



Nevertheless

We are privileged to read of our Lord Jesus Christ and His prayers to His Father, in the Garden of Gethsemane. The eternal plan of God was for the Lord Jesus to lay down His life for us all, to be the Saviour of the world. In the garden Jesus was under huge pressure to “opt out” and not to go ahead with the plan. At the end of the spiritual battle, Jesus’ response was *“Father if it be thy will remove this cup from me, but **nevertheless** not my will but thy will be done”*. In many ways, for Jesus, there was never really an alternative, He had come to do the will of God and that was set deep in His heart. King David in the psalms says “My heart is fixed”, but even so the pressures and the temptation were very real, but whatever the reasons for Jesus not going to the cross, it was **nevertheless** *“Your will be done”*. **Never anything less** than the perfect will of God was good enough for the Lord Jesus, in His love for His Father but also for us.

Jesus had previously told His disciples *“I lay my life down that I might take it up again, this commandment have I received from my Father”*. It is clear therefore that the Lord Jesus knew what the will of God was and had, in spite of all the opposition He faced, the overcoming ability to do that will. As we read in Hebrews 12, *“Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”*, Jesus had an understanding of where the will of God would take Him and the faith, and therefore the ability, to take Him through to the end. That must be the requirement for every Christian, following in Jesus’ footsteps. Firstly to know the will of God and then have the ability to do that will.

Paul, the apostle, writing to the Philippians, says that Jesus *“Was obedient to death, even the death of the cross”*. We therefore see the life in the Lord Jesus enabling Him to obey the will of God, even to His death on the cross. The book of Hebrews tells us that, *“He leaned obedience through the things which He suffered”*. This gives us a further insight into the quality of the life of our Lord Jesus, and His understanding of what was to be gained, through doing His Father’s will, even though it could be very difficult. Most people when they suffer try and get away from the suffering. Jesus, knowing the will of God, actually learned obedience, or discipline, self-control, in His trials and, we are told, *“So being made perfect became the author of eternal salvation”*.

The Book of the Hebrews also helps us to understand the Lord Jesus’ understanding of the will of God. In chapter 10 we read *“Lo in the volume of the book it is written of me, I come to do thy will O God”*. Even as a child the Lord Jesus had told His parents *“Do you not understand that I must be about my Father’s business”*. So for the Lord Jesus knowing and doing the will of God was the imperative in His life. That is why He was sent to the earth, having already, in heaven, *“Made Himself of no reputation”* and *“Taken upon Himself the position of servant”*. It was Jesus who made Himself of no reputation, exercising His own will, **nevertheless** conforming to the will of His Father, that He **must** come to earth, to be the Saviour of the World. It is important to note that the Lord Jesus had taken on the form of a servant, before He came to the earth. He was already in the right place with His Father before He came and therefore in the place of spiritual safety, having surrendered His own

will to serve His Father. The safest place for the Christian is the place of true service, under the authority of God, where no other authority has any place in our lives, but more of that later.

The difference between the Lord Jesus and any other human being is clear for us to see. He alone was able to know perfectly the will of God and to do that will. This is the challenge for Christians, those truly born again of the Spirit of God, they too should and must, know and do the will of God in their own lives. Jesus said *"If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"*. This pamphlet looks at what is required in knowing the will of God and doing that will. It will be a challenge to those who read it; and yet it will provide a way ahead; to be able to put into practice the principles the Lord Jesus has taught us. Read on if you are serious about your Christian life and living a life which will please the Lord Jesus, but as a consequence, going this way, will lead to the denial of your own will and ambition. The life you will be lead will be, and must be, on the basis of *"Not I, but Christ"*. It is impossible for anyone to live a life, in the will of God, without the power of the Spirit of God making real the life of Jesus Christ in them. Those who have tried to keep the commandments of God, apart from the power of God working in their lives, know the futility of such efforts. Even the apostle Paul found the demands of the will of God, set out in the ten commandments, totally impossible, in spite of all his undoubted zeal. *"Oh! Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me"* is his comment.

Among Christians there are different views, some doctrinal, some practical, as to the possibilities of living a life which follows the Lord Jesus, moving towards having the testimony, *"I do always the things which please my Father"*. While, of course, it will never be required of any of us to die on a cross, for the sins of the world, there is a requirement to do the will of God and please our Heavenly Father. In the epistle to the Philippians we are told *"It is God who works in you both to will and do of His good pleasure"*. This does make it clear that the working of God in any Christian can and should be for *"God's good pleasure"*. We must therefore conclude that it must be possible to please God, and this is when He works in us *"both to will and to do"*. There will not be *"a doing"* before there is a willingness to do that which is required. We read in 2 Corinthians 8.11 that where there is *"a readiness of mind, there is a performance, or outworking"*; first the willing mind and then the action. *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus"*. We, of course, have to **work out** that which God **works in**, and the outworking of His *"in working"* becomes the means of our salvation, on a day to day basis.

Some Christians, however, believe such a life is impossible. That is their doctrinal background, they have been taught such things in their churches and they will regularly say the General Confession, or a similar form of confession, confessing their sins, without any thought of exactly what it means. As a result, their expectation of what God can do in their lives is low. In many ways, they believe they are left with just their own inadequate resources, to try and do their best for God, but will inevitably *"let Him down"*. However, the prayer in the Church of England prayer book, which follows the General Confession, asks for the ability to *"Hereafter lead a godly, righteous and sober life"*. Is it believed or just recited as part of the service? Is there any understanding, or do the people ever stop to think what they are asking for? But for the prayer to be there, it does mean, that when the prayer book was originally prepared, there must have been an expectation, in the hearts of those who compiled the book, that a *"Holy life"* was possible. However does the recital of such a prayer, without such understanding and any real faith, actually reinforce the impossibility of ever doing the will of God? Dear Christian souls, with such an approach, will lament their common weaknesses and

therefore deny any possibility of being any different. They will, sadly, live their lives on the earth, without ever being brought into the realisation of what God can do in them, and for them.

Another group of Christians are brought up on “Victorious Christian living”. That is their background and the possibilities of having the power of God working in them is often preached, with great drama, from the pulpit in their meetings. Even so, if they are honest, these Christians fail to live the quality of life required, unaware of the real needs of their lives and the standard the Lord Jesus has set. Often the leaders, who preach such things, “Fail to live up to what they preach”, using their ministry for their own gain. All the “Hype” produces great excitement and animation in meetings, but often fails to penetrate into the heart and bring about the changes required to make the “Holy Life” possible. All these difficulties and failures, however, do not mean that doing the will of God is impossible. It is to God’s word which we must look, and not the experience of men who fail, but rather to base our faith and our lives on the testimony of the Lord Jesus. *“Let God be true and every man a liar”* says the apostle Paul. The apostle John comments *“Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world”* and *“This is that which overcomes the world even our faith”*; this points us to the possibilities of God and away from the testimonies and experience of human beings. *“The testimony of God is greater than the testimony of men”* and we must look to the *“Author and Finisher of our faith”*, our dear Lord Jesus, as our example. He is *“the faithful and true witness”*. If we look into the whole Bible we see the “Testimony of God” everywhere, God speaking truth to us and it is that truth we must believe. *“The truth shall make you free”*, which is why God provides **His testimony**, for us all to believe.

There are really two elements to doing the will of God. Firstly there is the need for a life, which is of a quality that testifies of the grace of God in that life, one that is holy and selfless. Secondly there is the specific need to know the will of God, and do it, in each situation in our lives. The one follows on from the other. Without the first, the second will not take place, as without the quality of life, there is no basis on which to know the will of God and do it. Our lives must be built on “The rock”. It is surely required if we are to “Hear God”, that we are in the place where we can listen. The “Hearing of God” can come in many ways, but even so our hearts have to be open to “His communications” and be able to recognise them when they come. But more of that later, to start with, we will look at how to achieve the quality of Christian living required, simply following our Lord Jesus. There will be no attempt to make us “super-spiritual” or “spiritually neurotic”, but Sons of God, just normally doing the will of *“Our Father who is in Heaven”*. The most normal life is a life doing the will of God. Our Lord Jesus lived just a normal life as far as He was concerned. It is just us all who, reading the gospels, find it quite extraordinary.

As we have said already our great example is the Lord Jesus. Our opening statement is ***“Nevertheless not my will, but yours”*** in other words whatever the circumstance “Not me, but you”. We therefore understand the conflict is always one between God’s will and our will. Many make the excuse of the devil being to blame for not doing the will of God. Of course satan will be involved in trying to make us exercise our own will, but, whatever the pressure we are under, in the end it comes down to whom we will obey. That only applies of course to the Christian. For the non-Christian the *“prince of the power of the air is the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience”*, so the non-Christian has the god of this world “pulling their strings”, although they would not recognise it, that is the deception of sin and satan. The non-Christian cannot please God, even with all their good works.

We know the Lord Jesus fulfilled all the will of God and His word, or testimony, to us in Luke 9.23 is ,

"If any man will come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me".

There is the choice; that little word *if*. Do you want to come after Jesus Christ? Do you want to walk the way He walked and live the type of life He lived?

Yes? then it is first about the denial of yourself, ourselves, as the same principle applies to all Christians.

When Jesus' disciples were asking about who was to be the greatest in the Kingdom of God, Jesus answered and said, *"You know not what you ask". "Are you able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"* They said unto Him, *"We are able"*. And he said unto them, *"You shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father"*. It was clear the reason for their questions, to the Lord Jesus, was their ambition to be "number one", to be the most important. The response they received, from the Lord Jesus, was not what they expected, and challenged them, "To the depths", about the choices they would make in their lives. It was possible to drink His cup and be baptised in His baptism and it would be their experience in the future. It would be possible to say and fulfil "Not my will but yours", but the position they wanted could not be guaranteed, their ambitions were totally out of place. Perhaps this helps us to understand why those early Christians rejoiced, that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Jesus' name. He had suffered shame for them, on the cross, and they were following Him, drinking the cup He drank.

Let us look at the way of thinking in the "Mind which was in the Lord Jesus". It was the basis, in faith, on which He fulfilled the will of God and why He resisted the ambition of his disciples.

We read in the book epistle to the Philippians chapter 2. *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"*.

"In the beginning" Jesus had a position with God His Father, but He denied Himself, He laid His position aside and gave up all His rights. So much is said, in modern times, about human rights and the rights we all have as individuals. There is an emphasis on "What is my right", and such thinking causes much conflict and argument between human beings, and nations too, as they fight for what is "theirs". *"What advantage is it if we gain the whole world and loose our own soul"*; the truth is that we will be "Possessed by the things we possess". *"It is certain that we brought nothing into this work and it is certain we can take nothing out"*. Jesus Christ put aside His rights in order to do the will of God. He says in Matthew chapter 11 *"Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly of heart and you will find rest to your souls"*. Here is the place of rest, rather than pursuing our ambitions. Rather than conform to the demands and desires of our ambitions which result in us being described as those who *"Travail (work hard) and are heavy laden (with large burdens)"*, we need to become meek and lowly of heart. We need to take Jesus yoke upon us, submit to the will of God, knowing that God's will is the best thing for our lives. Thus we find rest for our souls; we are not striving for things which are unhelpful, but content to do God's will. *"Godliness with contentment is great gain"*.

To come after Jesus we have to deny ourselves. The word deny means to disown, Chamber's dictionary gives one definition as "To refuse to acknowledge a connection with someone or something". Put another way, I refuse to recognise my own life; I deny myself having any connection

with my life and deny its right to have a place in my life. The part of me which dominated my life and controlled and exercised its will in my life, I disown it, and have nothing more to do with it. Sometimes families have a relative who behaves badly and brings embarrassment to the family. They prefer not to be seen with that relative and sometimes will ignore them when out and about in public. They cut off the relative and “disown them”. That is exactly what we do with our “self”, our own life. We have nothing more to do with it; it has been an embarrassment and led us into trouble. We saw earlier how the disciples’ ambition got them into an embarrassing situation with the Lord Jesus, and His response to them would have caused them to realise the wrongness of their actions. They must have wished that they had disowned their ambition, their self, before making the comments and needing Jesus’ instruction and gentle rebuke. How much their self interest must have contrasted with Jesus’ selfless love.

How are we able to deny ourselves? Is it now possible when the disciples could not do it while walking with Jesus on the earth? Paul in Galatians 2.20 writes *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”*. The solution is here. In His death the Lord Jesus put to death the “I” in me, He was fully identified with all that I am in His death, so that I am able to be identified with Him in His resurrection, and thereby walk in *“newness of life”*. It is because of what Jesus did on the cross, that we are enabled to actually deny ourselves. He put the “I” to death and rendered it powerless, so when disowned, or denied, it has no power to come back and dominate our lives again. The “I” must be substituted by Christ. We are no longer to be self-possessed but rather “God possessed”; we are no longer to have a self interest, but a godly interest, at the centre of our lives. Jesus paid the price for us and made us His own, we are His possession. And when we deny ourselves Jesus can come and take possession of our lives, in practice and in reality; He can take that which is His by right. In John chapter 12 Jesus said these words *“He that loves his life shall lose it; and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour”*

The apostle John expresses the same concept in another way. Jesus talks about hating our own life, this in contrast to loving Him. Jesus has said *“We cannot serve two masters; we will either love the one or hate the other”*. If Jesus is to be our master, then we have to love Him and hate the other thing which has mastered our lives; ourselves. If we love our lives, by failing to deny ourselves, then we lose our spiritual lives. If we hate our lives, we will want to disown, or deny ourselves and put God first. We will therefore keep our lives, unto life eternal. This will enable the eternal life, which we received, when we received the Lord Jesus, to operate in us; it is a whole new way of living, living unto God.

In 2 Corinthians 5 we read *“For the love of Christ constrains us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. We judge that if Jesus died for all then all are dead”*. It is the same truth as being “Crucified with Christ”. We then live unto Jesus *“Who died and rose again for us”*. The life that lives unto Jesus must be eternal life, as Jesus has eternal life, having already risen from the dead. For our lives to relate to Him they must be in His life, in His eternal life. By hating our lives, disowning ourselves, we keep our lives unto life eternal and are therefore able to live unto the risen Lord Jesus. The spiritual judgement which brings us to this place is one of faith, believing in all that God accomplished in the death of the Lord Jesus.

No wonder Jesus, in John chapter 12, goes on to talk about serving Him and therefore following Him. To be able to follow Him, we must first serve Him, and where Jesus is there will His servant be also. If we serve the Lord Jesus we cannot serve another, so we must hate our own lives and not follow our

own ambitions. So we find ourselves where “Jesus is” and that “We are in Him”. *“In that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you”*.

This is our place in the Father and the Son, as we honour the Lord Jesus, and we are now in the place where we can know the will of God. We are beginning to get into a place where we are usable by the Lord. “Follow me”, “Come after me”, “Deny yourself”, “Take up your cross”. Luke mentions the word daily. Matthew does not. Both are right. Matthew helps us, saying *“Take up your cross”*, “Once and for all”; the setting of purpose in a Christian life. We have come to realise this is the only way of being able to follow the Lord Jesus and save our lives unto “Life eternal”. Having set our course we do not look back. Luke writes *“Take up your cross daily”*, and confirms the need to maintain that direction of our lives on a day by day basis. We should never be complacent, always being aware of the demands “self” can make on us, ensuring that it continues to be denied any place in our daily lives.

So we are servants, *“But the servant does not know what His Lord is doing”*, but Jesus calls us friends (John 15), as he tells us all the things which He has learned of His Father. Jesus redefines “friends” for us. *“You are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you”*. So again Jesus is looking for us to do the will of God; that is what makes us His friends. Yes we are servants, and yet friends, servants who are able to know what the Lord is doing. If we know what God is doing, then we can do His work. Many Christians have no understanding of what the Lord is doing and there is little point God showing anyone what He is doing, if they won’t do His will. Abraham is called “The friend of God”, He knew God’s will and obeyed. To be a friend of God and not do the will of God is not friendship at all. God is no fool, as He sees our hearts and understands our motives; He will only reveal His will to those He knows are prepared to obey.

So why have we come to this place? So often in Christian circles, one hears the comment “The Lord told me to do this”, or “God spoke to me about this”. Fine! But there can be reservations in the heart of the listener, as to the genuineness of such a statement. It is not that, of course, there is any doubt that God can speak to a person. Of course He can. God has done so down through the years and continues to do so in present days. The wonder of the Living God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is His ability to communicate with human beings. Hebrews 1 talks of *“God speaking in times past by the prophets and speaking by His Son”*. Psalm 115 compares the living God with other Gods who cannot see or hear or speak. For the Christian the joy is there; God can and will and must speak to me. But there are concerns about “God said this to me”, and what is meant to have been said when it is clear that the “Word” is not working out in the person’s life. The question must be asked, did God really speak, or was “The Word” just the creation of the person’s own imagination? Often in such circumstances, when “The Word” is just not working out, the reputation and honour of the Lord Jesus is brought into disrepute. The danger is that if self has not truly been dealt with, “self” with its own agenda and ambitions, there is always a risk of creating our own “Word” to fit our circumstances and our own will. Sin can be very subtle, so we need to be sure that we are “Dead to it”, and not allowing it to have dominion over our lives. The classic sort of case, met regularly by the writer, is the man or woman who believes he or she has been called to a ministry in a certain way. However they don’t have the funds for this ministry and are always asking for financial support. Their eyes are full of taking every opportunity to get finance and so all their relationships are distorted. They fail to *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”* and allow all the things they need, not want, to be added unto them. They have not yet put God first in their lives, but live in

the works of the own imagination and follow their own ambition. God is gracious and they will see some blessing, the Lord is very kind to His children.

So how do we hear God? In many ways is the answer, and it would be unwise to prescribe a number of scenarios or methods for the reader to put into practice. The foundation we have laid for denying ourselves and not having our own agenda is the only thing which can be prescribed. There are general principles however which can help us to recognise the voice of the Lord Jesus and follow Him to do His will.

"My sheep hear my voice" is Jesus' comment in John chapter 10. He is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd and the Chief Shepherd of His sheep, but it is in His role as the Good Shepherd that He speaks to His sheep. They get to recognise His voice. It has a certain sound, the sound of goodness and of love and of peace. Samuel the prophet failed to recognise the voice of God, but the Lord's sheep, those who are *"The redeemed"* and are brought back into the sheepfold do know His voice. Jesus is their Saviour and the voice that called them/us to salvation, is the voice to hear and follow. *"Another will they not hear"*, but only the voice of the Shepherd. Here the word *"another"* refers to someone different. Jesus said He would send another Comforter, the word *"another"* means one exactly the same. The Holy Spirit, who is to lead us into all truth, is therefore just like Jesus, so He can be recognised, as He has the same spiritual quality in His voice.

In the Old Testament God spoke to Moses in many ways, but when the tabernacle was finished, raised up, and God had filled the tabernacle, we read in the first chapter of Leviticus, that *"God spoke from between the cherubim"*; i.e. from the place of His dwelling. So when become God's dwelling place by being filled with the Spirit of God, He dwells in our hearts or spirits, He will speak to us from and in our hearts. John says *"He that has the witness/testimony of God has the witness/testimony in Himself"*. (The word for witness and testimony is the same in the Greek language). So the Christian has the word of God in His heart, which witnesses with His spirit that he is a son of God. Charles Wesley writes *"Still the small inward voice I hear that whispers all my sins forgiven"*. This is the voice to listen to.

We all have a conscience; it is our place of inward knowing. The conscience provides an indication of when we are doing something which is right or wrong. It is like a little voice inside, and to go against the conscience sometimes can be difficult. For example; When we know we are about to tell a lie, *"Shall I tell that lie or not"*? If we do go against our conscience we have to harden our hearts. Each time we resist the little voice, we harden the heart, and slowly the little voice gets quieter and quieter, until we cannot hear it anymore. That is a position, of course, of danger to our souls. There is no longer a check on what we might do wrong and nothing to prevent us falling into sin. Paul the apostle spoke of serving with *"A pure conscience"*, in other words the little voice did not tell him anything was wrong. John in his first letter speaks of *"Our hearts condemning, or judging, us"*. It is the same internal mechanism; something in our hearts telling us, if we are wrong or right, which ever the case may be. John says, *"If our hearts condemn us not"*, or in other words if our consciences are clear *"Then we have confidence before God"*. We therefore have an assurance of access to the Lord, knowing we are right with God.

When the woman *"Taken in adultery"* was brought to Jesus He spoke the word *"He that is without sin....."*. The Bible tells us those who brought the woman, were convicted by their conscience and went away. They knew inside themselves the state of their being and their wrongness (sin) before

God. So the Lord can speak to us through conscience. Hebrews 9.14 mentions *"Our consciences being purged from dead works to serve the living God"*. It is essential that all the "Rubbish" of wrong thinking, and of our bad behaviour, and the awareness of all the wrong things we have done, must be purged, or washed away, so our conscience is clear and we are ready to cope with requirements of "hearing" the Lord. Our conscience must become sensitive enough, to enable us to respond to the Lord's commandments, when He speaks into our hearts.

In Colossians chapter 3 we read, *"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts"*. Jesus is our peace and His reigning in our hearts brings a peace. The peace we are told is to rule in our hearts, the word rule means to be the umpire, or the referee. So if we are about to do or doing something wrong this peace becomes disturbed and should and must be an indication that something is wrong. It is like a referee blowing the whistle and stopping everything. Take notice something is wrong! The loss or disturbance of our peace should cause us to turn to the Lord and seek His face to receive direction. It is essential to recognise this peace within our hearts, and when it changes it shows that it is God who is concerned, when we look like going out of His will. It is not based on nice feelings, which can be of the soul, but a learned spiritual knowledge of peace of God. *"And the peace of God, which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in the love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord"* says Paul. The peace of God is not a logical thing, but something of spirit and truth; there is a need, as with our consciences, to get to know ourselves after the spirit, after Christ, and not after the flesh. This comes from knowing the life of the Spirit of God within us and recognising His working. We should know the love of God, surpassing human love, and joy unspeakable, and the peace of God which passed understanding. It is that peace which becomes the umpire, or referee, in our hearts, and is an indicator as to whether what we are doing, or about to do is right with God. In Isaiah we read *"You will hear a voice behind you saying this is the way walk in it"*. The peace of God and/or our conscience become the little voice inside saying "This is the way". The more we listen, the more sensitive we become, and the when we feel the slightest change in the peace of God in our hearts, it should cause us to seek the Lord for His direction. That does not mean we cannot have difficulties, which can which trouble us, *"We are troubled on every side, but not in despair"* says the apostle Paul, nevertheless the peace of heart remains. Understanding these things is a matter of "Spiritual education" and the more we serve the Lord the easier it becomes to know hear His voice and know His will.

Of course there are things which are basic, not to kill, steal, lie, commit fornication and so on. It would not be possible for God to tell us to do something which goes against the basic commandments. So for a man to say that God told him to have relations with a woman, who is not his wife, just cannot be God speaking. God cannot go against the principles that He has laid down. So if a Christian says God told me to steal, for example, it simply cannot be that God told him. Some still will believe such things, but they cannot be true.

Peter tells us to abstain from fleshly lusts/desires which war against the soul. These desires harden our hearts and we should keep away from them. As mentioned previously, if we ignore the inward voice, the change in peace, then we become less sensitive and the same applies if we follow after the lusts of the flesh. Our conscience and the peace of God are spiritual attributes, and if we walk in the flesh, we are far from Spirit, and much less able to hear the word of God. However, in our lives there are things which are permissible (lawful) but are "Not expedient" (not helpful). Paul says *"I will not be brought under the power of anything; or alternatively, not all things edify"*. Those seem to the

two criteria, by which we must judge the things we do which are permissible, but may not helpful. Does my behaviour edify, for example, does my humour cause concern? If my behaviour does not edify, or build up other people or myself, for that matter; I should not behave that way. If my hobby, computers, football, reading, TV, music or anything brings me under its power and becomes an obsession; then I must not do it. Things can become idols, and do so when we come under their power, and we serve them. Almost anything can usurp, or takes over the place, of God in our lives. John says *"Little Children keep yourselves from Idols"*. This is exactly the same thought. Even our reputation can become too important, and we serve it and cherish our place in society, and come under its power and serve to promote that reputation. Paul tells us to put these things to death. ***"Sin shall not have dominion over you"***.

So those are the basics, but how do I hear the Lord and know His will. Perhaps this illustration will help. A famous Missionary Society needed to pull all its missionaries out of a country, because of an uprising; some missionaries had already been killed. The leaders all met for 3 days. For the first 2 days, no one said anything; they just prayed and waited on the Lord. On the third day they all knew the mind of the Lord. He had spoken the same thing to each leader in the quietness of their hearts and the matters were soon resolved, without debate and dispute. Now, of course, we can't spend 3 days praying over every little issue. In fact, *"If we walk in the Light as He is in the light we have fellowship with the Father and Son"*, so the word of God should be straightforward. *"They that are the Sons of God are led by the Spirit of God"*. But our Missionary Leaders spent the time to get rid of all their own ideas; just be subject to the Lord. No doubt each would have come with their ideas, and as with us, minds and feelings and wills will have ideas, some of them very different. Human beings can often be in two minds, and need, before God, to learn to lay their ideas aside, and "be quiet enough" in themselves and yet active in faith, never passive, towards the Lord, to hear His instruction. The requirement is that he who comes to God must believe that He is, and is a rewarder of those who diligently, or earnestly, seek Him. Simple?; but do you believe that in your heart? Most will believe that God is, of course we do, we are Christians, but do we really believe God will reward us, if we seek Him with all our hearts? If we don't believe, then we are more than likely to want to jump in with our will or ideas, and then manipulate our circumstances to suit those ideas. All the time we are not really believing that God will speak, and that His will is best.

The Lord can, of course, speak in many ways and we need to be adaptable, and not expect His word or instruction always to come in the same way. Some believe God **has** to speak through a Bible verse; that surely is too predictable and rigid; others want "a word" or a prophecy, some use "fleeces", like Gideon, asking God to meet certain conditions. All are relevant and valid and all can work, but the secret is to recognise the voice of the Lord how ever it comes. Yes, a verse in the Bible can jump out and hit us. The author can testify of many times God has spoken to him. One precious example is of "a word" he believed God gave him, when first travelling to Africa. In psalm 61, *"From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I"* and so relevant and real when the heart was overwhelmed, during that visit. The knowledge was there, that God really had spoken and had understood exactly what would take place, and why "the word" was so necessary. Also when feeling so homesick on the first night. The thought coming to the heart, *"The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head"*, and having a bed giving thanks, and going to sleep, with the issue resolved; so simple and yet so precious.

So how does the Lord communicate His will to the open and willing heart? In the two examples given above, one was a word while reading the Bible, which was somehow quickened. David in psalm 119 asks the Lord *"to quicken His word"*. Quicken really means to give life to something, Jesus said the words *"I speak to you are Spirit and they are life"*. There was something in the reading that just brought the word alive. The other example was a scripture already known, but able to be brought to the memory, just when needed. This demonstrates the benefit of knowing our Bibles well. This allows the Spirit of God to use the words we know, and bring them to our remembrance, at the just the right moment, and always there is something living, something faith building in that word. However many do not have Bibles, even so the idea that Jesus had nowhere to lay His head, could easily be brought to mind, with or without the Bible, and the word spoken. In one way, that is more wonderful, God is always able to communicate His word and does so, the problem is always with us and our listening.

Around the time of the millennium lots of Christians believed there was going to be a disaster, a computer crash etc. and made preparations. The idea had got into many hearts and created much fear. A lot was based on news reports etc. and reading all the opinions of "experts". It all seemed valid and right and fitted in with so many Christians' ideas of God bringing a judgement on the earth. The author asked the Lord and the word, *"Take no thought for tomorrow"* came to him, *"Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness"*, so no preparations were made, just looking to the Lord. In the end all was well and the expected disaster did not happen. We must always hear God and not follow our own ideas or be influenced by the opinions of experts.

Sometimes a word can crop up regularly in our lives. It just seems to come when needed. For the author, *"Be not weary in well doing but you will reap in due season if you faint not"* has come in Bible readings, a daily reading, Daily Light, just when the hands were tempted to "hang down" and the temptation to give in is very real. It is just that the Lord knows our situations at that time; His word is *"No excuses, don't be weary"*, and then the faith comes to look to the Lord, to see His grace available and find the life which comes from Him, to strengthen and keep going. *"Despise not the chastening of the Lord"*, has come too, at just the right time, and the realisation that God is working to perfect the life, and the hard times are just His ways of bringing purer fruit in our lives, and causing us to trust Him more.

In the book of Acts we read *"Young men will see visions and old men will dream dreams"*, so, of course, it is possible that God will speak through these means. The book of Acts gives accounts of visions given to men, and dreams are recorded in the Old Testament and there are many accounts of Christians receiving such "words" down through the centuries. Many have been led this way; some have been converted too, especially when far away from the conventional evangelism. Such intervention from God is wonderful, and yet we must remember not to try and copy others, and not be led away by our own imaginations. It is of course very easy to imagine things, people talk of having a "picture" from the Lord, which may or may not be genuine. There is no wish to limit the Lord's ability and freedom to communicate in which every way He chooses, but great care must be exercised, to ensure that such communication is from the Lord Jesus. *"By their fruits you will know them"*. Again we return to the vital position of being dead to all that is our own will and ambition, so that we do not generate visual images, pictures, visions or dreams which promote our own will, and so ensure we are not led astray by our own desires. *"He will scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts"* we read in Luke's gospel. Pride and "self-will" will produce imaginations in our hearts

which can lead to visual images; we can have delusions of our own self importance. Jesus said *"Learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart"*. That is the safest place to be spiritually, where our mind and heart is fully under the control of the Lord, a position where we can test and then trust the visions or dreams we receive.

The Lord can of course speak through the "Gifts of the Spirit", words of wisdom, knowledge, prophecy etc. within the context of the church meeting. See Acts 13. These are wonderful interventions, but must always bear witness in the heart, of those to whom the word is directed. Often the word will come through someone who knows nothing of a situation. The Lord seems to like that way, so that there can never be any thought of producing "a word" which "suits the situation". This can be human manipulation and very dangerous; the consequences of being a false prophet are severe, and we must never be tempted to produce "a word" which we think is appropriate, but only ever bring the "Word of the Lord". Better to say nothing than to bring the wrong word. Some people almost make a career of going around saying "I have a word from the Lord for you". Any such intervention needs watching with great care, and only followed when it witnesses with the heart, and confirms other directions from the Lord. If the payment of money is involved, it is almost never the "Word of the Lord". *"Freely have you received, freely give"*.

The Lord knows our hearts and He knows if we genuinely want His will and will make sure we hear. If any Christian is unsure of a word given to him/her, the Lord knows that and will not expect us to act on conjecture or pressure from others who have a "word". Wait and see, especially if genuinely unsure, watch and pray, the Lord is patient and so must we be. The genuine word of the Lord will bring faith with it, the faith to obey, and cause our hearts to respond to Him with ease and joy. There is no strain in the Spirit and if we find strain, we can happily wait for confirmation. The Lord will not cast us off, and is quite able to make us really know and really understand His will. He is the Almighty God and He loves us.

In the days of Elijah we read that the Lord was in the still small voice. He was not in the earthquake or in the storm but in the quiet voice. People love big dramatic things that impress, but so often the word of God is in His still small voice in our hearts, a voice recognised by "His sheep"; *"Another will they not hear"*.

So we have looked at some of the ways in which God can speak to us and of course there are many more and there is no desire to limit God or limit the various ways in which He can speak. The author can testify of a time when totally fed up, he put the radio on. This only to hear on BBC Radio 4 the following verses read out. *Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews.¹ For if thou altogether hold thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: **and who knows whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*** That was the word which brought repentance and a seeking of the Lord to continue in His will. God can even control the radio when necessary.

So our purpose has been to ensure that people really hear God and so do His will. We rejoice that we serve the living God, who is not a dumb idol, neither the figment of some one's imagination. We serve not only the God who made the world, but who also is our redeemer through our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we have seen, sadly, too many Christians say that “God told me” but there is little or no evidence of His word in their lives. These people discredit Christianity, and bear a false witness of God and of the Lord Jesus, who is the faithful and true witness. These people have not resolved the issue in their hearts “ **NEVERTHELESS not my will, but your will be done**” The booklet seeks to provide the truth so that Christians are in the place where they can hear the Lord and do His will, and are not still pursuing their own will and their own way.

The world is so in need of direction from those who bear a true testimony of Jesus Christ, people in whom there is clear evidence that God has spoken to them, that they are doing His will and their lives give evidence to the “Word of the Living God”. These people can be a demonstration to Christians too, of the way to walk and serve God showing the way ahead so that “others may believe”.

May God speak to you in your heart and enable you to respond to do His will and be a testimony to others that “**Nevertheless** not my will, but your will be done” is the only way to truly live in freedom on the earth, waiting for the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ.