

DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

March 10-14, 2008



March 10, 2008 **“Discerning the Voice of
God”**

“He who leans on, trusts in, and is confident of his own mind and heart is a [self-confident] fool, but he who walks in skillful and godly Wisdom shall be delivered.”¹

Is our experience of God primarily a matter of the mind or the heart? Which is more important in hearing God’s voice: understanding or feeling? Teaching or promptings? Common sense or intuition?

In the past, Christians have frequently favoured the mind over the heart. We have reasoned that if we believe the right things and do the right things, we will be right with God and we will be blessed. However, the result has often been a rather arid orthodoxy where people have known things about God without really relating to him in a way that has led to new, transformed life.

More recently, the pendulum has swung in the other direction. Right belief is less significant than experience. Christians are putting more stock in promptings, feelings and immediate revelation as they seek to walk in the Spirit. However, the result is often confusion and deception as we mistake our own leadings for the voice of God.

On its own, the heart (emotions, feelings) can be a deceptive guide.² But this does not mean we should reject promptings and leadings as means of divine communication. God can and does use immediate revelation. Our job is to carefully discern whether those leadings truly are from God. To do that we need to pose a number of questions.

¹ Proverbs 28:26 (Amplified)

² Jeremiah 17:9

March 11, 2008 **“Is it Consistent with
Scripture?”**

*“Your statutes are my delight;
they are my counselors.”¹*

As a case study in discernment, let's consider the example of a woman who gets a sudden leading from God to visit her grandmother. While doing the dishes one day, she experiences a strong, compelling sense that she should make arrangements to fly halfway across the continent in two months time, during her next week of scheduled holiday time. Her grandmother is not sick or in crisis and mid-winter would be an odd time to make the trip. However the leading is a strong one.

In discerning whether this communication is from God, the first question should be whether it is consistent with the teaching of the Bible. She is not feeling led to divorce her husband or abandon her children in order to take this trip nor is she thinking of stealing money for the plane fare. No commandments would be broken in following this leading. And the Bible does teach us that we are to honour our parents and treat the elderly with special respect and consideration. It would also be an act of mercy and compassion to reach out to her grandmother who lives far away from all the rest of her family. These dynamics are certainly in accord with Scripture and with the example of Jesus.

Consistency with Scripture does not mean that the leading from God sounds like something from the book of Jeremiah. Nor does it imply that the leading must be extreme or dramatic. But God's voice will be consistent with the specific teachings and with the broad values of the Bible. God will not contradict himself.

¹ Psalm 119:24 (TNIV)

March 12, 2008 **Do Others Confirm it?**

“The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.” Saul said to David, ‘Go, and the LORD be with you.’”¹

A prompting may often seem to be in accord with the tenor or scripture, or at least not in violation of it. But does that of itself does not mean it is from God. A second level of discernment would be to see if others confirm it. Today, faith is often a highly individualized experience. God intends his people to live out their walk with him in relationship with others.

In our case study, the woman shared her leading regarding the trip to see her grandmother with her husband. Although initially dubious, he was supportive of the idea. The trip, though unexpected, was within their financial means and he was willing to use vacation time to look after their three young children.

Confirming counsel often comes from those is closest relationships to us: spouses, parents, close friends or others who know us well and who may be able to help discern if this is part of a ‘fleshly’ pattern in our lives. Confirmation may also come from those in some sort of a position of authority: employers, parents, etc. Regardless of whether they are believers or not, God has placed them in our lives for a reason and can use them to help guide our course. Other godly people may also be a resource for confirmation, however we should be wary of those who themselves tend to buy into every dramatic inclination as a leading from God. Seek out persons with wisdom and a consistent walk with Christ.

¹ 1 Samuel 17:37 (TNIV)

March 13, 2008 **Do Events Confirm it?**

*“But I trust in you, LORD; I say, ‘You are my God.’
My times are in your hands; deliver me from the
hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me.”¹*

If God is communicating something to us, he will order events to confirm and enable it to happen. There may be obstacles and speed-bumps, but he will confirm it.

In our case study a number of events provided confirmation. The willingness of her husband to look after the children enabled her to go. When the trip was booked a seat sale provided a stunningly cheap airfare. This was not crucial to going, but it was a significant encouragement. But it was only two months later that God’s purposes became significantly clearer. On the evening of her arrival, she went to visit her grandmother and they had a great time together. But next morning, the retirement home called to say that her grandmother’s health had taken a sudden turn for the worse. She rushed to the bedside and was with her grandmother when she finally breathed her last and went to be with the Lord. As the only family member in town, she ended up overseeing the funeral arrangements and looking after her grandmother’s effects.

Two months prior, God had communicated via a strong prompting so that one of his children would have a family member by her bedside when she died. Events ultimately made plain that this leading was from God and obedient response led to various blessings. God frequently uses a number of means to communicate his will to us. Because we have a High Priest at the right hand of the Father, prayer and God’s answering of prayer is a two-way communication with God.

¹ Psalm 31:14-15 (TNIV)

March 14, 2008 **Hearing God's Voice: A
Final Plea**

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you."¹

A great deal of space has been devoted to how God communicates to us because this topic is currently one of great import among Christians. After centuries of believing that God communicated in rather limited ways through limited means (i.e. via the Bible, the Church, divine providence), Christians are receiving teaching which proclaims that God answers our prayers with communications that are personal, daily, intuitive and miraculous.

Some of these teachings are a breath of fresh air, an aspect of renewal in the Holy Spirit that is bringing us closer to the life of faith experienced by believers in the first century church and which God has always desired for his people. However some of these teachings are simply wrong, based more on New Age practices than the New Testament. Believers who frequently affirm "the Lord told me this" or "the Spirit has shown me that" may be doing more to alienate others from faith than drawing them to it. If our testimonies to God's leading seem trivial, self-centered or just turn out to be dead wrong, we are bringing the name of Christ into disrepute.

The intent of this examination regarding how God communicates is not to sow doubt, but to encourage discernment and humility. When God has truly spoken let us give him all the glory. Until we know that to be true, let us exercise wisdom and care.

¹ Psalm 32:8-9 (TNIV)

