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Teaching Letter

The One Requirement



Teaching Letter
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As a Christian, there is only one voice you should follow: the voice of your Shepherd. This excerpt, taken from Derek Prince's book Hear God's Voice, is the first in a 3-part Teaching Letter series on recognizing and obeying the voice of God. Hearing His voice is a requirement for all believers and one of three marks of Jesus' sheep.

We have seen that, in various periods of history, God has dealt with mankind in different ways. In theological language, 'dispensations' is the term used for these different periods of God's dealings with humanity.

Let us briefly recap the three main dispensations. First, the dispensation of the Patriarchs—when God dealt with individuals and their families in a personal relationship. Second, the dispensation of the Law—when God placed the nation of Israel under a special law and dealt with them by way of the temple and the priesthood. Third, the dispensation of the Gospel—the one in which we are living today. The gospel is the universal proclamation from God to all mankind regarding salvation through Jesus Christ, and it requires an individual response from everyone who hears it.

In each of these distinct dispensations, the one common, unvarying requirement for all of God's people has been to hear His voice.

The Good Shepherd

In the New Testament, Jesus' teachings carry the same pivotal message we noted in the Old Testament with the examples of Moses and Jeremiah. I want you to see again that with respect to this requirement, nothing has changed. As we discussed, there may have been a change of context and circumstances, but this crucial mandate of hearing and obeying the Lord's voice has remained constant.

In this regard, I want to quote several verses from John 10, where Jesus presents Himself as the Good Shepherd. The following is how Jesus describes the relationship between a true shepherd and his sheep, using this analogy to depict Himself as the Shepherd and His people as the sheep:

> "To him [the shepherd] the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." (John 10:3)

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What is the mark of Jesus' sheep? They hear the Shepherd's voice.

Knowing His Voice

John 10:4 adds another important element to the picture:

> "And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice."

What is the great basis of our relationship with the Lord Jesus? We follow Him. Why? Because we know His voice. The next verse clarifies this point:

> "Yet they [the sheep] will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." (John 10:5)

Once again, we see that everything revolves around hearing and knowing the voice of the Lord. God's people recognize His voice, and they follow Him. They will not follow deceivers. They will not follow false prophets and errant teachers. Why? Because they recognize that the voices of these others are not the voice of the Lord. The fact that they know the voice of the Lord enables them to keep from being deceived by the false prophets and teachers.

Up to this point, Jesus has been speaking about believers among the people of Israel. But in John 10:16, He goes on to talk about people from other nations:

> "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold [not of the Jewish fold]; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd." (NASB 1995)

What draws believers to Jesus from among all Gentile nations? How are they able to come to Him? This verse provides the answer to these questions: "they will hear My voice." That is the characteristic mark of all who come to Jesus and follow Him as their Shepherd.

What Jesus says in this context is very significant for attaining Christian unity: "They will become one flock with one shepherd" (John 10:16, NASB 1995). What is the way to achieve unity among believers? I do not believe it will come primarily through planning and organization. I do not think it will come mainly through doctrinal or theological discussions. Unity will come as we all learn to hear the voice of the Lord. "They will hear My voice," Jesus says, "and they will become one flock with one shepherd" (verse 16).

Three Traits of Followers

Later in John 10, Jesus sums up this principle of hearing His voice by saying,

> "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27, NASB 1995)

Three related traits identify true followers of the Lord:

- They hear His voice.
- He knows them—He recognizes them and acknowledges them.
- They follow Him.

Being a follower of Christ is not a question of belonging to a particular religious group. Jesus is not talking in terms of Catholics, Protestants, or any specific denominations. Neither is being a follower tied to a certain form of worship or adherence to a particular doctrine. Jesus is not saying, "My people come from one particular group that does things a certain way." But He is saying, "There are characteristic marks that single out My people. These traits distinguish them from all others. They make them different, and they make them Mine. Here are those traits: 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me'" (John 10:27, NASB 1995).

Following His Voice

We must realize that, in biblical times, a shepherd did not drive his sheep. He led them. How did he lead them? By the sound of his voice. The sheep didn't follow mainly by watching him. They followed by listening to him—and they always went where they heard the shepherd's voice. If we apply this scriptural analogy to our lives, we see that it is impossible to follow the Lord unless we hear and recognize His voice.

As I bring this section to a close, let me say something to you in love and sincerity that may be hard to receive. Jesus did not tell us, "My sheep read the Bible." I believe it is essential to read the Bible. But just reading the Word is not sufficient. Many people read the Bible but do not hear the voice of the Lord. It is not reading the Bible that enables us

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to follow Him. It is hearing His voice, either through His Word or by other spiritual means. As Jesus so clearly stated,

> "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27, NASB 1995)

Let's end this teaching with a prayer expressing our intention to hear and obey Him.

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Transcript: TL-L171-100-ENG
Last Updated: 14 Aug 2026
Website: Derekprince.com/en/resources



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