the unique emphasis of what he identifies as “God’s economy.” In verse 4 Paul says, “nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than [God’s economy], which is in faith.”

Emphasizing minor things

The apostle Paul charges certain brothers who are teaching among the saints not to get sidetracked with the kinds of things that arouse questions. In other words, his charge is to warn them not to emphasize minor things. Do not stress myths, genealogies, an improper emphasis on the law, or your favorite subject. Rather, in ministering the Word, aim at God’s economy.

The goal of Paul’s charge to not teach differently

from God's economy is "love [out of] a pure heart, a good conscience, and [unfeigned] faith" (1 Tim. 1:5). This love is related to Christ experientially being worked out in our life. Love out of a pure heart, out of a good conscience, and out of unfeigned faith, has to do with experiencing the Lord in a simple, pure way. This is what God's economy does. It does not leave you as a doctrinally-minded Christian who measures others by doctrines and practices, stirring up questionings and debates among believers. God wants us to be calibrated not to emphasize minor things, but to stress the major revelation of His will, purpose, and economy, which is Christ Himself to be everything to His redeemed people. Colossians 3:11 states it clearly: "Christ is all and in all."

God's economy refers to His plan and His arrangements to carry out that plan

The full significance of the term economy is that God has a plan, and with that plan He has arrangements to carry it out. A plan with arrangements — this is the meaning of "economy." God's plan is related to His one will and His one purpose of conforming man to the image of His Firstborn Son. In other words, the plan in God's economy is centered in Christ being dispensed into man, in

order that man would be saturated with Him. With this plan, God also has a number of arrangements to carry it out.

The arrangement of creation

Creation was the first of the arrangements God made to carry out His plan of dispensing His Son into man. He created the universe with the heavens and the earth. But after creation, the devil came in as a serpent to frustrate God's plan. Man fell into sin and became separated from God. However, at this time God came in with the promise of the Seed of the woman who would come one day and bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Thus, when the first arrangement of creation was apparently frustrated, God made another arrangement, sending His Son as the Seed of the woman to provide redemption for man and to deal with God's enemy, the devil.

Following creation, man became very degraded. Cain slew his brother and went out from the presence of the Lord. He then began to build a city without God (Gen. 4:16-17). From that point the world system started to develop, apart from God and His plan. Man began to live on this earth apart from God's original plan for creation. God had created man in His image for His plan, but now man was away from God, living to himself, without any

regard for God's plan.

The account of man's creation, purpose, fall, and degradation is all recorded in Genesis 3—11. Eventually, everything became so wicked that God had to judge the earth with water. At that point, God made a further arrangement to carry out His original plan. This arrangement was to preserve Noah and his family in order to have a new beginning on the earth for God's plan. However, man again fell further and further away from God and went down into Babel, worshipping idols. Even after God had a new beginning with Noah, eventually man again became degraded to an idolatrous existence. Once again God made another arrangement in His economy to carry His plan forward. This arrangement centered in the man Abraham and his family.

The arrangement of the called race

God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia and called him out to go into the land of Canaan. Acts 7:2b says, "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia . . ." Also Hebrews 11:8 says, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was

going.” Thus, Abraham came out and crossed the river Euphrates. It was by this that the Hebrew nation was born. The meaning of the name Hebrew is “river-crosser.” Abraham crossed the river and thereafter was identified as a Hebrew (Gen. 14:13). The significance of being a Hebrew is related to being called out to fulfill God’s plan. To do this it was necessary to cross the river. Crossing the river means burying our old manner of life in order to be free for God’s plan.

Abraham came into the good land where God’s plan could be carried out. God’s calling of Abraham to form the Hebrew nation was a major arrangement in the process of fulfilling His plan in His economy. During the period of the Old Testament, God came and revealed Himself to man in many such marvelous ways, all of which pointed to and typified His Son and His plan.

The arrangement of His incarnation

We have seen that with God’s plan come the various arrangements that God has made to execute the plan. This is what is described as “God’s economy.” After the arrangement with the called race, God arranged for the actual sending of His Son, Jesus. John 1:14 declares, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” This

truly was one of the greatest arrangements that God made in His economy. God's one will, one purpose, and one economy is to have many sons in the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:10). To accomplish this He sent His Son. Thus, the incarnation was a major part of the plan.

The arrangement of His human living

Following His incarnation, God's Son lived a perfect, sinless human life for 33 1/2 years. This was the next major arrangement in the carrying out of God's plan. Jesus passed through all kinds of experiences in His human life. He faced sin, He faced the flesh, He faced the devil, He faced the world. As a man, He overcame every obstacle and came out victorious. The deep significance of His human life is that this very same life that lived victoriously in the flesh would be made alive in resurrection to become "a life-giving [Spirit]" (1 Cor. 15:45b). As the Spirit (John 14:16-18), He would enter into us (John 20:22), becoming a well within us (John 4:14) and supplying His victorious life into our being (John 15:4-5). Surely, His human living was a great arrangement in God's economy.

The arrangement of His crucifixion

Crucifixion was the next arrangement in God's plan.

The Lord went to the cross and accomplished redemption. When the apostle Paul was revealing God's economy in Ephesians 1, he spoke of Christ in verse 7: "In Him we have *redemption through His blood*, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

Not only was redemption accomplished by the Lord's death on the cross, but also all the problems and complications related to the old creation were solved. For example, the flesh, the old man, the world, and the devil were terminated. Paul also declares in Ephesians 2:15-16 that the dividing factors between mankind were dealt with by the cross so that all peoples can be reconciled in one Body to God. Thus, we can say that Christ's death was an all-inclusive arrangement in God's economy.

The arrangement of His resurrection

Following His crucifixion, the Lord was resurrected. His resurrection was another crucial arrangement provided by God in His one economy to impart life into us. In resurrection Christ became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). Indeed, on the day of resurrection Christ came to His disciples and breathed into them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). This act shows that the resurrection was not only Christ's personal vic-

tory over death, but it was also His way to impart His very life into man.

God's imparting of His life is called regeneration. The apostle Peter connects the resurrection with regeneration in the opening of his first Epistle. In 1 Peter 1:3, he says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Thus, we can see that the resurrection issuing in regeneration was for God's one economy. God used one arrangement after another to carry out His plan.

The arrangement of His ascension

There was not only resurrection, but also ascension. In ascension Christ was seated at the Father's right hand, and all authority was given to Him in heaven and on earth. Thus, we have not only His life but also His authority. Jesus is Lord and He is also the Head of the Body.

All these arrangements — His incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension — were preparatory to His dispensing of Himself into us as the Spirit. This dispensing starts with regeneration in our spirit, and ushers in His indwelling in our heart for our

transformation into His image. This is God's one economy.

We have seen that God's arrangements started with creation and continued through the entire Old Testament period. The apostle Paul speaks of God's arrangements in this way: "[God] works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). God's will has a counsel. This simply means His will has an arrangement. God had a certain way that this plan would be carried out; and this carrying out, or administration, of the plan is part of His economy.

*The arrangements of regeneration
and transformation into His image*

As part of God's plan, we were made with a spirit, a soul, and a body (Gen. 2:7; 1 Thess. 5:23). In His economy, the arrangement is that we would be born again and He would be dispensed into our spirit to begin the process of conforming us to His image. In the Bible God's economy begins with creation and continues through the Old Testament with the called race and into the New Testament with His Son. Then His Son is dispensed into our spirit. Now His arrangement is that our soul, with our mind, our emotions, and our will, would be conformed to the image of His Son. This takes

place in the realm of the Spirit.

For this conformity, there is the absolute necessity of our being oriented to the Lord by walking according to spirit and knowing that realm. So, for example, in the morning when I am exercising my spirit by saying, “Lord Jesus, I love You,” I am linked to the whole history of God’s economy. His life is being dispensed into my thoughts at the very beginning of the day. Positively, He is using not only my touch with the Spirit, but He is also using the “all things” mentioned in Romans 8:28. All things are working together for good. What is the good? The good is my being conformed to the image of His Son in Romans 8:29. This means I have to handle my problems in an altogether new way now. If I see God’s economy, I am forbidden to murmur, to reason, or to complain about my spouse, my problems, my finances, my situation. I am forever forbidden, if I am a person under the view of God’s economy.

The arrangement of our environments

All the environments in our lives are under the mighty, sovereign hand of God. There is not one accident in your life or my life. It is all under God’s hand. Why is it under His hand? It is under His hand for good, that is, for our being conformed to His image.

Humanly speaking, we would not wish problems or sufferings on anyone. But if whatever we go through will bring us into a deeper touch with the Lord, then we should have Paul's attitude as expressed toward the Corinthian believers in 2 Corinthians 7:8-10a: ⁸ "For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. ⁹ Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. ^{10a} For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation. . . ." In other words, Paul's letter caused some momentary sorrow and he apologized for that. But, on the other hand, according to the principle of God's economy, he could not regret that they were made sorrowful. Why? Because their being made sorrowful turned them back to God. This means they dealt with the Lord and experienced Him in their sorrow. So, ultimately, because Paul was a person with a clear vision of God's economy, he knew that the Corinthians did not suffer loss in their sorrow, but rather experienced a practical salvation.

To summarize again, economy refers to a plan with arrangements. Creation was an arrangement, the choosing of the people of Israel was an arrangement. Incarna-

tion was an arrangement. Jesus' human living was an arrangement. Crucifixion and resurrection were arrangements. Ascension and His dispensing were each an arrangement. And then regeneration was another arrangement. It is all part of God's economy. And now in your daily living, even the disagreeable expression on your husband's face is an arrangement. Or your disappointment because of an unmet need is also an arrangement. These arrangements in our environment are all intended by God to bring us on in His economy.

Brothers and sisters, we are all linked to one will, one purpose, and one economy, with many arrangements. If I see this and you see this, we can only bow down and say, "Lord, I repent for all my murmuring. I only want to know one thing in my life — to love You through all of the sovereign arrangements of Your economy."

All families have little problems, big problems, and even sometimes storms. Yet, through it all, when we see God's economy we have a new sense of values. Our one desire is to experience Christ. We want Christ. We see that every kind of situation in our environment is for the dispensing of His life into our mind, emotion, and will.

The best marriage counseling and fellowship is according to God's economy. It is to hear that your marriage is a big arrangement that God has given you for

you to experience Christ. Marriage is one of the “all things” which are divinely appointed arrangements for us to be conformed little by little into the image of God’s Son. This is God’s one economy.

The arrangement of the church

The next arrangement in God’s economy is that we, as the many brothers, are together experiencing the building up of the church. God’s economy is not only for Christ to be formed in me individually, but it is for us corporately to experience Christ together. This corporate experience of Christ results in the building of the church, which the gates of Hades cannot prevail against (Matt. 16:18). Moreover, the building of the church today, in this age, is the present reality of the kingdom of God. The Lord prayed to the Father, “Your *will* be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). But immediately before these words He said, “Your *kingdom* come.” By putting all these verses together in Matthew’s Gospel, we can see that God’s arrangement to have a builded church issues in bringing in the kingdom, thus fulfilling His will and economy.

The arrangement of the kingdom

God’s arrangement for the reality of the kingdom is

directly related to the building of the church with the rich experiences of Christ in all the members (Matt. 16:18-19). This is not something that can be devised and organized by man's wisdom. Rather, the reality of the kingdom comes as the overcoming saints are living in God's economy, that is, as they are experiencing the divine dispensing of God into their whole being while passing through all kinds of environments.

Yes, we are all at different stages, yet we can all experience Christ and become material for the building of the church. This building with Christ as the content is the reality of the kingdom (Rom. 14:17). He lives, reigns, and rules in us, and the devil is defeated (Rev. 11:15-17). It is no longer my opinion, my view, or my way. It is Christ, the church, and the kingdom!

All of God's providential arrangements in His economy are for the answer to what He taught us to pray in Matthew 6:10, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." There is *a present reality* of the kingdom now in this age (Col. 1:13; Rom. 14:17), and there is *a future manifestation* of the kingdom at the Lord's second coming (2 Tim. 4:1). Thus, the answer to the Lord's specific petition is now being fulfilled in the Holy Spirit and in the church life, and will one day appear in the future as a fully restored earth where He rules and

reigns in His glory with His saints (Acts 3:20-21; Rev. 5:9-10).

The arrangement of the New Jerusalem

Ultimately in God's one economy, He will administer the universe to arrive at the consummation of the ages in the holy city, the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-2). Following the kingdom age of one thousand years, God the Father has arranged that His Son will deliver up the kingdom to Him, that God may eternally be all in all (1 Cor. 15:23-28).

There are many arrangements — from creation to the called race, to the Lord's incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, dispensing, and indwelling, to our conformity, saturation, and building up, to the kingdom, with Christ's ruling and reigning, to the New Jerusalem with the full expression of God's plan for the universe. All these arrangements make up God's one economy.

This is one economy, having one plan with many arrangements. And the glorious thing about it all is that each time we turn to the Lord and touch the Spirit, we are actively participating in this one economy. We are in the reality of God's dispensing and administra-

tion. This is the mark, the goal. This is the one will, the one purpose, and the one economy. This is the dispensing of His wonderful life into our being, to make us living stones for the building of the church, to bring in His kingdom in order that God could consummate all things in the bride, the Lamb's wife, which is the New Jerusalem, fully expressing God's glory. Amen!

It is for this glorious expression that we hear the Lord's voice and follow Him. Our comprehension of His eternal purpose is a controlling factor in our daily life to know His voice. Then as more of us come to understand the nature of His voice and live compatibly with Him in a life-relationship, the fulfillment of His words in John 10:16 will be our enjoyment:

“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”