

At a former church, the day I started my job as an associate pastor I was given a set of keys to the church by one of the Trustees, Bill. Bill told me, "Peter, these are not all the keys to the church, we are only giving you four keys: One key to the church building, one key to your office, one key the church office, and one key the Sunday school class rooms. If you need to get into other rooms, you will find the rest of the keys in the top drawer in the church office."

Well, for some time those four keys were all I needed, but one day I needed to get into several other rooms. So I went into the church office, looked in the top drawer, and there sat this enormous ring of keys to the church, exactly as Bill had said. I said out loud, "This is crazy, anyone could find these keys and then get into any room in this church." Our church secretary laughed...and kept on working.

First I went to the pantry and after rifling through the keys for quite some time, I finally found the key labeled pantry on the key ring. There must have been 75 keys on this ring, so it took awhile to find the right key. I inserted the key into the lock on the door, it didn't work. I attempted to open the door for several minutes - nothing.

So I moved on to the shed behind the church. After several minutes I found the key marked shed. I inserted the key - nothing. After several minutes of working the lock I had no success. I tried the choir room, the youth room and one of the storage rooms, but not a single key worked.

Frustrated, I went back into the church office and told our church secretary that none of the keys worked. She just laughed and said, "Talk to Luis." Luis was our sexton and was in charge of all the cleaning and maintenance in the church.

I found Luis and told him my frustration with the keys. Luis said, "Peter, all the keys work just fine, you just have to memorize what key fits what lock."

You see, all the keys were mislabel. The key labeled pantry would never work on the pantry, the key labeled pantry was for the dumpster; The dumpster key was for the soundboard; the soundboard key was for electrical room #3; The key to the pastor's office was to the water heater closet in building #4 and so on. There was about 15 working keys, all mislabeled and the rest of the keys didn't go to anything, they were just useless decoys.

Luis taught me the system of how the keys were organized. Once I got the label/key secret code down it was easy. Luis had created this intricate key system so that only those who knew the key system would find the keys useful, all others would be locked out.

The fact is, I not only needed the keys to the church, I also needed to know the person who created the keys to make the keys useful. For the person who made the keys could teach me how to use the keys.

Having a key in your hand is useless, unless you know how to use that key.

Jesus promised Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven Matt 16:19 **“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”** We saw in our text this morning that Peter is now on his way to Caesarea, those keys jingling in his pocket.

Peter was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven, but Peter needed to know how to use those keys. Here in our passage today, along with our passage from last week, we see God teaching Peter how to use the keys he was given. To use the keys to the kingdom of heaven, Peter needs to be able to discern spiritually.

Peter used to use his experience, education, intelligence and intuition to make a judgment about something or someone - just like he always had. But, now, as a Christian, Peter is called upon to make a judgment in a new way, by the Spirit.

Last week we saw that when we are born again and become a Christian we are given a new nature, Paul calls this our spiritual nature. We have this new nature, our spiritual nature, but we still retain our old nature - who we have always been. Our challenge is to learn to live by this new nature and to unlearn living by our old nature.

At the core of living by our new nature is discernment, which is really making a judgment about people, events and things: Are these people of God? Is this an event that I should participate in? Is this thing, something I am able to use as a Christian?

This is very practical stuff. Let's say I run into a person and they claim to be a Christian - right then and there I need to make a judgment: Is this person for real, or are they fake? The same goes for events I have the opportunity to attend. I'm invited to an event and as a

Christian I don't just blindly go, I must make a judgment: Is this an event a Christian should attend, or not? The same applies with objects. I have an opportunity to own or use an object and I need to make a judgment, Is this object an object that I as a Christian should use, or not?

We can apply what we see happening in our Scripture to every part of our lives. Learning to be able to spiritually discern is central to our Christian walk, without spiritual discernment we will languish in our Christian walk.

What we see in our Scripture this week, builds upon what we saw in the Scripture last week. Last week we saw the beginning process that God uses to walk us through spiritual discernment. The process is as follows: God the Father initiates; the Holy Spirit speaks and confirms what God initiates; Physical confirmation is given. (Acts 10:13-15, 19-20, 21-22)

This week we see that Peter is obedient to the Holy Spirit with the result being that, Peter receives understanding and the kingdom of God increases. Take notice of this, this is very important, Peter is obedient to the Holy Spirit in spite of everything in him that is humanly saying, NO.

If Peter were to judge the men who came to him by human means, Peter would not go with the men, but since Peter judges by the Spirit, Peter determines he should go, even though it logically doesn't make sense to him.

An example for us might be something like this: you have been invited to a party at the home of one of your coworkers. This coworker is not a Christian, is not known to be a moral person at all, and you suspect that at this party people will drink way too much. So you must make a judgment, should I go to this party or not? On a human level, you would use your experience, education, intelligence and intuition (this includes applying appropriate Scripture to your decision), you would use all these to make a judgment: Do I go or not?

Now on a purely human level, your answer would be fairly easy, a Christian shouldn't participate in drunken parties, so you would say, no I will not go to the party. But, as a Christian we are called upon to add another dimension to our humanity, we are called to use spiritual discernment.

What if, for example, the Holy Spirit wanted you to go to this event because there is a person who will be at the party who is searching for answers and is very open to the Gospel. What if God wants you there to speak to this person? What if, in spite of all logic, the Holy Spirit guides you to go because He has plans for you against what you see as unfavorable circumstances?

Do you go or not?

Be very careful here. Many a Christian has fallen because they are unable to recognize the voice of the Holy Spirit and they take the voice of their own conscience as the Holy Spirit and use it to justify sin.

Hear this: The Holy Spirit will not, will not lead you into sin, nor will the Holy Spirit lead to do something that is against Scripture.

Let take a brief moment to explain what may appear to be a contradiction here. I have told you that the Holy Spirit will never lead you to do something that is against Scripture, but isn't the Holy Spirit leading Peter to do something against Scripture since he is told to eat what is called unclean and in the OT, it clearly states Peter is not to eat these animals?

This is a concept that confuses many people and as such they will misinterpret scripture as a result of their misunderstanding, so please listen carefully: In the OT we have the moral law and the ritual law. The moral law deals with morality, things like murder, theft, sex, money and so on. The ritual law deals with rituals, like animal sacrifice, what kind of food to eat and so on.

When Jesus comes, he does not come to change the law, but to fulfill the law. Now the morals of the moral law remain, The Ten Commandments and so on, but the ritual law, with the ritual law, Jesus' actions on the cross and in his resurrection, Jesus' actions make the ritual law superfluous, in other words, Jesus has accomplished, once and for all, and for all time, Jesus has accomplished in his work on the cross everything that the ritual law intended to do, so the ritual law is set aside.

Do we need animal sacrifice for the atonement of our sins anymore? No, Jesus fulfills the need for the ritual of animal sacrifice, and by extension, Jesus fulfills all the ritual law of the OT.

There is no contradiction in Scripture here, and the moral law does not go away. The Holy Spirit will not lead you into sin, ever, He will only lead you to do His will.

When I was in college I had a friend who told me that the Holy Spirit told him to move in with his girlfriend and that they should sleep together. The voice he heard was another voice, because Scripture clearly tells us sexual relations only belong within the bounds of marriage. My friend ignored Scripture, justified his sin with immature spirituality and moved in with his girlfriend. Absolute disaster ensued.

Let us look at how God teaches Peter this process of spiritual discernment and then see its application in our lives.

Now we have already seen in the previous verses that God initiates the with a vision about different kinds of animals on a blanket - Peter has no idea what this could mean (10:13-15); Then, the Holy Spirit speaks to Peter telling him men are at the gate to see him; (10:19-20); Then the prompting of the Spirit is physically confirmed when Peter heads downstairs and the men are there, just as the Holy Spirit said (10:21-22).

God initiates, Spirit confirms, Physical confirmation.

Today we see the rest of the process: Obedience, Understanding, Advancement of the Kingdom of God.

Peter now confident that the Holy Spirit is directing his way - goes to Caesarea to see Cornelius (23-24).

How did Peter arrive at this confidence? Through spiritual discernment. The Spirit spoke to Peter and what the Spirit told Peter was physically confirmed, so Peter is confident.

Now, understand that spiritual discernment doesn't fill in all the blanks. Peter doesn't know what the animals on the blanket mean yet. Peter doesn't know why he is going to see Cornelius. Peter doesn't know what the outcome will be. Now the truth is, it doesn't matter - we do not need to know all the details - we only need to be obedient.

Look, the outcome might not be good. Peter may go to Caesarea and be killed. Peter may go to Caesarea and fail. Peter may tarnish his reputation by going to Caesarea and entering this man's house - and in fact Peter's reputation is tarnished for a time in the

church because of this encounter. But, remember, we have learned that the book of Acts is not about the apostles, the book of Acts is about Jesus Christ - first and foremost. Who Peter is and what happens to Peter is secondary. The same with us as Christians, the Holy Spirit working through us is not about us, the Holy Spirit working through it is about Jesus Christ, you and I, and our comfort take a back seat to the kingdom of God.

Peter takes with him some believers as witnesses. A wise move. Even though the Spirit has clearly spoken, Peter is learning to hear and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Bringing other godly men or women with him will help him in his discernment process. Proverbs 15:22, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."

This is a key insight for us. As you learn to hear the Holy Spirit, seek the counsel of those who are mature Christians. In confidence, they can help you work through growing in spiritual discernment.

In verse 25 we see Cornelius greeting Peter in a way that he sees fitting as a messenger of God and prostrates himself before Peter. Remember, though Cornelius is a follower of Judaism and is a good man, Cornelius is not a Christian and still retains a lot of pagan thought - He believes Peter may have God like qualities so he offers him reverence. Peter is not pleased and tells him to get up.

As Peter and Cornelius enter the house filled with people, Peter shows his dissonance. Peter is conflicted here, on one hand, everything from his experience, his education and his intuition is telling Peter as a Jew he should not be in this house, but on the other hand, clearly the Holy Spirit has told him to go against his human judgement. 28 "He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

The word Peter uses to describe the men as a Gentile/foreigners is used in the LXX to describe an uncircumcised Philistine - he is not very complementary. Peter has heard the Spirit and he has physical evidence confirming what he heard, but Peter is still learning spiritual discernment, so he remains conflicted.

Back when I was in college a good friend of mine was driving home from work late at night when she clearly felt the Holy Spirit tell her to pull the car over and talk to someone.

Let me pause for a moment to say that, if you are listening for an audible voice of the Holy Spirit, you need to listen deeper. Sometimes the Spirit speaks in an audible voice, or a voice you can hear in your head, but more often than not, a person will just know without an audible voice. And remember, we have talked about this before - your conscience is not the voice of the Holy Spirit. Everyone has a conscience, only Christians have the Holy Spirit.

So, my friend, she pulls over, which is crazy from a human perspective because it is about 2:00 a.m., she is in the middle of a neighborhood and the streets are absolutely deserted. But, this woman, knew the voice of the Holy Spirit, and so she obeyed.

In a very brief amount of time a man came walking by on the other side of the street. OK now understand that by all human judgment this woman should have stayed in the car. She was alone, a young woman, and it was the middle of the night - the last thing she should do is get out of the car, walk across the street and talk to this guy, yet that is exactly what she did for she was able to use the Spirit to discern what could not be discerned by human means.

It turned out that 30 minutes before the man had received a call from a hospital back east that his wife, who was on a business trip in that state, was in a terrible accident, and was clinging to life in the ICU. The man could not go to his wife as she was across the country, and in an act of desperation he walked out of his house and was repeatedly walking around his block in the middle of the night. While he walked he called out to God asking that God send him assurance that his wife would live - up walks my friend. She hears his story, prays with the man, tells him about the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, then man goes home and just as he arrives home he receives another phone call from the hospital - his wife, said the voice on the line...is going to make it, she is on her way to recovery. The man gave his life over to Jesus on the spot.

Spiritual discernment is a powerful thing in the hands of a woman obedient to the Spirit.

See the pattern? God initiates with this man. Spirit speaks to this woman, physical confirmation with the man walking by; My friend is obedient to the Spirit, understanding

is achieved for both parties when they meet, the call from the hospital arrives and the man understands that Jesus is Lord - the Kingdom of God is advanced.

God initiates, Spirit confirms, Physical confirmation; Obedience to the Spirit, Understanding attained, advancement of the Kingdom of God. Result, an event that only the Holy Spirit could put together.

Cornelius explains to Peter his visit from an Angel with details Cornelius couldn't have known about, another confirmation that the Spirit did indeed speak to Peter (30-34) and then Cornelius asks Peter to tell them everything. Cornelius has no idea what Peter will say, but he is fully aware that he has been set up by God.

OK, now this next part is rather odd.

Peter speaks to Cornelius and friends in Aramaic not in Greek, we know this because there are a string of Aramaisms in the Greek translation here. What does this mean? First it shows that this is a literal rendering of what Peter spoke, these are the exact words Peter spoke. But, why would Peter do this?

See, if Peter speaks in Aramaic, one of the men he brought with him would have to translate into Greek for the Gentiles to understand. Well, first off, Peter is not a Greek speaking Jew and so he would not be as good with Greek as with Aramaic, and second, Peter had always told the Gospel story before in Aramaic because Peter had only spoken with other Jews about Jesus Christ and never Gentiles. So Peter speaks in Aramaic. Still, Peter is using the keys given to him to open the kingdom of heaven for the Gentiles.

Now this is very significant, these men are receiving a very rough version of the Gospel because they are hearing someone translate as Peter speaks, they do not hear a clear rendering as all others had heard before them - but still they believe.

Look, Peter cannot even finish and they believe. How do we know that they believe, the Holy Spirit falls upon them - this only happens to those who believe.

They didn't perform religious rituals.

They didn't become Jewish first.

They were not baptized first.

Still, the Holy Spirit arrives in power.

Here we have what is known as the second Pentecost, or the Gentile Pentecost.

The Jews were astonished.

God does a thing only God himself could do, bring together a group of people who would never voluntarily stand together under the same roof. Don't believe me, just watch the news any night when they talk about the middle east, no one can get the diverse people together in the middle east - except Jesus Christ himself.

Let me stop here and say that if some of this is familiar to you, about how the Holy Spirit speaks to you, great, wonderful, keep on working on it. Hearing the Holy Spirit well is a lifetime learning experience.

If you have never experienced hearing the Holy Spirit in your life and you are a Christian, well, I won't pull any punches - Houston, we have a problem.

Look, hearing the Holy Spirit, understanding the Holy Spirit, acting on what the Holy Spirit tells us is not child's play, it is difficult stuff. I mean even the Apostle Peter has difficulty with it.

But, if there is nothing. If you draw a blank. If there is a big zero there - something is wrong. As I see it we have two options: One, something is stopping you in your life from hearing the Holy Spirit or from recognizing the Holy Spirit, and usually that is unrepentant sin or, or two, you may not be a Christian.

If you fall into either of these categories, you must deal with this, ASAP.

Not being able to discern spiritually can lead to disaster.

Peter is able to step out in faith here in Acts chapter 10 because he is developing his spiritual discernment. We saw the steps clearly spelled out for us in this chapter: God initiates, Spirit confirms, physical confirmation; Obedience, understanding, advancement of the Kingdom of God. Result - an event that only the Holy Spirit could put together.