### “In Your Heart” Steve Finlan for The First Church, March 9, 2025

**Deuteronomy 30:11–14**

11 Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. 12It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” 13Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” 14No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

**Isaiah 30:20–21**

20Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. 21And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”

**Romans 10:8–13**

8But what does it say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” 12For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. 13For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

In Deuteronomy, the author seems to be saying that you know the Torah, the law of Moses; its words are in your heart. And it’s not impossible to obey; it’s not up in heaven or across the ocean. Potential obedience is close; it’s within the reach of your willpower.

Isaiah is saying that God whispers words of guidance to our heart, indicating to us which way we should turn. I’ll return to this passage later.

Paul, in Romans, seems to be largely using Deuteronomy’s sense. The word of the gospel is something that you have heard and have taken to heart; it’s on your lips and in your heart. Further, if you confess that Jesus is Lord, you are saved. Then he moves on to say that there is no distinction between Jew or Greek. Faith and salvation are the same for both. Some scholars argue that, for Paul, salvation for the Jews involves Torah plus faith, while salvation for the Gentiles just involves faith, but this passage clearly makes that impossible. Paul says there is *no difference* for Jews and Gentiles. In fact, a few sentences earlier, he had said “Christ is the end of the law” (Rom 10:4), probably using the word “end” in both of its meanings: the finish and the purpose. Christ finishes the reign of Torah, and Christ was the real purpose and goal of the Torah from the beginning. Now that the goal has been revealed, the stepping stone, the Torah, is no longer needed. Paul is saying “call on the Lord,” whether you are Jewish or Gentile, it makes no difference.

It is the Isaiah passage that stands out as different from the other two, in that it is talking about an inner voice, a divine voice, and not the memory of a teaching that has been internalized. This is an actual inner voice, which may impart *new* teaching. It’s not something that came from the outside and which you took in; it actually comes from somewhere inside you.

It is *this* idea that I want to talk about. I believe there is a divine spirit within us that can sometimes speak to us, although we rarely hear it very clearly. In the story of Elijah’s flight from Jezebel, he heard God speaking to him not in a fire or a whirlwind, but in “a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12 KJV). That is, indeed, how that voice manifests, but usually it is so small or so spiritual that we can’t hear it. Our minds tend to be more focused on the *material* level. However, we can *seek* to hear the inner voice. We can pray for help in discerning God’s will, and we will eventually get some internal messaging about it, I believe.

Jesus implies as much when he says “Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own” (John 7:17). *How* will they know? Presumably, there is some inner messaging that confirms that Jesus’ teaching is valid. It rings true within us. As it says in the Book of Job, there is a “spirit in a mortal, the breath of the Almighty that makes for understanding” (Job 32:8). Proverbs says “The spirit of a person is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the innermost parts” (Prov 20:27).

It takes time and persistence, prayer and sincerity, to be able to *discern* the inner voice, but it can be done. With practice and patience, and in proportion to the spiritual importance of the question at stake, we will get an answer. There was a lot at stake in Elijah’s conversation with God, the direction that Israel would take, either to worship Baal or to worship Yahweh. When Peter was uncertain about whether Gentiles should be welcomed as fellows, the seriousness of that question was sufficient to cause a message to come to him in an intense dream, telling him “that I should not call anyone profane or unclean” (Acts 10:28). His ears heard a word, so to speak, in the form of a dream, telling him God’s will.

You and I are probably not in a situation as crucial as were Elijah or Peter, but we can still get the inner guidance of that divine voice, especially if we energetically seek it and need it. The actual guidance of the voice might only be discerned two or three times in your lifetime, or maybe more. But the whispering of God is there constantly. Maybe we more often *feel* it rather than *hear* it. We feel an attraction to certain values and truths. Certain authors or speakers ring true for us. That is very often an example of the inner voice guiding our perception. But as fallible humans, we can also be misled. We can fall for demagogues or for overly simplistic answers to questions we have. We have to discipline ourselves through practice and reflection, so that we might learn to “discern the spirit” (1 Cor 12:10) or “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1).

Trust that God has sent a part of himself to dwell within you, that there is a spirit within that seeks to guide your living, to steer you to the left or to the right in your decisionmaking, to help you to “discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2). There is a divine pilot light within your mind, the lamp of the Lord (Prov 20:27), but it takes practice and patience to be able to discern its guidance. You have to train your ear, as a musician does. We’re all singers in the divine chorus.