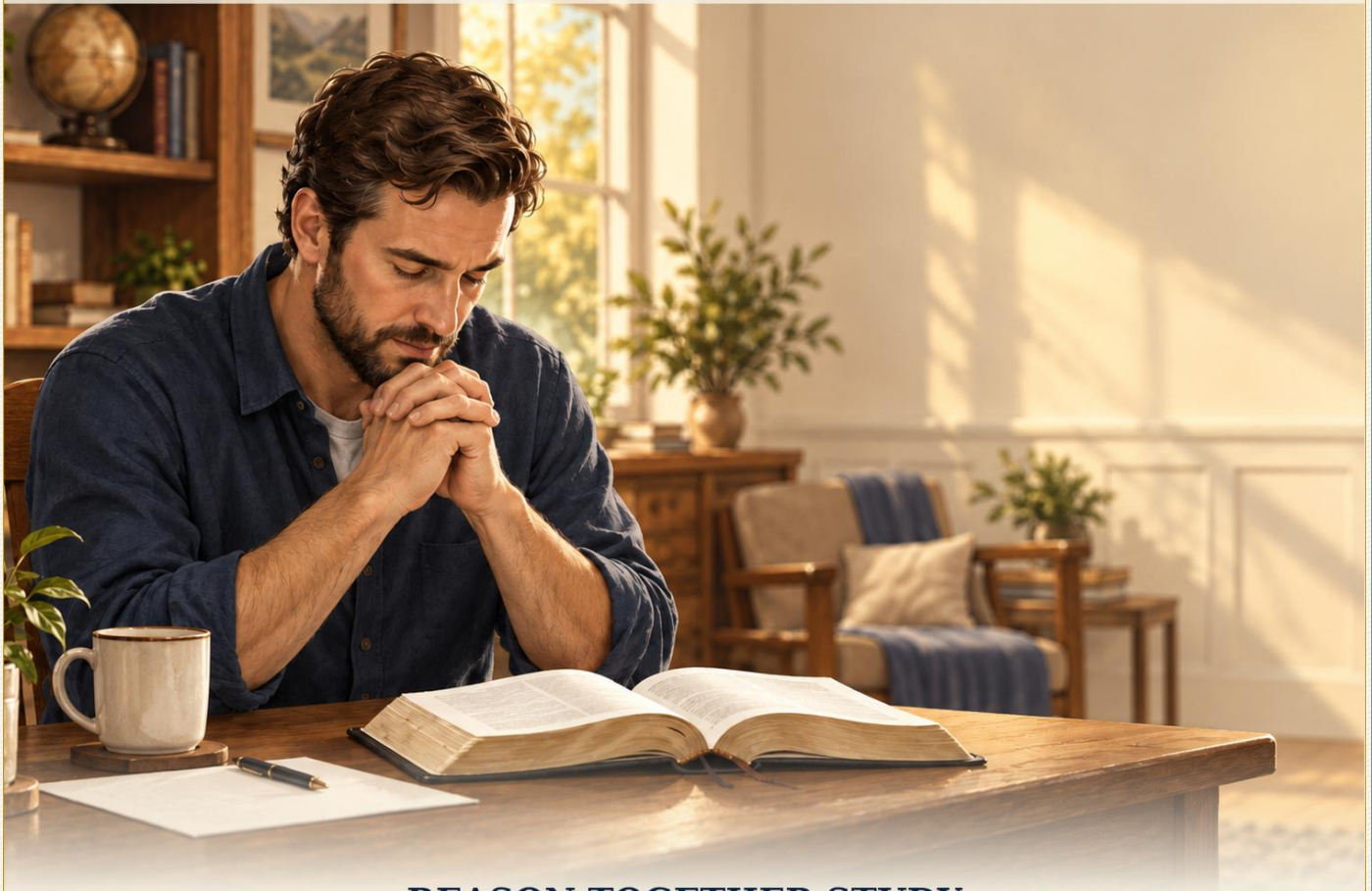


REASON TOGETHER CHURCH



REASON TOGETHER STUDY

HOW DO I KNOW WHETHER GOD IS SPEAKING TO ME?

1 THESSALONIANS 5:21

God's Word is infallible. Our interpretation of an inward impression is not.

SERMON & PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

HOW DO I KNOW WHETHER GOD IS SPEAKING TO ME?

Romans 12:1-2; James 1:13-17; James 3:13-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

How can a Christian test a thought, desire or perceived direction?

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Whether you have worshiped with us many times...

or whether this is your first time with us...

you are welcome here.

We are especially grateful for every honored guest who has joined us today.

Our invitation is simple.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father...

You are the God of truth.

You have not left us without light.

You have given us Your Word.

You have given every believer the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Yet we confess that our desires can be strong...

our fears can be loud...

and our understanding can be wrong.

Teach us to recognize what You have clearly said.

Teach us to test what we only think You may be saying.

Protect us from deception.

Protect us from pride.

Protect us from using Your name to strengthen our own opinions.

Renew our minds through Your Word.

Lead us toward Jesus Christ.

We ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Our opening Scripture is Romans chapter twelve, verses one and two.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

"that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

That word prove will matter today.

Paul does not tell us to believe every thought that enters our minds.

He tells us to be transformed.

He tells us to prove what is good.

He tells us that discernment grows as the mind is renewed.

Before we begin the study, I want our guests to know how we handle giving.

We do not pass an offering plate.

Guests are not expected to give.

If you are a member of another church, please continue supporting your home church.

For anyone who desires to give as the Lord leads, there is a giving box in the back.

If this is your first time with us, a guest card is available.

We ask only for your first name and email address.

After the service, you are invited to Reason Together Cafe.

COFFEE means Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.

The coffee is free...

and so are the refills on conversations.

Children are also welcome in our Keiki Kids Center.

Today we are asking a question that almost every sincere Christian eventually asks.

How do I know whether God is speaking to me?

Perhaps you have faced a decision about employment.

A better job becomes available.

The salary is higher.

The timing seems remarkable.

A friend says, "God opened that door."

On Sunday, the preacher says something about stepping out in faith.

On Monday, your present job becomes unusually difficult.

You feel excited about leaving...

but you also feel uneasy.

Is God directing you toward the new job?

Is Satan trying to make you afraid?

Is personal ambition interpreting every event?

Is your friend placing pressure upon you?

Or has God given you two lawful choices and called you to exercise wisdom?

Those are not imaginary questions.

Christians make life-changing decisions because they believe God spoke.

Some leave jobs.

Some begin ministries.

Some enter relationships.

Some give away money.

Some confront family members.

Some move across the country.

Sometimes they were wise.

Sometimes they were mistaken.

And sometimes they used the name of God to avoid admitting that the decision was their own.

So we must begin with a distinction.

God's Word is infallible.

Our interpretation of an inward impression is not.

When Scripture speaks, God has spoken.

When I experience a strong thought, I may have understood correctly...

or I may have misunderstood.

Hebrews chapter one begins this way.

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets..."

"Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son..."

God is not silent.

He spoke through the prophets.

He spoke supremely through His Son.

He gave us inspired Scripture.

Second Timothy chapter three says...

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness..."

"That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

The Bible is not one voice sitting beside several equal voices.

The Bible is the standard that tests every other claim.

We must never place "I feel" beside "It is written" as though both possess the same authority.

That does not mean the Holy Spirit is inactive.

The Spirit inspired the Word.

The Spirit indwells the believer.

The Spirit convicts of sin.

The Spirit teaches, sanctifies and produces fruit.

The Spirit can bring a passage to our attention and show us where we have refused its truth.

But we need words that help us speak carefully.

Revelation is truth communicated by God with divine authority.

Illumination is the Holy Spirit helping us understand and apply truth God has already revealed.

Conviction is the Spirit exposing sin and directing us toward repentance and obedience.

Wisdom is the ability to apply Biblical truth to a situation Scripture does not address by name.

Providence is God's sovereign ordering of circumstances whether or not He explains His purpose beforehand.

An inward impression is a thought, burden, inclination or sense of direction within us.

These are not interchangeable.

If I read, "Thou shalt not steal," I do not need to pray for a private exception.

God has spoken.

If the Spirit uses that command to expose dishonesty in my business, that is conviction and application.

If I must choose between two honest business practices, Scripture may give principles without naming the precise choice.

Then I need wisdom.

And after I choose, God may direct the outcome through providence.

God can lead me without giving me a private message.

Consider Ruth.

Ruth went out to glean because she and Naomi needed food.

She used the opportunity God's law provided for the poor.

Ruth 2:3 says that "her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz."

From Ruth's immediate viewpoint, she chose a field.

From the viewpoint of the whole book, God was directing a redemptive history larger than Ruth could see.

The text never says that Ruth heard a private voice naming Boaz's field.

She acted faithfully...

and providence was already at work.

That should relieve some of us.

God's sovereignty does not depend upon our ability to interpret every impression perfectly.

We also need to reject another oversimplification.

Not every thought comes either directly from God or directly from Satan.

The Bible speaks about the world...

the flesh...

and the devil.

Other people influence us.

Culture trains us.

Fear affects us.

Exhaustion affects us.

Past wounds affect us.

Our ordinary reasoning produces countless thoughts every day.

James chapter one says...

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God..."

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."

"Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin..."

James does not allow us to blame God.

He also does not permit us to blame Satan for every desire that grows within our own hearts.

Satanic temptation is real.

Yet sometimes the thought sounds like us because it is ours.

We may even have mixed motives.

A desire to serve can be mixed with a desire to be noticed.

A desire to protect can be mixed with fear.

A desire to confront wrongdoing can be mixed with anger.

A desire to provide can be mixed with greed.

A desire to move forward can be mixed with impatience.

The presence of one good motive does not make every part of the decision good.

Proverbs 16:2 says...

"All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits."

That is why a mature Christian asks more than, "What do I want?"

He asks, "Why do I want it?"

She asks, "Would I still call this God's leading if the answer were no?"

We must be willing for God to disagree with us.

Now listen to 1 Thessalonians chapter five.

"Quench not the Spirit."

"Despise not prophesyings."

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

"Abstain from all appearance of evil."

Notice the balance.

Do not quench the Spirit.

Do not despise what claims to be a spiritual message.

But do not believe it automatically.

Prove all things.

Test them.

Examine them.

Hold fast to what is good.

Reject what is evil.

Testing a spiritual claim is not rebellion against God.

Testing honors the God of truth.

First John 4:1 says...

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God..."

John was addressing false prophets and their teaching about Christ.

He was not giving us a quick technique for labeling every private thought.
But he establishes a permanent responsibility.
Spiritual language does not excuse us from examination.
Sincerity is not enough.
Confidence is not enough.
Supernatural appearance is not enough.
The first test is Scripture.
Does the proposed direction agree with the Bible correctly understood?
God will never lead you to disobey what He has revealed.
No dream can cancel a command.
No open door can make sin righteous.
No inward peace can make adultery holy.
No prophecy can replace the Gospel.
No religious leader can use a private revelation to overrule the Word of God.
If someone says, "God told me not to forgive," the claim has failed.
If someone says, "God told me to deceive these people for a good purpose," the claim has failed.
If someone says, "God told me to leave my faithful spouse for another person," the claim has failed.
We do not need a second sign.
God has already spoken.
But we must add the words correctly understood.
Satan knows how to quote Scripture.
In Matthew chapter four, Satan told Jesus to cast Himself from the pinnacle of the temple.
Then Satan quoted Psalm 91.
"He shall give his angels charge concerning thee..."
The words came from the Bible.
The application did not come from God.
Satan tried to turn a promise of protection into permission to test the Father.
Jesus replied...
"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."
Jesus answered distorted Scripture with Scripture rightly applied.
Finding a verse is not the same as understanding a verse.

Opening the Bible randomly and pointing to a sentence is not interpretation.

Hearing a sermon about an open door is not proof that your opportunity is God's command.

A repeated verse may direct our attention toward Scripture...

but repetition does not decide what the verse means.

The Word must govern our conclusion.

It must not merely decorate a conclusion we already chose.

Now consider Peter in Matthew chapter sixteen.

Peter confessed that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus said flesh and blood had not revealed that truth to him, but the Father in heaven.

Soon afterward, Jesus spoke about going to Jerusalem and dying.

Peter rebuked Him.

Peter was sincere.

Peter loved Jesus.

Peter wanted to protect Him.

Yet Jesus answered...

"Get thee behind me, Satan..."

The same disciple spoke glorious truth and then voiced an idea aligned with Satan's opposition to the cross.

One spiritual insight did not make Peter's next conclusion infallible.

Pastors can be wrong.

Teachers can be wrong.

Mature Christians can be wrong.

I can be wrong.

You can be wrong.

Humility is not weakness in discernment.

Humility is part of discernment.

Second Samuel chapter seven gives another important example.

David told Nathan that he wanted to build a house for the ark of God.

Nathan replied, "Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee."

That sounded reasonable.

David's desire sounded honorable.

Nathan was a prophet.

Yet that night the Word of the Lord corrected the conclusion.

David would not build the house.

Nathan had spoken too quickly from an understandable human judgment.

God corrected him.

Good intentions do not transform immediate judgment into revelation.

This is why we must examine peace, doors, fleeces and signs.

Peace is a precious gift.

Philippians chapter four teaches us to pray rather than be consumed by anxious care.

The peace of God guards the heart and mind through Christ Jesus.

Colossians chapter three tells the church to let the peace of God rule in their hearts because they were called in one body.

But neither passage says that a calm feeling makes every choice correct.

Jonah slept during a storm while running from God.

Some people feel peaceful because they have silenced their conscience.

Other people feel anxious while obeying because obedience is frightening.

Jesus experienced agony in Gethsemane and still obeyed perfectly.

God may give peace.

Peace does not make our interpretation infallible.

What about an open door?

An open door may be an opportunity.

It may also be a temptation.

A closed door may be God's protection.

It may also be an obstacle that faithful perseverance must overcome.

Paul spoke of a great and effectual door being opened unto him...

and he added, "there are many adversaries."

An open door and opposition existed together.

Ease does not prove approval.

Difficulty does not prove Satanic resistance.

What about Gideon's fleece?

By the time Gideon placed the fleece upon the ground, God had already told him what to do.

The fleece was not Gideon discovering an unknown command.

It was Gideon asking for reassurance after receiving one.

God was patient with Gideon's weakness.

The passage describes God's mercy.

It does not command Christians to invent tests for God.

Jesus said, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

What about results?

Success does not prove that God authorized a decision.

Sin can appear profitable for a season.

Failure does not prove that a believer disobeyed.

Prophets suffered.

Apostles were imprisoned.

Jesus was crucified.

Outcomes matter, but outcomes cannot replace truth.

Then how do we discern?

James chapter three gives us one of the clearest answers.

"Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom."

James describes earthly wisdom as marked by bitter envying, strife, confusion and every evil work.

Then he says...

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated..."

"full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

James does not tell us to identify wisdom by a mysterious sensation.

He tells us to examine its character and fruit.

Is this direction pure?

Does it require compromise?

Is it peaceable without surrendering truth?

Am I gentle with people who disagree?

Am I easy to be intreated?

That means I am open to reason.

If no one is allowed to question my claim, I am not displaying the wisdom James describes.

Is the decision full of mercy?
Does it produce good fruit?
Am I impartial?
Am I honest?
Or am I pretending to seek God's will after deciding what I intend to do?
Romans twelve brings us back to the renewed mind.
Present your whole life to God.
Refuse the pressure of the world.
Allow Scripture to reshape your thinking.
Then prove what is good, acceptable and perfect.
This gives us three broad categories.
When Scripture commands something, obey.
You do not need a sign before telling the truth.
You do not need a dream before forgiving.
You do not need a prophecy before loving your neighbor.
When Scripture forbids something, reject it.
No opportunity or emotion supplies an exception.
When Scripture permits several choices, seek wisdom.
Pray.
Study Biblical principles.
Examine your motives.
Seek qualified counsel.
Consider your responsibilities.
Count the cost.
Make the wisest lawful choice you can make.
Then trust God with what you cannot know.
Sometimes the most spiritual decision is not waiting for another sign.
It is using the wisdom God has already provided.
Qualified counsel matters.
Proverbs says, "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety."

But counsel must be real counsel.

Do not ask only people who will agree.

Do not hide important facts.

Do not punish the counselor who gives an unwanted answer.

The wise person wants informed counsel from people who know Scripture, understand the situation and are free to disagree.

The church in Acts chapter fifteen prayed, discussed, listened to testimony, examined Scripture and reached a shared judgment.

Acts chapter thirteen shows leaders praying and fasting together before Barnabas and Saul were sent.

Christian discernment is personal...

but it was never designed to be proudly isolated.

Acts chapters twenty and twenty-one show another complication.

Paul knew through the Spirit that bonds and afflictions awaited him in Jerusalem.

Other believers urged him not to go.

The information about suffering was real.

The application was debated.

People may agree about facts and disagree about what obedience requires.

That is one reason we must distinguish a message from our interpretation of it.

We must also change the way we use the sentence, "God told me."

When God has spoken in Scripture, say so clearly.

"God has said in His Word."

When you are describing a personal conclusion, use language that tells the truth about your certainty.

"I have prayed about this."

"I believe the Lord may be leading me."

"This appears to be the wisest course."

"I could be mistaken, but I am trying to act faithfully."

That language does not deny God.

It refuses to make God responsible for our fallible interpretation.

This becomes especially important when the claim affects another person.

"God told me you must marry me."

"God told me you must give this ministry money."

"God told me that your disagreement is rebellion."

"God told me you must leave your church."

Those statements place divine pressure upon another person's conscience.

No private impression gives one Christian ownership of another Christian's decision.

If God is leading you, you may obey Him without pretending that your impression eliminates another person's consent or responsibility.

And what happens when we were wrong?

We admit it.

We do not say that God changed His mind merely to protect our reputation.

We do not blame people for failing to make our prediction come true.

We accept responsibility.

We apologize where necessary.

We correct what we said.

We make restitution when someone was harmed.

Then we continue walking with God.

A mistaken decision does not place a believer beyond grace.

God is greater than our ability to read every circumstance correctly.

There is one more pastoral boundary we must state.

Some people experience persistent voices that seem external and commanding.

Not every such experience is demonic.

Severe sleep deprivation, medication effects, substance use, trauma, mental illness and neurological conditions can affect perception.

If a voice commands you to harm yourself or another person, do not obey it.

Tell a trusted person immediately.

Seek pastoral help and medical help.

If the danger is immediate, contact emergency services.

Seeking medical care does not deny prayer or spiritual reality.

It recognizes that God made both body and mind and that we should respond responsibly to danger.

Now we come to the center of the Gospel.

Our deepest problem is not that we sometimes misunderstand a feeling.

Our deepest problem is sin.

We have ignored what God clearly said.

We have followed our own desires.

We have called darkness light.

We have sometimes used God's name to strengthen our wishes.

But Jesus Christ heard and obeyed the Father perfectly.

In the wilderness, He rejected Satan's distortion.

He refused bread outside the Father's will.

He refused to test God.

He refused a kingdom gained through worshiping the enemy.

In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed...

"Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."

Jesus did not pretend the cup was painless.

He placed His honest desire beneath the Father's will.

Then He went to the cross.

He bore the judgment our sin deserved.

He died.

He was buried.

On the third day, He rose again.

Salvation does not rest upon your ability to interpret every impression perfectly.

Salvation rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ.

If you have never trusted Him, the most important voice is not a whisper within you.

It is the clear testimony of the Gospel.

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Turn from sin.

Trust Jesus Christ.

Receive the forgiveness you cannot earn.

If you desire to trust Christ today, you may speak to Him from your heart.

The prayer does not save you.

Jesus saves the sinner who comes to Him in faith.

You may pray...

Lord Jesus...

I know that I am a sinner.

I cannot save myself.

I believe that You died for my sins...

that You were buried...

and that You rose again.

I turn from my sin and place my trust in You.

Forgive me.

Save me.

Teach me to follow Your Word.

I ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

For the believer facing a decision today, begin with what God has already said.

Where Scripture commands, obey.

Where Scripture forbids, refuse.

Where Scripture gives principles, apply them carefully.

Where Scripture gives freedom, choose wisely.

Where you remain uncertain, speak humbly.

You do not have to identify the supernatural origin of every thought.

You must test whether following that thought would be true, holy and wise.

Search the Scriptures.

Examine your motives.

Pray for wisdom.

Seek honest counsel.

Respect the conscience and consent of others.

Accept responsibility for your decision.

Then trust the providence of God.

Let us close in prayer.

Father, thank You for speaking through Your Word.

Thank You for the Holy Spirit who convicts, teaches and sanctifies Your people.

Forgive us for the times we have called our own desire Your command.

Forgive us for demanding signs when You have already spoken.

Forgive us for using Your name to pressure others.

Give us pure hearts and renewed minds.

Make us willing to hear correction.

Give wisdom to every person facing a difficult decision.

Comfort those who are afraid they have missed Your purpose.

Remind us that Your providence is greater than our understanding.

Help us hold fast that which is good and abstain from evil.

We pray for every person who trusted Christ today.

Lead them into Your Word and into fellowship with Your people.

We ask all of this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Test every claim beneath the Word of God.

Obey what God has made clear.

Choose wisely where God has given freedom.

And trust the Lord who directs your steps.

Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

HOW DO I KNOW WHETHER GOD IS SPEAKING TO ME?

Romans 12:1-2; James 1:13-17; James 3:13-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

How can a Christian test a thought, desire or perceived direction?

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Commentary in Brief

CENTRAL CONCLUSION: God speaks infallibly in Scripture, while Christians interpret impressions fallibly. The Spirit genuinely leads God's children, especially into holiness, truth and Christlike life. Scripture commands the church to test spiritual claims. It does not promise that every believer will identify the exact origin of every thought.

The controlling method is to begin with revealed truth. A thought that contradicts Scripture must be rejected. A command of Scripture should be obeyed without waiting for an additional sign. When Scripture allows several choices, a renewed mind applies Biblical wisdom, counsel and responsibility while trusting providence.

1. Hebrews 1:1-2

The opening word "God" controls the sentence. Biblical faith begins with the God who acts and speaks. He spoke "at sundry times and in divers manners," acknowledging the varied forms of Old Testament revelation: prophetic speech, visions, dreams, enacted signs and direct encounters. Variety in past revelation does not imply that every religious experience carries equal authority.

"Spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets" identifies authorized messengers within covenant history. A prophet did not merely offer spiritual advice. A true prophet spoke under divine commission and could be judged by God's earlier revelation and by the truth of what was declared.

"Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" establishes culmination. The Son is not one messenger among many. The surrounding verses identify Him as heir, Creator and the express image of God's person. Christian discernment is therefore Christ-centered. Any claimed message that diminishes Christ, alters His Gospel or moves allegiance away from Him fails at the foundation.

The verse does not support the claim that God became inactive after Biblical revelation. It does establish that Christ is God's decisive speech. The question for modern claims is not whether God possesses the power to speak, but whether the claimed message agrees with the revelation completed in Christ and faithfully witnessed in Scripture.

2. Second Timothy 3:16-17

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God" translates the idea of Scripture as God-breathed. Its authority derives from God, not from the reader's emotional response. Scripture remains God's Word when it feels immediately relevant and when it confronts a desire the reader would prefer to keep.

Scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness. These functions directly serve discernment. Doctrine teaches what is true. Reproof exposes error. Correction restores the proper path. Instruction trains a pattern of righteous life.

"That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" describes adequacy and equipment. Paul does not claim that Scripture names every future circumstance. Scripture equips the believer with truth, character and wisdom necessary to act faithfully within circumstances.

The passage establishes an authority hierarchy. An inward impression may send a believer back to Scripture, but the impression never sits in judgment over Scripture. If the two conflict, the impression must yield.

3. Romans 12:1

"I beseech you therefore" connects Christian obedience with the mercies of God developed in Romans 1-11. Discernment does not begin as a technique. It begins as a response to grace.

"Present your bodies a living sacrifice" requires the whole embodied life. The believer does not offer God only the decision under consideration while reserving motives, ambitions and relationships. Surrender includes the desired outcome.

"Holy, acceptable unto God" supplies moral direction before a private question is answered. God's revealed holiness narrows the field of lawful choice. No impression can make an unholy act acceptable.

"Reasonable service" joins worship with thoughtful response. The term can carry the sense of rational or spiritual service. Paul does not oppose devotion and reason. Renewed judgment belongs within worship.

4. Romans 12:2

"Be not conformed to this world" recognizes external pressure. The world supplies patterns of success, identity, pleasure and approval. Peer pressure may sound ordinary rather than spiritual, yet it can govern a decision unless resisted.

"Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" places discernment within sanctification. Transformation is not achieved by chasing increasingly intense impressions. The mind is reshaped through Gospel truth, Scripture, obedience and the Spirit's continuing work.

"That ye may prove" uses dokimazo, a verb associated with testing and approving after examination. The renewed mind learns to recognize what accords with God. Discernment therefore requires moral formation, not merely information.

"What is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" first concerns a life pleasing to God. The verse does not promise the name, date and location of every personal choice. It teaches believers to approve God's will as their thinking is transformed.

5. James 1:13

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God" excludes God as the moral source of temptation. God's holiness is not one clue among several. Any supposed direction toward sin is incompatible with His character.

"For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" protects God's name from human blame. A person cannot assign divine responsibility to an evil desire merely because it arrived with force or religious language.

6. James 1:14-15

"Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." James assigns agency to personal desire. The word translated "lust" refers to strong desire and receives its moral quality from its object and operation. Here it draws the person toward sin.

The progression from desire to conception, sin and death shows development. A thought may be noticed before it is embraced. Temptation is not identical with consent. The believer is responsible for what he nurtures and obeys.

This passage corrects the assumption that every inward conflict is a direct conversation between God and Satan. The flesh has desires. Those desires may be intensified by external temptation, but responsibility cannot be escaped by naming Satan.

7. James 1:16-17

"Do not err, my beloved brethren" warns against deception concerning God's character. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." What comes from the Father reflects His goodness.

The Father is described as having no variableness or shadow of turning. Human impressions change. God's moral character does not. Discernment begins with the stable goodness revealed in God rather than the changing intensity of an experience.

8. James 3:13

James asks who is wise and knowledgeable, then requires demonstration through "a good conversation," meaning manner of life. Wisdom is shown by works performed in meekness. Loud certainty is not proof of heavenly wisdom.

Meekness does not mean indecision. It means strength submitted to God and expressed without self-exaltation. A claimed leading that makes the claimant uncorrectable already conflicts with this posture.

9. James 3:14-16

Bitter envying and strife must not be hidden beneath boasting or lies against the truth. The heart's motive matters. Religious explanation can conceal rivalry and ambition.

James calls such wisdom earthly, sensual and devilish. "Earthly" locates its horizon below.

"Sensual" describes natural or unspiritual life. "Devilish" identifies demonic character. James distinguishes categories while showing that their fruit can converge.

"Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." Confusion is not merely an uncomfortable feeling. It is disorder produced by self-seeking. The verse should not be turned into the formula that any momentary uncertainty proves Satan is speaking.

10. James 3:17-18

Wisdom from above is "first pure." Moral purity takes priority. Peace cannot be used to excuse impurity because purity comes first.

It is "then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated." Heavenly wisdom seeks peace without sacrificing truth. It treats others gently and remains open to reason. The phrase "easy to be intreated" is especially important for guidance claims. A person who declares that questions are rebellion does not display the quality James commends.

Wisdom is "full of mercy and good fruits." Discernment becomes visible in treatment of people and in the life it produces. It is "without partiality, and without hypocrisy." The believer must not adjust standards to favor a desired outcome or pretend surrender while protecting a predetermined choice.

Verse 18 connects righteousness with peacemaking. Wise decisions should be evaluated over time by their righteous fruit, though results never replace Scripture as the standard.

11. First Thessalonians 5:19-20

"Quench not the Spirit" uses the image of extinguishing fire. The church must not suppress the Spirit's work through unbelief or resistance.

"Despise not prophesyings" addresses claimed spiritual speech in the gathered church. The command prevents cynical dismissal. Paul does not then command automatic acceptance. He immediately requires testing.

The combination is essential for RTS-112. Openness without examination becomes credulity. Examination without openness can become hardened suspicion. Biblical discernment practices both reverence and testing.

12. First Thessalonians 5:21-22

"Prove all things" again uses dokimazo. The object is comprehensive within the context of claimed spiritual speech. Every claim remains accountable.

"Hold fast that which is good" shows that testing has a positive purpose. The church should retain what survives examination. Discernment is not endless hesitation.

"Abstain from all appearance of evil" is often understood as avoiding every form or kind of evil, not merely avoiding conduct that might look questionable to observers. Once evil is recognized, the believer must separate from it.

13. First John 4:1

"Beloved, believe not every spirit" assumes that supernatural claims may be false. Spiritual language, signs or confident delivery cannot replace examination.

"Try the spirits whether they are of God" addresses the source through the content of prophetic teaching. John explains the need: "many false prophets are gone out into the world." The human messenger and spiritual influence are evaluated together.

The verse is relevant to sermons, prophecies and doctrinal claims. Its use for private thoughts must be qualified. John does not give a sensation-based method for detecting the origin of ordinary cognition.

14. First John 4:2-3

The confession that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is the immediate Christological test. False teaching concerning the incarnation reveals a spirit not of God.

This test is more substantial than the mere pronouncement of Jesus' name. The message must confess the Biblical person and work of Christ. Deception can use Christian vocabulary while redefining Christ.

15. First John 4:4-6

"Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" assures believers of God's preserving presence. The verse does not encourage fascination with Satan. Christians test from a position of belonging to God.

John contrasts worldly reception with apostolic hearing: "He that knoweth God heareth us." The "us" points to authorized apostolic witness. "Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." Agreement with apostolic truth remains decisive.

16. Matthew 4:1-4

Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness and tempted by the devil. Being within God's will does not eliminate testing, hardship or hunger. Difficulty cannot by itself prove that a believer missed God.

The tempter begins, "If thou be the Son of God." He tries to turn identity into independent action. Jesus answers from Deuteronomy: man lives by every word proceeding from God. Obedience governs appetite.

17. Matthew 4:5-7

The devil quotes Psalm 91 while urging Jesus to cast Himself from the temple. The quotation is substantially true, but the proposed action is a false application. Scripture can be cited within temptation.

Jesus responds, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." One passage must be read with the whole counsel of God. A promise of protection is not permission to create danger in order to force divine proof.

This directly challenges random-verse guidance and the use of isolated promises as guarantees of a preferred result.

18. Matthew 4:8-11

Satan offers kingdoms through worship. The offer seeks a destination resembling Christ's future reign by a path opposed to the Father. A desirable result cannot sanctify disobedient means.

Jesus commands Satan to depart and cites exclusive worship. The identity of the voice becomes clear through its contradiction of loyalty to God.

19. Matthew 16:16-17

Peter confesses Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus identifies the Father as the source of this revealed truth. Peter receives genuine insight.

20. Matthew 16:21-23

When Jesus announces His suffering and death, Peter rebukes Him. Jesus answers, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Peter's protective affection aligns with Satan's opposition to the cross.

The narrative warns against assigning continuing infallibility to a person because that person previously spoke truth. Love, sincerity and spiritual experience do not guarantee the next conclusion.

21. Second Samuel 7:1-5

David desires to build a house for the ark. Nathan answers, "Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee." The judgment sounds natural and honorable.

That night the word of the Lord redirects the plan. Nathan must return and correct his earlier counsel. The episode distinguishes immediate pastoral judgment from revealed speech and models accountability after correction.

22. Judges 6:36-40

Gideon asks for dew on the fleece and then for the reverse sign. God has already commissioned him and provided earlier confirmation. The requests therefore concern reassurance more than discovery.

Narrative description does not equal command. God's patience with Gideon reveals mercy toward weakness, but the passage never directs believers to devise arbitrary tests. A fleece can also become an attempt to transfer responsibility to an event of our choosing.

23. First Samuel 3:1-10

The word of the Lord was precious and open vision was not widespread. Samuel hears an identifiable call and initially assumes Eli summoned him. Eli eventually perceives that the Lord is calling.

God's message becomes clear and carries prophetic content. This is not an ambiguous mood. Samuel's role in redemptive history cautions against turning the event into a universal expectation of audible guidance for daily choices.

24. First Kings 19:11-13

Wind, earthquake and fire precede the "still small voice." The Lord is not said to be in the dramatic signs. The Hebrew wording can suggest a gentle whisper or a sound of thin silence. The passage teaches that God is not confined to spectacle. Yet God then communicates comprehensible instructions to His prophet. The narrative is not a command to empty the mind and treat the quietest inner thought as divine.

25. Jeremiah 23:16-18

Jeremiah warns against prophets who make people vain and speak "a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD." The contrast is between God's speech and human imagination.

Verse 18 asks who has stood in the Lord's counsel and perceived His word. Confidence and popularity do not establish authorization.

26. Jeremiah 23:25-32

False prophets report dreams and cause people to forget God's name. God compares His word to fire and a hammer. He opposes those who steal words from one another and say, "He saith."

The repeated condemnation establishes a serious boundary. Attaching God's name to an unauthorized message is not harmless spiritual enthusiasm.

27. Ezekiel 13:1-9

The prophets "follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing." They claim peace and divine speech without revelation. The passage shows that an internal religious impulse can be mislabeled as God's word.

The corrective is not contempt for all spiritual ministry. It is submission to what God has actually revealed and accountability for claims made in His name.

28. John 10:27-29

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." The shepherd imagery concerns relationship, recognition and saving allegiance. The sheep hear because they belong to Christ, while unbelieving opponents refuse Him.

Jesus gives eternal life and promises that no one will pluck His sheep from His hand. The main assurance is preservation, not a technique for identifying private directives.

The text may support the broad truth that Christ's people respond to Him. It should not be made to promise that every Christian will distinguish an inward sentence as Christ's voice without error.

29. Romans 8:12-14

Paul contrasts living after the flesh with mortifying the deeds of the body through the Spirit. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" summarizes a Spirit-directed life marked by warfare against sin.

The passage concerns adoption and holiness. It does not name impressions, signs or individualized information as the defining evidence of sonship.

30. Galatians 5:16-25

Walking in the Spirit opposes fulfilling the lust of the flesh. The works of the flesh and fruit of the Spirit provide observable moral categories.

Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance describe character formed over time. One peaceful feeling is not equivalent to the fruit of peace. Fruit concerns the life produced under the Spirit's rule.

Verse 25 joins life and walk: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Guidance is inseparable from daily sanctification.

31. Colossians 3:15-17

"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body." The corporate phrase controls the immediate application. Paul calls divided believers to Christ-governed peace.

The word of Christ is to dwell richly among them through teaching, admonition and worship. Peace and the Word belong together. Peace cannot be isolated as a private decision oracle.

The believer may consider settled peace as one pastoral factor, but it cannot override Scripture, wisdom, responsibilities or counsel.

32. Philippians 4:6-9

Paul addresses anxious care with prayer, supplication and thanksgiving. God's peace guards hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. The promised peace concerns God's keeping presence amid prayer.

Paul then directs thought toward what is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, reputable, virtuous and praiseworthy. The passage joins prayer with disciplined thought. It does not replace thinking with feeling.

33. Proverbs 11:14 and 15:22

Safety and established purposes arise through a multitude of counselors. Counsel exposes blind spots and supplies information one person lacks.

The principle can be defeated by selecting only agreeable voices. Counsel should be qualified, independent, informed and permitted to challenge the proposed decision.

34. Acts 13:1-3

Prophets and teachers minister to the Lord and fast. The Holy Ghost directs the setting apart of Barnabas and Saul. The community then fasts, prays, lays hands upon them and sends them.

The passage records direct guidance while emphasizing corporate recognition and accountability. Private spiritual experience is not isolated from the church.

35. Acts 15:1-29

The Jerusalem council considers doctrinal controversy through debate, testimony, apostolic leadership and Scripture. James cites the prophets and proposes a judgment. The final letter states, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us."

The statement joins divine guidance and responsible communal reasoning. It does not depict leaders bypassing discussion with an untestable claim.

36. Acts 16:6-10

Paul's group is forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach in Asia and prevented from entering Bithynia. Paul then sees the Macedonian vision. Afterward, "we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering" that God called them.

Luke's language of gathering or concluding shows interpretation by the group. Extraordinary revelation leads to reasoned application and common action.

37. Acts 20:22-24 and Acts 21:4-14

Paul goes bound in the spirit while the Holy Ghost witnesses that bonds and afflictions await him. Later disciples say through the Spirit that he should not go, and Agabus predicts binding. Interpretations differ. Some believe Paul disobeyed a prohibition. Others distinguish the Spirit's warning from the disciples' conclusion that danger meant Paul should not proceed. The narrative at least demonstrates that information about suffering does not interpret itself.

The final response, "The will of the Lord be done," recognizes that faithful believers may reach the limit of persuasion and entrust the outcome to God.

38. Providence and Planning

Proverbs 16:9 says, "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps." Human planning and divine direction are placed together. Planning does not threaten sovereignty.

James 4:13-15 condemns proud certainty about tomorrow and teaches, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." The correction is humble dependence, not the abandonment of plans.

Paul's letters record intended journeys, delays, hindrances and conditional language. Providence often becomes visible retrospectively. The believer need not turn every circumstance into a coded message.

39. Commands Prohibitions and Wisdom Choices

When Scripture clearly commands, obedience should not wait for another sign. Truthfulness, forgiveness, sexual holiness, love, justice and worship already bear divine authority.

When Scripture forbids, an impression cannot create an exception. The claim fails even if circumstances appear favorable.

When Scripture allows several choices, the believer should apply principles. Responsibilities, gifts, resources, likely consequences, counsel and the needs of others matter. More than one option may please God.

Christian freedom does not promise equal outcomes. A lawful choice may still be unwise.

Wisdom accepts responsibility without claiming secret certainty.

40. The Language of Guidance

"God has said in His Word" identifies an objective authority that others can examine. "I believe the Lord may be leading me" identifies a personal conclusion.

Humble qualification is not lack of faith. It prevents a fallible interpretation from borrowing God's infallibility. The speaker remains open to correction.

The danger increases when the claim binds another person. A private impression cannot supply another person's consent, settle a marriage proposal, compel a donation or silence appropriate questions about leadership.

41. Correction After Error

Nathan's return to David illustrates correction. A Christian who mistakenly attributed a conclusion to God should admit the mistake, correct the record and apologize to those affected.

Failed outcomes do not always prove disobedience, and successful outcomes do not always prove approval. The correction should focus upon the unsupported claim rather than rewriting providence to preserve reputation.

Grace remains. The believer's standing rests in Christ. Honest correction can become evidence of maturity.

42. Pastoral Safety

Persistent voices may be associated with spiritual, medical, psychological or substance-related factors. Scripture does not authorize a pastor to make a diagnosis merely from the religious content of an experience.

Commands to harm oneself or others must not be obeyed. The person should disclose the experience immediately, avoid isolation and seek appropriate emergency, medical and pastoral help. Prayer and competent care can proceed together.

Intrusive thoughts are not equivalent to chosen desires. People suffering obsessive fear may need help resisting repeated reassurance rituals while learning to rest in objective Gospel truth.

43. Gospel Center

Human discernment fails because sin affects desire, judgment and worship. The answer is not self-confidence refined by a spiritual technique.

Jesus resisted Satan with Scripture rightly applied. He refused appetite outside obedience, refused to test the Father and refused rule gained through idolatry. In Gethsemane He submitted His real anguish to the Father's will.

At the cross, Christ bore the judgment of sinners who ignored God's clear voice. He rose from the dead and gives forgiveness, new life and the indwelling Spirit to all who trust Him.

Salvation therefore rests upon Christ's finished work, not upon flawless interpretation of private experience. Discernment grows as a fruit of grace.

44. Final Pastoral Summary

The congregation should leave with confidence concerning what God has revealed and humility concerning what He has not. Scripture is clear enough to command obedience and sufficient to form wisdom. The Spirit is present and active. Providence is dependable even when its meaning is hidden.

The mature believer does not need to name the source of every thought before testing its content. What contradicts Scripture is rejected. What Scripture commands is obeyed. What remains lawful is considered through prayer, wisdom, counsel and responsibility.

The approved language is simple: say with certainty what God has said, state personal conclusions honestly, respect the freedom of others and trust God with the outcome.

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