

Hearing the voice of God

My five-year-old daughter, Barbara, had disobeyed me and had been sent to her room. After a few minutes, I went in to talk with her about what she had done. Teary-eyed, she asked, "Why do we do wrong things, Mommy?"

"Well," I replied, "sometimes the devil tells us to do something wrong and we listen to him. We need to listen to God instead."

To which she sobbed, "But God doesn't talk loud enough!"

-- Jo M. Guerrero, Joplin, Missouri. Christian Reader, "Kids of the Kingdom."

See: 1 Sa 12:15; Mt 7:21; Eph 5:6.

Heather Whitestone ... implant caused her to be able to hear but the sounds that she heard were new to her. She could hear water running but she did not know what it was. She had to learn not only to hear but also learn what the sounds were. So it is with the voice of God.

How do we hear the voice of God?

I. Through His word

I lay it down as a foundation principle, which no one can gainsay, that of course [God's] voice will always be in harmony with itself, no matter in how many different ways he may speak. The voices may be many, the message can be but one, if God tells me in one voice to do or to leave undone anything he cannot possibly tell me the opposite in another voice. If there is a contradiction in the voices, the speakers cannot be the same. Therefore my rule for distinguishing the voice of God would be to bring it to the test of this harmony.

-- Hannah Whitall Smith in *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*. Christianity Today, Vol. 37, no. 10.

See: Pr 8:34; Lk 8:15; Jas 1:19

II. Through His spokespeople

III. Through the testimony of the saints (Abel)

IV. Through the witness of the Spirit

RO 8:12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are **sons of God**. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "*Abba*, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷

Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

The relation of the Spirit to the sons of God is presented as being much like that of a shepherd to his sheep. They are "led" by him as their guide and protector. In [Galatians 3:24](#) the law is pictured as having a responsibility to "lead" men to Christ. Once this goal is achieved, the law must hand over the guiding role to the Spirit, who guides into the truth ([John 16:13](#)) and, as in the present passage, into holiness. Unlike sin, which may at first only gently seduce, then deceitfully begin to drive as a hard taskmaster, the Spirit relies on persuasion rather than force. In fact, Paul goes to some pains to avoid misunderstanding on this very point, assuring us that the Spirit's leadership does not involve a new bondage that is no improvement over the old in which fear ruled the life (probably a fear of the consequences of sin and a fear of death, as in [Heb 2:15](#)). The new title given to the Spirit, namely, "the Spirit who makes you sons" (literally, "Spirit of adoption"), emphasizes the vast gulf between slavery and family relationship. By the Spirit believers cry, "Abba, Father." The two terms are equivalents, the first being the Aramaic word Jesus used in prayer ([Mark 14:36](#)). Paul's use of the Aramaic alongside the Greek both here and in [Galatians 4:6](#), a closely related passage, may well indicate that the tradition concerning the prayer life of Jesus filtered down through the church even before Mark wrote his Gospel. J. Jeremias notes that in permitting the Twelve to use the Lord's Prayer, Jesus "authorizes his disciples to follow him in saying *Abba*. He gives them this address as the token of their discipleship" (*The Central Message of the New Testament* [New York: Scribner's, 1965], p. 28). The "cry" refers to calling on God in prayer.

The important term "adoption" bears a relationship to justification in that it is declarative and forensic (inasmuch as it is a legal term). Adoption bestows an objective standing, as justification does; like justification, it is a pronouncement that is not repeated. It has permanent validity. Like justification, adoption rests on the loving purpose and grace of God ([Eph 1:5](#)). Though the term is used of Israel in relation to God ([9:4](#); cf. [Hos 11:1](#)), it is doubtful that adoption was practiced in OT days. Much more likely is the conclusion that Paul was drawing on the background of Roman law both here and in [Galatians 4:5](#). The readers of both Epistles would be familiar with adoption in their own society (Francis Lyall, "Roman Law in the Writings of Paul--Adoption," *JBL* 88 [Dec. 1969] 458-66).

Paul's readers are called sons (v. 15) and children (v. 16), without any appreciable distinction. Both are family terms. "Children" emphasizes family relationship based on regeneration, while "sons" stresses legal standing. (This is not according to the usage of the apostle John, since John uses "children" for believers and reserves "son" for the Son of God.)

Here (v. 16), as in [Galatians 4:6](#), the Spirit is represented as bearing witness together with the redeemed spirit in man to the reality of membership in the family of heaven, that is, to the actuality of salvation through Christ. Hebrew law prescribed that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter was to be established ([Deut 17:6](#); cf. [Matt 18:16](#)). Similarly, there are two witnesses to one's salvation, the person himself in his inmost being and the Holy Spirit, who confirms the believer's realization that he has indeed been made God's child through faith in Christ. Because this witness takes place in the heart ([Gal 4:6](#)), it is not a witness others receive, though it may be the basis for testifying to

others about the reality of salvation. It may be aided by Scripture ([John 20:31](#); [1John 5:13](#)) but is not dependent on the written word. It is a secret inner witness (see Bernard Ramm, *The Witness of the Spirit* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959]).

A comparison of vv. 15 and 16 will bring out an important truth concerning the assurance of salvation. All too often a believer may come to the point of doubting his salvation because his sanctification has proceeded so slowly and so lamely. The Spirit, however, does not base his assuring testimony on progress or the lack of it in the Christian life. He does not lead us to cry, "I am God's child." Rather, he leads us to call upon God as Father, to look away from ourselves to him who established the relationship.

In George Bernard Shaw's play *Saint Joan*, Joan of Arc is always hearing voices from God, and the king is angered by this. He complains to her, "Oh, your voices! Your voices! Why don't your voices come to me? I'm the king, not you."

"They do come," she replied. "But you do not hear them. You've not sat in the field in the evening listening for them. When the Angelus rings, you cross yourself and have done with it. But if you prayed from your heart and listened to the trilling of the bells in the air after they stopped ringing, you would hear the voices as well as I do."

-- Ben Patterson, "A Faith Like Mary's," *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 87.

See: Pr 8:34; Jer 6:10; Eze 12:2; Jas 1:19.