

The Telephone and the Letters

On what do you base your "God told me so", the quiet still voice within or the written word of God, or both? If they do not seem to say the same thing, which do you accept as God's words?

Once upon a time there was a young woman who met a young man and fell in love with him and he with her. But after only a few weeks, the young man was called by his company to go overseas for a period of time. He took his leave of his fiancée, for by now they were engaged, and his parting words were, "I will write to you daily. Be sure to read my letters because they will always be from me. I will call you and you may call me anytime, but I must warn you to be careful of messages on the phone because I have an enemy who hates me and does not want to see us together happily married some day. He will do everything he can to break up our relationship. The phone line I have is a party line and he has access to it so he may try to talk to you and sound like me so he can tell you lies. Also, your receiver is not in good shape and there may be static on the line from time to time that will cause my words to be garbled or not clearly heard, so you may misunderstand what I have said. Therefore, be sure you check my letters everyday after our phone conversations to make sure you have heard from me and not my enemy, and that you have understood clearly what I have said to you."

At first, the young lady studied eagerly each letter daily and every evening would talk to her fiancée. Sometimes he called her and sometimes she called him. They would talk at length and then she would go and review the letter to double check that she had heard correctly. Yes, she had heard from him all right. She was so happy.

But one day her brother took something that belonged to her and lost it and would not replace it. She became very angry at him and refused to forgive him. She was so upset and distracted by this situation that she didn't read her fiancée's letter that day. That night, when her fiancée called, she was still so upset about her brother that she didn't notice that he sounded slightly different. The person on the phone sympathized with her. Yes, she had every reason to be angry with her brother. After all, it was her possession he had lost and she had the right to make him suffer. In fact, she needed to start planning a way to get back at him. After this conversation, she forgot completely about checking the letter. The person on the phone told her just what she wanted to hear. It had to be her fiancée.

By next morning, she had a plan all worked out, but just then, the doorbell rang. It was a friend of hers stopping by to visit. Her friend noticed how upset and irritated she appeared and asked what the problem was.

It was unusual for the young lady to be like this because ever since she had become engaged, she had been very cheerful, happy, and peaceful. The young lady explained the situation to her friend, and the friend wisely said, "Have you read the letter from your fiance yesterday?"

"Oh, no," the young lady replied, "but I talked to him on the phone and he was very reassuring and told me just what I was to do."

"But are you sure it was he you were talking to?" inquired her friend.

"Well, I think so." replied the young lady starting to look puzzled.

"How about we get the letter just to make sure," suggested the friend.

Together they read the letter. "Honey," it said, "if anyone does anything to hurt you, please forgive him right away, because if you don't, it gives my enemy access to the phone and he will tell you things to do that will really cause you to be hurt and will mess up your life. So please, forgive and don't try to take revenge."

The young lady was shocked at first and then started to cry. "He warned me about this. I forgot. I'll have to call him right away and ask him to forgive me for neglecting his letter and I forgive my brother as well."

The young lady felt she had really learned her lesson. She would make sure she forgave everyone and she would faithfully read her fiance's letters. But days went on, and the letters always said the same thing as the phone calls. She was so busy making wedding plans and getting things ready for their new home. It was so much easier and more enjoyable to hear his voice, that she started skimming through his letters and not reading carefully. She rationalized, "I'm so used to his voice that I know what he sounds like and what he says. I'm sure he won't mind if I don't really read them for awhile." And so she quit reading the letters altogether.

Then one day her dad came to her and criticized her on how she was keeping her room. Instead of accepting what he said, trying to see what he meant, and changing her room, she became highly indignant and hurt. "How dare he say something about my room. I've seen his room and it's worse than mine--in fact, it's the worst mess I've seen in my life. How can he have the nerve to criticize me!"

She was still upset that night when the phone rang. It was her fiance again, or so she thought, not detecting the slight change in his voice. She proceeded to tell him of her problem with her father. Oh, her fiance was so understanding. "Yes, Yes, you were misunderstood, misjudged, unfairly criticized, and generally ill-treated." He continued, "You have a right to be upset and he had no right to tell you these things. In fact, I think you'd better make plans to move and get your own apartment. That way, you won't have to listen to him anymore and he'll be off your case. You have to learn to be

independent, you know. Stand on your own. Be your own boss. Grow up. You don't need anyone else telling you what to do. You have to find your true self. You can't do that under the dominance of your father."

At first this sounded good and made her feel good, but later, there was also a slight uneasiness about what she had heard.

By morning, she was still a little bothered, but she was busy making plans to move out and was going through the want ads looking for apartments when the doorbell rang. It was her friend again. "What are you doing?" she asked, looking at the things packed in boxes all over her room.

"I'm moving out - on my own!" she replied.

"You are?" her friend asked in surprise. "Why?"

The young lady told her about her problem with her father and finished with, "He just doesn't understand me and never will."

"And what does your fiance feel about all of this?"

"Oh, it was his idea," she said.

Her friend frowned and said, "It was? Are you sure?"

"Oh yes, I know his voice by now. I talk to him every day."

"But are you sure? Did you read his letter?"

"His letter? What does that have to do with it? They just say the same thing he says on the phone anyway."

"Well, let's get it and read it just to make sure. It can't hurt anything."

The young lady agreed so went and got the letter. "Honey," it read, "my enemy has been trying to figure out a way to get you to move out from your father's house. He can't get to you to hurt you while you are living at home, but if you move out, then he can get into your apartment and hurt you. Please stay with your father. Listen to him and try hard to understand what he is telling you, because he loves you and is trying to help you, not hurt you."

"Oh, dear," the young lady exclaimed, "I almost blew it again. I'm so thankful you stopped by. I must apologize to my dad and my fiance."

Another tragedy was barely avoided and the young couple's relationship continued to grow through letters and phone calls. But there had been another warning, and the young lady had forgotten all about it. Once again, as time went on, in her business and preoccupation, she became lax in reading his

letters. One evening, she was talking on the phone and heard her fiance say, "I'm coming home to see you." Then there was some static but she heard through it, "the day after tomorrow, Honey." Oh, she was jubilant. He would be home in just two days! She started running here and there to get things ready. Two days came. He didn't come. She waited all day. He still didn't come. She was devastated. What had happened? She was too hurt to call for an explanation and had forgotten about the letters. The phone rang, but she ignored it. "He hurt me and now I'll hurt him. All he's said to me--lies--I can't trust him." On and on she went feeling more and more miserable.

At this point, the doorbell rang. Again, her friend had come to visit. "What's the matter? Why so glum?" she asked her friend.

The young lady proceeded to pour forth her tale of woe. The friend inquired, "Have you called him? Have you talked to him? Surely there's an explanation."

"No, there can't be. He just doesn't love me, doesn't care," she replied.

"Well, have you read his letters?"

"Letters? Oh those. I've forgotten about them. No, I don't read those anymore."

"I think we'd better check it out," her friend insisted.

"Honey," it read. "I would really like to come and see you. I don't know just when I'll be able to get there but I'll come home to see you as soon as I can borrow some money to get there. I hope you are reading this because I heard static on the line when I was talking with you and I didn't want you to misunderstand me. Love."

"Oh, dear, I've done it again," the young lady said. And from that day on, she checked every phone call with the letter for that day. She learned to love his letters as much as his phone calls and she also learned that sometimes, there was more in the letters than in the phone calls.

Scriptures for discussion:

I Timothy 4:1

II Timothy 3:14:17

I Thessalonians. 5:20:21

Acts 17:11