

Beware the Voice of Strangers.

Jesus referred to himself as the fine shepherd, and he referred to his disciples as 'sheep'. So as his sheep, how can we respond to the voice of our fine shepherd?

What can we use as an example of how we can respond? Well, as we've all just heard, from the book of John, chapter 10, and verse 3 to 5, to give us an example. Let's look at those words together, John chapter 10, and verses 3-5.

Here, Jesus says, 'The doorkeeper opens to this one,' meaning he opens to the shepherd, 'and the sheep listen to his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. When he has got all his own out, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice. A stranger they will by no means follow, but they will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers'.

You notice there friends; literal sheep know the voice of their shepherd, and they follow their shepherd, and their shepherd only. Why? Well, Jesus explicitly said "Because, they do not know the voice of strangers."

Jesus' further words in John chapter 10, tells us to appreciate how we can apply this in a spiritual sense to ourselves today, and to our relationship with Jesus and our heavenly father Jehovah.

Notice in verse 14, where he continues, 'I am the fine shepherd, and I know my sheep and my sheep know me'. And then over the page, verse 27, he adds: 'My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me'.

So Jesus now, applies this in a spiritual sense. We need to apply this verse in a spiritual sense ourselves.. In harmony with those words of Jesus the apostle Peter, at first Peter chapter 5 and verse 2, referred to the Christian congregation as the 'flock of God'. So if we're going to apply what Jesus said, we're to apply them to ourselves, to our relationships, with him and our Father Jehovah, then we need to begin to apply and follow the direction of our Father and our fine shepherd Christ Jesus. And listen to his voice only.

The Bible account in Genesis chapter 3 verses 1 through 6, doesn't talk about sheep or a fine shepherd, but certainly helps us to appreciate where the voice of strangers originates. Now we know the account; we're not going to read it, we know the account and it tells us that Satan, the Devil, spoke the first lie back in the garden of Eden six thousand years ago, when he used a serpent to speak to our first mother Eve. By listening to words that blatantly contradicted the truth, Eve and then Adam sinned.

What happened after that? Well, they passed on sin to all their offspring, and not only did they pass on sin, they passed on all the results, and woes that after that we all have been experiencing for the last six thousand years.

John chapter 8 verse 44, Jesus referred to Satan as 'a liar, and the Father of the lie'. So back there in the Garden of Eden, Eve believed and acted on the lie. But since then, Satan has used not a serpent, but he has used humans to serve as a sounding board to spread his lies.

Open your Bibles with me to Hebrews chapter 13, verse 9. We want just the first part of that verse.

And notice how the apostle Paul's words mean 'listening to', meaning 'as a sounding board'. Hebrews 13, 9; here Paul warns 'do not be carried away by various and strange teachings'.

Primarily, who promotes strange teachings today? Is it not the apostates? Certainly it is. Apostates promote strange teachings in an attempt to undermine the spirit of Jesus' followers, the sheep, Jehovah's people.

At Acts chapter 20 and verse 30, Paul said 'apostates speak twisted things'. Why do they do this? Well, they do this to speak half-truths openly in an effort to undermine the spirituality of Jehovah's people, to deceive and corrupt Jehovah's people.

Recently, brothers in the course of serving in district and circuit work were asked if the work of the apostates was having a negative effect on the preaching work in their areas, primarily in the house-to-house ministry. Well, interestingly, the consensus of the brothers was, that the only real negative effect was on the brothers and sisters in their circuits and districts who have listened to the apostates'. And usually this is via TV documentaries or the Internet.

The fact of the matter is, these extremely wicked opposers of Jehovah and of the truth, have succeeded in affecting the spiritual balance of quite a few of our brothers and sisters who have listened to their propaganda. In fact, in one congregation in a local circuit, 8 publishers were very shaken and uncomfortable because of watching an apostate promoted TV documentary. And this was in spite of the fact, that very week, the elders, by means of the service meeting a couple of days before that documentary was aired, warned the brothers that it was going to be on, and helped them to see why they should not watch it. In spite of that, in spite of that, those eight publishers were very shaken because they did watch it. So those were affected because they have not heeded the warnings to beware the voice of apostate strangers.

Proverbs chapter 5 verse 3 describes another stranger. Let's look at that together. Proverbs chapter 5, and verse 3. 'For as a honeycombe the lips of a strange woman keep dripping, and her palate is smoother than oil'. So you notice there friends, that the stranger here, is referred to as 'a strange woman'.

Well, who could that be? Look with me at chapter 7, in verse 5, he's talking continuing from verse 5 about the need to develop wisdom and understanding. Why? Well, let's read that, 'to guard you against the woman stranger, against the foreigner who has made her own sayings smooth.' And verse 21; 'She has misled him by the abundance of her persuasiveness. By the smoothness of her lips she seduces him.'

She seduces him. So it's obvious here, that this immoral woman here is a prostitute uses smoothness and sleek works to lure people into immorality.

In fact, quite a few of our brothers and sisters have indeed been lured into immorality in recent years. Was it worth it. What price did they have to pay, for being lured into immorality?

Well, first of all hopefully, they experienced a troubled conscience. What else? Well, they might also have had the experience, and this affects both sisters and brothers, of having an unwanted pregnancy. They have perhaps acquired a sexually transmitted disease, because of their being lured into immorality. And what about the exorbitant emotional pain experienced by innocent mates? Just one act of immorality of adultery can cause pain emotionally that can last a lifetime. Is it worth it? And most important of all, we can damage and even sever our relationship with Jehovah, for immorality hurts everyone concerned.

So dear brothers and sisters, make it your goal to stay as far away as possible from the influence of the immoral woman, from immoral people. Avoid if you can, association with them, their thinking, their ways of doing things. You can be affected by listening to debasing music, by watching corrupting entertainment.

Whether it be the theatre, or a video, where you just look at your VCR or books or the internet whatever it might be, why expose yourself to these things? Why expose yourself to things like pornographic material, which is more and more available around the world today? Also, avoid if you can, the attention of immoral people by flirting with them or adopting their dress and grooming, like we talked about earlier on the program. Beware of the voice of immoral strangers.

Now all of Jehovah's people no matter what age group you fit into, a desire to be popular, and be accepted by your peers and that's exactly why our teenagers of today are so especially vulnerable to bad associations. So, you young people, among us here today, at times your schoolmates are going to ridicule you, are going to make derogatory remarks about your beliefs; sometimes they may try and persuade you not to listen to your christian parents who love you, and who know what's best for you.

So, my young friends, think about this. Any of your peers, who try to dissuade you spiritually, may say they care about you, they may even say they love you, but it's a fact that they don't believe in Jehovah, and they don't love you. Be smart. Don't listen to them. While they may appear to you to be cool, even sophisticated to you, that makes it more appealing, right? But you know how they look to Jehovah? They are physical, they are unspiritual, and they are a real danger to you. So young people, beware of the voice of strangers among your peers.

Now, speaking of association here, we all need association. As Jehovah's people, we are the whole world so to speak, with our brothers and sisters, don't we? we're experiencing that this very weekend. But there is another kind of association that that we need to talk about, that we all need to be aware of. We've talked about it briefly. Strangers who don't respect bible principles, and who like to promote their perversions and their perverse ideas by the internet. And you know how it is, through email, through internet chatrooms, who communicate with people they don't know, from any corner of the earth, any part of the world. Some of these people may claim to be Jehovah's Witnesses but they're not. They may claim to be a youth, but they're not. Another may claim to be of a certain gender, but they're not. So brothers, think about this; would you let a stranger into your home, without first finding out who he is; if there's no way to find out, would you allow your children to be alone with that stranger if you didn't know anything about that person? Of course not! But you're thinking, 'That's ridiculous!' But the fact is, that's an indisputable probability over the internet.

Some through email or chatrooms, receive information about our beliefs, some of which is not verifiable or untrue. But the comment should be made, this could also be a cover for spreading apostate propaganda. How do you know? Well you simply may not know until it's too late. And those websites of Jehovah's Witnesses, well here again it may well be a vehicle for spreading apostate propaganda. We don't know for a fact who they are. What about websites that you know have been set up by Jehovah's Witnesses? You may even know the person personally who set up the webpage representing Jehovah's Witnesses. What about those? Well, listen to the advice in Our Kingdom Ministry, November 1997, page 3.. That's Our Kingdom Ministry, November 97, page 3. They made the statement, 'There's no need for any individual to prepare anything about Jehovah's Witnesses, our activities, or our beliefs. Our official website, www.watchtower.org presents accurate information for anyone who would want it. We'd want to be very very cautious about the internet.

Notice at Psalms 26 verse 4, how the psalmist David expressed his feelings about the same things that was happening . We're talking about how, on the internet, you can interrelate with people are people you don't know and may never get to know. The Psalmist said, at Psalms 26 verse 4,

I have not sat with men of untruth, and to those who hide what they are I do not come in. Many people there in the world, especially on the internet hide what they are. So then we need to exercise extreme caution so we don't find ourselves personally associating with those kinds, in those various ways. Friends, beware of the voice of strangers via the Internet.

Another area where we should exercise extreme caution is in what we hear in news reports and documentaries. Now we've touched on documentaries before, where they're promoted by apostates, and becoming more and more prevalent and populous. But sometimes things are presented as truth when they're not the truth or not the whole truth when they're..presented by apostate or ex-witnesses or just an over-zealous reporter trying to make a name for himself. As to that, he doesn't like Jehovah's Witnesses and so he goes out and spreads lies about them. How do you feel when you hear reports like that? It doesn't make you feel good, does it? In fact, do you feel upset inside? I feel upset inside, at least temporarily. We don't like to feel upset, we don't like to hear things like that. Something we want to keep in mind friends; we don't want to personally be refuting these untruths unless Jehovah's organization assigns us to do that publicly. Now, we talk to people in our ministry and elsewhere, and they have something they have heard or read, then certainly we can present the truth to them, and we'll want to do that publicly, so they don't get wrong beliefs about us. something we want to keep in mind is, the point in 1 John chapter 5, verse 19, where John says 'The whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one.'

Well we know, that not every report is untrue it would be unreasonable for us to push aside every piece of secular information, otherwise why would we watch the news, to find out what's going on in the world. But we need to keep in mind , what with the whole world lying in the power of the wicked one, it needs to be accepted that Satan and his demons are going to be saturating the world with untruthful information, even false information from apostates.. So here again friends, beware of the voice of strangers via the media.

How can we be protected from these dangers that we've ben discussing? We need to understand why sheep don't respond to the voice of strangers. As we said earlier, literal sheep have a keen sense of who their shepherd is and who is not. They are perfectly familiar with their shepherd only. The apostle tells us in 2 Timothy chapter 1, at verse 13 and helps us to appreciate how we can view these things, how we can clearly be familiar with our shepherd only. 2 Timothy chapter 1, verse 13. Here Paul admonishes: 'Keep holding the pattern of healthful words that you heard from me with the faith and love that are in connection with Christ Jesus'. Do you notice; Paul says 'keep holding the pattern of healthful words'. Well, our language has a distinct pattern of words and grammar, and similarly, and through his word the Holy Bible, and the truths that are clear to us in these last days by Jehovah through his spirit-directed organization, also has a distinct pattern that we recognize, that we live by. Well this pattern is based mainly on the Bible, the teaching of Jehovah's sovereignty by means of his kingdom. So we need to keep this pattern very clear in our lives and particularly in our hearts.

In Galations chapter I and verse 6, the apostle Paul tells us how important it is that we do that. Notice Galations chapter I and verse 6; here Paul stresses what we need to do if someone presents to us a teaching that doesn't fit into the pattern of truth to us, ' However, even if we or an angel from heaven were to declare to you as good news something beyond what we declared to you as good news, let him be accursed . So friends, hypothetically, I repeat, hypothetically. even if an angel were to come down here, and come onto this platform, and talk to us and relate something to us that didn't fit the pattern of truth, what should we be ready to do? We should be ready to say 'Hold on there!, that doesn't fit the pattern, and I'm not going to listen to it'. Yes, even if it were one of Jehovah's angels.

And what about literal sheep? Literal sheep know the voice of their shepherd by hearing him, by touching him, so to speak, right from when they were born. How did we get to firmly become acquainted with our shepherd's voice? Was it not by listening to Jehovah, literally from the time that we were born so to speak, from the time that we started studying leading up to the day of our baptism? How do we do that, though, primarily? Well, we do it primarily by reading Jehovah's word. Now friends, think about it this way: If we can miss even one day ,where we can read at least a portion of Jehovah's inspired word, in esence, what we are telling Jehovah is, 'Jehovah, I'm sorry but I don't have ime to hear you today.' Because this is primarily the way Jehovah speaks to us, is through his inspired word. So brothers, never allow a day to go by without reading a least a portion of God's word the Bible. Allow Jehovah to speak to us every day, without fail.

If literal sheep heard the voice of their shepherd, but failed to respond, what could happen? Well, maybe the shepherd is telling the sheep, 'there's a wolf in the pasture,' and, the sheep says to itself, 'my shepherd doesn't know what he's talking about.' Well, he could die, right? So, think of that in a spiritual way. By applying what we've learned, we show that we've not simply heard our shepherd, but we have listened to the voice of our shepherd for our benefit, for our protection.

Matthew chapter 17 verse 5 tells us that Jehovah's voice was heard on one particular occasion from heaven, saying as reference to Jesus saying, 'this is my son, my beloved, who I have approved'. So we listen to Jehovah, by listening to our shepherd, Christ Jesus. So how do we do that today? By listening to the faithful and discreet slave, who Jesus appointed over all his belongings and dispenses spiritual food at the proper time,all the abundance of spiritual good things that we receive, including this convention here today.

Jesus also instructed us to shun adultery and fornication, and to shepherd and to preach the good news and make disciples and do many other things. Are we listening? Are we applying? Are we hearing?

Notice what Acts chapter 3 verse 23 emphasizes regarding the importance of cheerfully obeying Jesus' voice. And by so doing, obey Jehovah's voice. Acts chapter 3 verse 23; here Paul is basically quoting Deuteronomy chapter 18, when he tells us that 'he that does not listen to that prophet' the Messiah, he will be completely destroyed from among the people'. How important is it that we obey the voice of that prophet, the Messiah Christ Jesus? Our eternal welfare is involved. It means our life, to listen to our shepherd.

At John chapter 10 verse 5, which we read earlier, Jesus tells us how we should respond to those who utter teachings that are not in harmony with the truth. Remember, he said to the sheep, 'flee', which is what we need to do as well. You'll recall the account of Joseph, in Genesis chapter 39, where he was appointed by the Egyptian Potiphar. Now when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him, Joseph, into committing adultery with her, what did Joseph do? He fled immediately. So friends, like Joseph, flee from any temptation to relinquish your moral cleanness, no matter from where it comes, flee from it. Young people, flee from the desires that the devil will use that are coming through the internet, that are coming through your peers in school. Notice in 2 Timothy chapter 4, 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 3 through 5, here Paul also warns of the dangers to anyone, young old, male, female, anybody. In verse 3 it starts, 'for there will be a period of time when people won't put up with healthful teachings, they will want to have their ears tickled', and he says in verse 4: 'They will turn aside to false stories.' Well, that's for people that choose that for themselves. But what about us? The Bible says 'you'...you, you, you, and me, all of us here today, 'keep your senses in all things, suffer evil, do the work of an evangelizer, fully accomplish your ministry'.

So we should not allow ourselves to be turned aside by false stories, whether told by the media or the apostates or by anybody else, we want to keep our senses in all things. We want to keep busy in spiritual things, busy in the ministry, teaching the people the truth, about Jehovah's word and purposes.

And what are the rewards, for all this? Well, by repudiating the voice of strangers spiritually, we can look forward to hearing the fine shepherd's words found at Luke chapter 12, verse 32; directed to them personally. Luke chapter 12, verse 32; here he says to his own followers, 'have no fear, little flock, because your father has approved of giving you the kingdom'. Yes, they have an opportunity to share—and literally-- in the kingdom with Christ Jesus. But what about the rest of us, the vast majority of Jehovah's people around the earth here today, the other sheep? Well, we can look forward to hearing Jesus' words according to Matthew chapter 25, at verse 34, spoken to us personally. Matthew 25, and verse 34; 'and the king will say to those on his right, Come you who have been blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the founding of the world'.

So friends, regardless of whether we are of the flock, or whether we are of the other sheep, we should joyfully serve our loving spiritual shepherd. And we will continue to do this into eternity if we listen to the voice of our shepherd and at the same time beware of the voice of strangers.