

DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

March 3-7, 2008



March 3, 2008 **God Communicates
Through Providence**

*“your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be.”¹*

Circumstances as directed by divine providence are another means by which God guides us and answers our prayers. Providence may be defined as “that continued exercise of the divine energy whereby the Creator preserves all His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end.”²

Because God is sovereign over all events, he can and does use them to lead us as we seek his will. He has the ability to open doors and shut them. He can work all things together for good for those who love him.³ While we may at times think God is answering our prayers in one way, his ordering of the circumstances may confirm or correct that assumption.

Having said this, one be careful about accepting circumstances too readily as the definitive answer to our prayers. Discernment is still required. Is this ‘open door’ really an opportunity from God – or a distraction from God’s true purposes? Is this ‘closed door’ an indication that God is saying ‘no’, or is he calling us to persist and overcome the adversity?

In the midst of the events, circumstances can be confusing. We should be open to God’s direction by other means and trust in his ability to lead in his time.

¹ Psalm 13:16 (TNIV)

² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 166

³ Romans 8:28

March 4, 2008 **God Communicates
Through 'Promptings' (1)**

*"My sheep listen to my voice;
I know them, and they follow me."¹*

When we become followers of Jesus, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives. As our 'counselor'² one of the Spirit's roles is to guide us from within. We may experience these inner 'promptings' in different ways and God may use a number of different methods to form them. However, unless they are prophecies, these communications do not come in the form of specific words or messages.

Jesus uses the metaphor of sheep knowing the shepherd's voice to assure us that his own people will recognize his direction. When a shepherd calls out, the sheep do not hear and understand words or coherent messages. They hear and respond to a familiar sound. Animals may come to respond appropriately to a few specific, oft-repeated terms (e.g. 'sit!', 'beg'), but they are unable to hear and understand sentences or long messages of human language. When Jesus says that sheep know the voice of the shepherd he clearly means that they know its timbre, tone, cadence in comparison to the voices of others.

In these verses Jesus is not indicating that he will send regular, verbal messages to his followers. He is, however, assuring us that we will be able to discern and follow his leading when he calls out to direct us. Sometimes that direction will be loud and clear. At other times it may be quieter and require more careful discernment on our part. But with the Spirit in us, God has an immediate means to prompt, nudge, beckon us to follow his paths.

¹ John 10:27 (TNIV)

² John 14:16-17

March 5, 2008 **God Communicates
Through ‘Promptings’ (2)**

“My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight, preserve sound judgment and discretion; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble.”¹

We have a tendency to get most excited about leadings from God that come in the form of ‘special’ revelations. When we think of the inner leading of the Spirit, our paradigms are testimonies of visions, dreams, prophecies, ‘nudges’ or directions from God that are very compelling or urgent.

But God devotes a whole book of the Bible to the importance of gaining wisdom. This wisdom begins with reverent respect for God, and grows by gathering insights from observation, from the Scripture and from the experience of oneself and others who have traveled the road before us.

In many cases, God doesn’t need to re-invent the wheel. He prompts us through common sense – the accumulated wisdom/insight we have gained in life thus far. This wisdom is not to be despised as ‘earthly’ or ‘ordinary’ but, as Proverbs teaches, it is to be regarded as a treasure which we eagerly seek and which we should be ever ready to put to use.

Often, when something just seems right to us, God is blessing us with the guiding of the Spirit via common sense. And as many have observed, common sense is unfortunately not that common.

¹ Proverbs 3:21-23

March 6, 2008 **God Communicates
Through ‘Promptings’ (3)**

“Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God.”¹

Sometimes the inner prompting of the Spirit is a result of providential preparation.

Though only a teenager, David had spent years cultivating a close relationship with the Creator of the universe as he tended his sheep on the hillsides of Judah. When he arrived at the valley of Elah and heard Goliath pouring scorn upon the God of Israel he was passionately certain that something had to be done to silence the giant’s slanders. And he was convinced that his God-given skill and experience with the sling were the means that God was going to use to bring glory to his name.

God often uses the experiences of life, both good and bad, to build passionate conviction in us. We find that we are moved by a situation or on behalf of certain people while others around us may lack similar direction or conviction. To us it seems patently obvious that something must be done. We may have very clear specific ideas as to what that course of action should be. We may be perplexed as to why everyone does not share our outlook.

It such circumstances, it may become clear that the providence of God has shaped our lives to produce those passions and to prepare us to respond. The Holy Spirit may well be prompting us based on preparatory work that God has been doing. When God’s moment arrives, his leading seems clear.

¹ 1 Samuel 17:36 (TNIV)

March 7, 2008 **God Communicates
Through 'Promptings' (4)**

"The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it.'"¹

At times, God may choose to communicate with us by means of 'special' providence. These include strongly compelling leadings from God, prophetic messages, dreams or visions. While some teach that these 'miraculous' interventions of God ceased after the time of the Apostles², this view is contrary to the plain sense of Scripture. These means of communication occur in the Bible and believers continue to testify to their experience of them today.

On the one hand, these means of communication are to be embraced as gracious gifts of God. It is true that they are very frequently abused and people are deceived by mistaking the voices of the world, the flesh and the devil for the voice of God. But we should not allow fear or bad doctrine to cause us to reject God's gifts. To label them as delusional or evil is, frankly, blasphemous and divisive.

On the other hand, many exalt the 'special' means of guidance over the other forms. They constantly seek visions or 'words' from the Lord and put forward the product of their own imaginations as God's revelation. They resist examining or properly discerning these communications as quenching the Spirit, even though Scripture specifically commands us to do so³. To declare, 'the Lord has said' when in fact he has not is equally blasphemous as it violates the third of the Ten Commandments.

¹ Acts 8:29 (TNIV)

² This view is called 'cessationism' and argues that, once the revelation of the New Testament was written, the church no longer needed miracles, prophecy, etc.

³ 1 Corinthians 14:29