

4,8,21 Hearing the Lord in Corporate Life (GO SLOW; IT'S A SHORT STUDY)

This principle, taught in 2 Cor. 8:12, will be the foundation of what we're going to talk about in the first part of our study:

“For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.”

A 'willing mind' presupposes faith in the word of God – a commitment to do God's will in response to what He shows us.

God has no expectation that an infant be instantly mature or that a poor man give millions to missions. What He *does* expect is a *willingness* to hear Him, believe Him and follow His lead.

That's what a disciple is – 'trust and obey, for there's no other way'.

The Lord responds to this with all the provision we will need to accomplish His will for us.

2 Cor. 9:8 promises this: “God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.”

This is the wonder of the age of grace – those who follow Christ will never lack anything needed to accomplish His purpose for them.

I'm not saying there are no consequences for unbelief or rebellion.

(Gal. 6:7) “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

I'm sure we've all learned this personally from time to time.

But as we saw in 2 Cor. 9, God's provisions for us, in every area of life, are distributed to us by grace in response to a willing mind, not based on our own abilities or resources.

So, if the Lord says it's time to leave Ur of the Chaldees and go into the unknown, we don't wait. If we do (like Abraham did because of his father-in-law), then God waits also, patiently – while our momentum comes to a grinding halt.

Before we go into more depth on this, I want to quickly update us on a couple things and tie them into what we're studying.

You've probably noticed that there has been an increase of 'mixed messages' coming from LuciferNews.com.

Here's some examples:

LifeSite News:

Dr. Michael Yeadon, former Vice President and Chief Science Officer of Pfizer; "It's entire possible Vaccine Campaigns will be used for massive-scale depopulation."

From The Insider report:

"The Biden administration is developing a national coronavirus vaccine-passport program for Americans."

Forbes:

"New York just launched a digital vaccine pass to restart concerts, sports events and other activities".

Health Impact News:

"Franklin Graham urges Christians to get the Covid shot because (quote) 'Jesus would advocate for people using vaccines.'"

Now, we're going look at some headlines that will confuse us.

ABC News:

"Over 100 fully vaccinated people contract COVID-19 in Washington State."

ABC8 News:

"Goochland County man suffers rare, severe reaction to COVID-19 vaccine" (a severe rash that spread over his entire body requiring five days of hospitalization).

The Hill:

“Battle rages over vaccine passports” (the governors of Florida and Texas are banning mandated passports; and we just found out yesterday that the governor of Idaho is also banning passports. So, if you are thinking about moving and you don’t want to move to Texas or Florida, you’re welcome to join us here).

Why the mixed messages?

- 1) Satan wants the most of the world vaccinated, because that will cause massive-scale depopulation – and he is big on killing people. So, the vaccine will continue to be pushed. It easier to control 500 million people than 8 billion.
- 2) He also wants to create chaos and division. It’s the ‘divide and conquer’ principle. The Lord used this technique in 2 Chron. 20 when He caused the Moabites and Edomites to turn against each other. That’s how Judah won that one.
- 3) The Antichrist can’t achieve the worship and gratitude of the earth-dwellers until the world is in a state of fear and confusion sufficient to make them completely vulnerable to the enemy’s ‘solution’ for all their problems. It would be like finding out you have an incurable disease, and then someone walks in with a cure.

Remember the Hegelian Dialectic we talked about a few months ago? Crisis, reaction, solution. Satan has been using that for thousands of years.

So, we will see constant mixed messages and everyone will wonder who they can trust. It makes it extremely difficult for either side to make their case, because there seems to be indisputable evidence proving both positions.

As I said earlier, people like Franklin Graham and hundreds of other Christian leaders are in full support of Satan’s agenda and have no idea what’s really happening.

Because of their unwillingness to see the *invisible* world, they do what they’ve done for decades, they buy into the explanations given in the *visible* world – the only world they’re in touch with.

As we've talked about in the past, there's a massive inability among Christians to give a spiritual interpretation to world events – and that inability blinds them to reality.

(Hos 4:6) "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

(Jer. 25:7) "But you would not listen to me," says the Lord. . . "You have brought upon yourselves the disasters you now suffer."

Listen to this comment is by Shawn Findlay,

"There is a reason we don't heed warnings. We say to ourselves that it's not that bad, that it won't affect me, and that it probably won't even happen. This is when we let our guards down and disaster strikes. It is then that we move into the reality of the danger upon us and start crying out for help. This is when it's often too late."

(Psalm 81:11-12) ""But My people would not listen to My voice, and Israel did not obey Me. So, I gave them up to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in [the path of] their own [decisions]."

The bottom line is very simple. If we listen to Him, He will provide everything we need, there's no need to be afraid. If we don't believe Him, He will allow us to 'walk the path we have chosen'.

Probably the most difficult thing for many people, is to determine whether God is genuinely warning us about this, or whether people like me don't know what we're talking about, and should be ignored.

That's obviously a decision that's very personal for all of us. We have to pray, study and do our own research to determine (like the Bereans) whether this is real or not.

Whatever decision we make, will determine whether we do or do not take action.

The Lord is in the process of refining and perfecting *the faith* of the remnant through testings that are characteristic of what He has done throughout history, from Moses at the Red Sea to the book of Acts.

*Faith in the face of the impossible.*

God is meticulously arranging the details of our lives to create impossible circumstances.

We don't experience Him like Moses and Paul did, and He's not glorified if we have options other than faith.

We are facing an opportunity to see the Lord in action in our lives in ways only the persecuted Church experiences. But in order for this to happen, He must be followed closely in the days ahead.

I want to read from a commentary on Haggai 2:6-7, coupled with Heb. 12:26:

“Once more I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations . . . .”

“At *that* time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens.”

That's us. Our position and identity in Christ are “in the heavens”. Here's what one author wrote on this:

“Because vast numbers who call themselves Christian are in a false position, and the system itself has become so largely an earthly, traditional, formal, and unspiritual thing, this worldwide shaking is absolutely necessary. If we were writing an (expose'), we could show that what is called 'Christianity' is really the greatest enemy of Christ. It will be seen that it is not a matter of substituting another and better system for an old or bad one. Some people seem to think that this is all a matter of the order, technique, and form, and if we returned to the "New Testament" form of churches, all would be well. The fact is that, while certain things *characterized* the New Testament churches, the New Testament does not give us a pattern according to which churches are to be set up or formed. There is no blue-print for churches in the New Testament, and to try to form New Testament churches is only to create another system which may be as legal, sectarian and dead as others. Spiritual churches are organisms which spring out of Life, which Life itself springs out of the Cross of Christ wrought into the very being of believers. Unless believers are crucified people, there can be no true expression of the Church.”

This end-time shaking that we are swiftly moving into, will place the Cross in between a failed Christianity and the spiritual remnant of God. And the inward work of that cross in us, will free us from attachment both to the world and to the Christian religion.

I'm going to read some comments by Sparks on this principle. His explanation on how this works is much better than anything I could come up with:

“The passion of the Cross is the way of our release, and if you consider your own spiritual experience, those of you who have any experience of a walk with God, you know quite well that it has been through times of deep and acute suffering that you have found new insights into true spiritual life. We pass into a time of excruciating spiritual and soul suffering. We do not know what the Lord is doing, what He means by this, what He is after, but we are suffering, and it goes on. We, of course, ask the Lord to stop it, to bring it to a quick end, to deliver us from it. He takes no notice of us, and it is only those people who get out the other end who say, ‘Thank God, He did not stop it.’ In the meantime, we think He is anything but kind and good and doing the right thing, but as we move forward under His hand, we begin to see and to sense that He is dealing with something. Maybe He is dealing with our pride, our independence, or our irresponsibility, for example. That is the issue that comes up, and we are faced all the time with something about ourselves that is almost devastating. We would not have believed that it was so strong in us. Of course, we were always ready to believe that this is in mankind, and in us, in a *general* way. We would never have resented being told that there was pride or unbelief in us, but we would never have believed how deeply rooted and strong that thing is, until it was put to a fiery test. And when we stop and consider, we know quite well that what the Lord was after was not to pulverize us (though it may have felt that way) but to bring about enlargement, and growth, and to bring about release, which always lies along the line of the Cross.”

When I've experienced these kinds of things, certain problems and questions have come up.

For example, have you ever read passages like 2 Cor. 1:3-5 and then felt guilty because you don't buy it, even though you know it has to be true?

Here's the passage;

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation. . . For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.”

Does He *really* comfort us in *all* our tribulation? Maybe this was never a question or struggle you've had, but it has been for me.

(Isa. 55:8-9) “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

That's not just poetry; that's reality.

Rom. 12:2 says that we desperately need “the renewing of our minds”. Because without that, we have no idea how to understand what the Lord is doing.

If we read further into the context of 2 Cor., we can see that Paul clearly explains what he means by “comforts us”.

(2 Cor. 7:5-7) “For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us. . . “

Paul talks about his need for comfort and encouragement, and this time he gets more specific – bodies stressed out, conflicts in our circumstance and fears inside.

So, how did God comfort Paul?

(vs. 6-7) “Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you.”

What Titus did for Paul, the Corinthians did for Titus.

What's amazing is that even after *our* Titus's come and encourage us, we still, in the back of our minds, want to know where God is.

‘Paul said that God comforts us in our tribulation. Titus is a great guy, but I need the Lord to do this.’

So, where's God? He's in Titus. Titus is God's embrace.

We may intellectually believe that we are the Body of Christ, but when the Lord acts for our benefit in *that spiritual reality*, we discover we don't really believe or understand the nature of our union with Christ or the ways of God in this age.

It's like when people tell me they believe me about how close we are to Christ's return, and then they start talking about watching their children grow up, or their "five-year plan" at work.

They *don't* believe – our actions and words expose our unbelief in a thousand things.

I'm going to digress for a few minutes and at first this might seem unnecessarily technical, but bear with me, I'll be making a point that I hope will be very practical.

I remember, a few years ago, crying at night in pain, begging God to talk to me if He wasn't going to heal me.

All I ever heard was silence.

But what the Lord *did* do, is begin to show me in the Word how communication with Him is meant to be in the Church Age – it's not like what we see in the Old Testament. It's not appearances of angels, or booming voices from heaven.

This is the age of the Holy Spirit communicating with *our* spirits.

Our outer man or natural man is our body and our soul. The five senses in our body receive input from the world; the soul can either receive from what the body takes in, or it can receive from the human spirit (assuming our spirit is increasingly becoming the source of communication to us of that which is spiritual).

The soul operates on what is rational and intellectual, just as the body interacts with the external world receiving that which is sensual.

The spirit receives from God – this is the organ God places within us for spiritual communication and understanding, and takes information in from the unseen world, just like the body takes in from the seen world.

The soul receives from both and hopefully places the spirit in the place of ascendancy over both itself (not letting intellect or reason rule) and over the body (not letting the world dictate our reality).

One way to put it might be to say that there is an inward reality and insight, through the spirit, that we could call spiritual instinct; and it's through this and our study of God's word that we are able to give a spiritual interpretation to what we see in the world and in the Church.

Other passages like, "Strengthened with all might by His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16), make no sense to the natural mind – the soulical mind. Because that strength is developed *in* our physical weakness.

To our soul, this is irrational. You can't be strong and weak at the same time.

To the spirit, it makes perfect sense because it's not *our* strength that God is demonstrating to others – it's *His*.

When we grow spiritually, we begin to discern the difference between soul and spirit. (Heb. 4:12) says that God 'divides' these within us and makes the function of each clearer.

Unless our soul is running our lives, our spirit is in *direct* communication with God, (normally through prayer and the Scriptures), and the Body of Christ is *indirect* communication from Him, but equally as vital to our spiritual life and encouragement.

The Lord uses His Body, just like our hand can rub the back of our neck to work out the kinks.

This is one of many reasons every member needs to be spiritually healthy. Our neck isn't going to get very comforted if our hand is paralyzed.

People don't go without comfort because the Lord is unwilling to help them; it's because either they have isolated themselves from other believers, or those they are with are non-functional.

We always tend to interpret the Bible with old creation concepts centered in emotion, rather than new creation, spiritual realities – so we go with how the world defines comfort, not how God defines it.

There is no way to overstate the importance of corporate life. It's not just in the area of encouragement. It ranges from "iron sharpening iron" to "what every joint supplies, when each part is working properly, causing the body to grow and mature, building itself up in love" (Amplified translation of Eph. 4:16)

And as we saw last week in Heb. 10:25, ". . . encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

God has arranged the diversity in every local assembly to have everything it will need to help each other and to move everyone to maturity.

Some will be young believers with less to offer, spiritually, than older, mature believers. But God's sovereignty brings together the perfect combination of people to ensure the potential of all in that assembly being encouraged and strengthened.

What the Lord will *not* do is override our free will.

Again, 2 Cor. 8, "If first there be a willing mind . . ."

Those who are in an unhealthy church, will experience gaps in mutual support and encouragement.

Titus didn't have to find Paul and comfort him. But in Titus' case, the Lord had a functional disciple He could use; one who would do His will.

We're given some incredible examples in Acts of what kind of church gets people's attention. Those examples show us healthy churches where diversity is expressed in compassion.

(Acts 2:44-46) "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

Genuine corporate life in a healthy church is an attention-getter. People were flooding in to be saved and become a part of this miraculous community of saints.

You'll notice too that the Christians themselves were 'filled with gladness, simplicity (single-mindedness) of heart and praise to God'.

I don't get the sense that a 'lack of comfort or encouragement' was a major concern for them.

What the world of the first century saw when they looked at the Church both confused and amazed them. They didn't realize it, but what they were seeing was Christ being formed in His followers.

They saw the Lord extending Himself into this world in His second Body, and that was the real attraction – the 'attention-getter'.

The world can't imitate Christ.

As I read this section of Acts that tells what happen to Stephen, think about how he's described, what he said at the end of his message and the character that that shows – identical to Christ on the Cross;

(Acts 6:8-7:60 – segments);

“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen . . . disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. Then they secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.’ And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw that his face was like the face of an angel . . . ‘You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.’ When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’ Then they cried out with a loud voice,

stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Stephen did great wonders and signs, his face shown like the face of an angel; he confronted the religious hypocrites; he commended his spirit to God and he prayed for his enemies' forgiveness as he was dying.

I don't know of another place in the scriptures that paints a more perfect picture of the Christ-life coming through one of His disciples.

This is where the Lord desires to take us. All around the world, the remnant will become the outshining of the indwelling life of Christ.

I'll close with some comments by Sparks on what we've been looking at:

"In the Church the Lord came to occupy a larger realm than Palestine alone. And it was something that at that time bore all the marks of God's good pleasure. The men and women were not perfect in themselves, but there was something so much of Christ there, that God is smiling upon it. The whole scene at the beginning of Acts is one of God being able to say: I am well pleased. God finding His home and His rest and His satisfaction . . . It only takes two 'in Christ' to be a microcosm of this whole wonderful thing that God is after. If there are only two of us somewhere, that has the potential of Life, because the Lord has said it. If there are three, so much the better; and if there are more, better still, but the principle, not the multitude, provides the Lord with that which makes it His pleasure to be there. Two or more hearts for the Lord, where the Lord alone is Lord. The Lord grant that out of this there may be inspired in our hearts this purpose and meaning in life, and we shall say as one said long ago: As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And if you want to know what serving the Lord is, it means giving to Him that upon which *His* heart is set."