

DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

February 25 – 29, 2008



"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..."¹

If prayer is our communication to God and God answers prayer, how more specifically does God communicate to us? 'Prayer' in the common usage of the term also means entering into God's presence to commune with him. It is an integral part of growing in one's relationship with God. But if a relationship is to grow, one party can't do all the talking. How does God 'speak' to us?

As Acts 15 illustrates, God uses a variety of means to guide his people. These include the Scriptures, wise counsel, circumstances, 'promptings', visions/dreams and prophecy/word-of-knowledge. The Holy Spirit usually communicates using a variety of these means in combination to direct us corporately and individually.

Acts 15 is a good case study for corporately hearing the voice of God. A diversity of leaders came together with varying perspectives. Some had personal experience in the area. Some had experience a vision or dream. Most had various scriptures to put on the table that had bearing on the issue. As they wrestled together to seek the will of God, he communicated what he wanted them to do.

In prayer, motivation is key. *"You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives."*²

If we are sincerely seeking God and willing to do his will, whatever it might be, God is able to find a way to communicate it to us. Even when we are a bit 'deaf', God is able to get through.

¹ Act 15:28a (TNIV)

² James 4:4:2b-3a (TNIV)

February 26, 2008 **God Communicates to
Us Through the Word (1)**

*“You have laid down precepts
that are to be fully obeyed.
Oh, that my ways were steadfast
in obeying your decrees!”¹*

When the Bible speaks plainly on a subject, it is all the guidance we need.

For example, if a person very much wants to go on vacation, but can't afford it, the idea might pop into his or her head that they could obtain the funds by fudging the accounts at work. Could this idea be a leading from God? No. The Bible tells us that we should not steal. God calls us to live with honesty and integrity. The Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible never contradicts himself.

What happens if we are unaware of the Bible's teaching or if we disagree with it? In a nutshell, we will still either reap the benefits of obedience or suffer the consequences of disobedience. If a person runs a stop sign because don't want to stop or because they simply failed to see it, they may still get into an accident or find themselves paying a heavy fine. Our opinions or ignorance do not insulate us from the results of our actions.

When we buy an electronic device, it almost always comes with an instruction manual. Some of us don't both to consult it because we think we don't need to or its too much trouble. We may then have difficulty getting the thing to work right or we may not use it to its full potential. God expects us to make his 'manual' our first stop when are seeking to hear from him. Where it speaks plainly, we need to obey.

¹ Psalm 119:4-5 (TNIV)

February 27, 2008 **God Communicates to
Us Through the Word (2)**

*"I seek you with all my heart;
do not let me stray from your commands.
I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you."¹*

When the Bible does not speak directly or specifically to our situation, we need to grapple with the principles or truths that do have bearing on the matter.

For example, changes in culture or science may pose questions that were not before us 2000 years ago. A person with a terminally ill loved one may have to make tough decisions around life support. A quick answer probably will not be found by turning to 'euthanasia' in the index of one's Bible. In such a situation a number of Biblical truths could have relevance: What does Scripture teach us about the sanctity of human life? Does it help us to examine our own motives; perhaps our thinking is tinged with selfish concerns about the turmoil or trouble we will have to endure? Or are we clinging to them when God wants to take them home; perhaps increasing their suffering by extending things beyond what God is intending?

Very often these questions do not have easy answers. Sincere Christians may differ on similar subjects. In personal situations we may need look for God to confirm his leading by other means because the Scriptures alone are not crystal clear. But it is important for us to become familiar with the Bible so that its principles can direct our paths. The Holy Spirit is powerfully able to make the Word come alive in our situation if we have it in our hearts.

¹ Psalm 119:10-11 (TNIV)

February 28, 2008 **God Communicates to
Us Through the Word (3)**

*“Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path.”¹*

With God, the journey is often of equal or greater importance than the destination. He may want to lead us to a specific decision or action, but he may also be trying to increase our trust and dependence upon him as we go. This is one reason why his direction often comes one step at a time.

In such situations, Christians often find that God speaks through the Bible as they read it ‘devotionally’. In the midst of their regular reading of the scripture, they come across a passage that ‘hits them between the eyes’. It provides encouragement or rebuke or assurance or direction. This may be the voice of God. However we need to be discerning when reading the Bible devotionally.

When meditating on a passage that we think speaks to our situation, it is good to reflect on a number of things. Is the context similar to my/our situation? Before I jump to a conclusion, are there other Biblical truths or examples that should be considered?

If the insight really is from the Holy Spirit, events may confirm it. If the matter is important enough, it might be good to seek input from other godly people. But refrain from introducing it with ‘God gave me this verse...’ Simply share the passage as perhaps having some relevance. If it truly is God’s leading, the Holy Spirit may lead that other person to confirm it. Or God might use the situation as an opportunity to adjust our course in a different way. God is sovereign and can find a way of speaking into the matter in his time.

¹ Psalm 119:105 (TNIV)

February 29, 2008 **God Communicates to us
Through Wise Counsel**

“Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam, ‘What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?’”¹

The Christian life was never designed to be a solitary journey. God calls us into relationship with himself and with others. He wants us to use our gifts, experiences, insights, etc. to build one another up in the faith and in unity. This is one reason why he often uses other people to be his ‘voice’. Listening to God through others is of great importance as we seek God’s direction corporately and personally.

While some people have spiritual gifts of wisdom, knowledge or teaching, God can use virtually anyone as his voice. These may include family members, fellow Christians, those in some role of ‘authority’ in our lives, people who have expertise in the area before us, those whose knowledge may be found via research, etc.

Although guidance from ‘godly’ sources is often valued because the Holy Spirit has a presence in that person’s life, we should not despise ‘secular’ sources of wisdom. All truth is God’s truth. God used pagan kings to direct the course of Israel’s faith journey. He even spoke through a donkey to a particularly thick-headed person who had the gift of prophecy! God can use any individual or organization regardless of their sanctity or lack thereof.

Again, it is important for us to be discerning. We are not to blindly defer to human opinion or expertise. God will often use other means of communication to confirm or protect us as we receive counsel through other human sources.

¹ Number 22:28 (TNIV)