

How Do We Know When God is Speaking to Us Privately?

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I. Introduction

Many people are quick to say, “the Lord told me to do or say.....”. How do we know this thought? For some people, a feeling or a message heard from someone else came from God.

There is a more extensive study on this issue, but because Christmas is upon us and we are just taking a break from our study of Revelation, we will approach this subject in summary form, so let's dive right in.

II. How God Speaks to Us in Order to Guide and Direct Us

A. Christ at Salvation:

1. Christ says His sheep will respond to His voice (John 10:14-16, 27-30). Does this mean a still, small voice? When Christ said this, He meant the following:

a) The Holy Spirit will draw people to God (John 6:44) because no one seeks God on their own (Romans 3:9-11). Maybe this is why a non-Christian suddenly develops an interest in church or senses a need to read the Bible.

b) The Holy Spirit will use God's Word preached through preachers to do the following:

i) To draw them to God (Romans 10:14-15).

ii) Due to the power of the Word, unbelievers will be provided enough faith to accept Christ. *"So faith {comes} from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; `Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'"* (Romans 10:17-18)

2. When His sheep hear His voice, it will be the result of the Holy Spirit drawing us, the Word providing us enough faith to hear the message and us having the good sense to accept it.

B. Daily Guidance:

1. The Holy Spirit:

a) God has anointed us with the Holy Spirit so that we can understand the Word of God and distinguish the truth from lies taught by false teachers (1 John 2:20-22, 26-27). This is important because it is the truth that sets us free from the bondage of sin (John 8:32; all those vices or habits that were gained while we were not saved).

i) 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 *"Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him. For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God."*

- b) The Holy Spirit grows in His influence in our lives as we seek to obey God's Word (Romans 8:5-9).
- c) From this intimate daily walk with God a believer will reveal the fruit of the Spirit and walk in step with God (Galatians 5:22-25). When we walk in His step, because the flesh is no longer in control, we are fully directed by God. This allows a believer to be controlled by God daily.
- d) As a believer's life is directed by God's Word, which is applied under the control and direction of the Holy Spirit (Titus 2:11-15), the believer is functioning in the will of God.

i) Titus 2:11-15; *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you."*

2. The Word of God – the will of God:

If the following statements are true, then we do not need to hear a small voice in our heads.

- a) The Word of God tells us that the Holy Spirit will guide us into truth that He hears (John 16:13).
- b) It is also a true knowledge of God's Word that allows us to discern what is best and pure (Philippians 1:9-11).
- c) A true knowledge of God's Word provides us with everything we need pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).
- d) A true knowledge of God's Word allows the Holy Spirit to transform our lives (Romans 12:2).

- e) It is the practicing of the truth that allows us to be trained to understand what is good and evil (Hebrews 5:14; James 4:17).
- f) The Word teaches that if we trust in God's Word and obey it, God will direct our paths (Proverbs 3:5; 16:9).
- g) Our obedience to God allows us to abide with Him (John 15:10) and to get to know God intimately (1 John 2:3-6).
- h) The key to knowing when God is speaking to us is to obey His moral will (the Word of God). We must also trust His sovereign will; use our trained senses (this occurs as we practice the truth; Hebrews 5:14), and our ability to discern good from evil (this ability is developed as a result of acquiring divine knowledge).
- i) Bible study is essential for us if we sincerely want to hear God speaking to us (2 Timothy 2:15).

3. Pastors and Teachers:

- a) 1 Timothy 4:16 – *“Paul, pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.”*
- b) Ephesians 4:12-13 – *“for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to be building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”*
- c) Hebrews 13:7 – *“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.”*

4. Circumstances in Our Lives - Charles Stanley provides us a list of ways Christ can speak to us through circumstances:

- a) When God does not answer our prayers, He forces us to evaluate our lives (James 4:3; 1 John 3:22; 5:14; 1 Peter 3:7)
- b) Disappointments or failures (Numbers 14; 26-35; Judges 7:5)

- c) “The wise response when disappointment comes is always to ask God what He is trying to teach us and then respond to our disappointments with new insight into God’s plan and purposes.”
- d) Financial problems (Judges 6:1-6; Haggai 1:3-11; Acts 5:1-11).
- e) God can speak to us through nature (Romans 1:18-20).
- f) God can speak to us through sickness (2 Chronicles 32:22-25; 1 Corinthians 11:27-34; James 5:14).
- g) God can use other believers either as a result of wise counsel (Proverbs 12:15; 13:10; 19:20-21; 27:9), the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:10) or the sharing of God’s truth (Ephesians 4:15).

C. Does God Speak to Us in our Minds?

1. Every time God spoke to someone in scripture, He did so through an angel, directly, or through a vision. Here are some examples:

- a) God spoke to Abram in a vision (Genesis 15).
- b) God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai first through an angel (Exodus 3:2), and then God spoke to Him directly (Exodus 3:4-21).
- c) Moses went before God and spoke with Him (Exodus 34:33-35). It was not something he heard in His head.
- d) It was an angel of the Lord that spoke to Hagar (Genesis 16:6-14).
- e) It was through a vision that Peter was told to go to Cornelius (Acts 10:9-18).
- f) The apostle Paul heard from Jesus while traveling on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4-8).

These are some of the many examples of how God communicated with His shepherds or sheep in the Old and New Testaments. Maybe this is why the Bible tells us to test every spirit. *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”* (1 John 4:1)

2. The writer of Hebrews said that when God spoke to us, He did so *“long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways.”* When God speaks to us, the writer continues, He speaks to us through Christ; *“in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.”* Christ said that He would speak to us through the disciples (John 17:20) who will bring out old and new treasures (Matthew 13:52). They will lay for us a foundation that no one must change (Ephesians 2:19-20; 1 Corinthians 3:11-12).

Conclusion

This study is by no means claiming that God has stopped speaking to us. I strongly believe that God still speaks. The issue is how does He do so when we possess His completed Word, the Bible (2 Timothy 3:17)? I believe that scripture supports the fact that God speaks to us through His Word and His creation (Romans 1:20), as well as through His messengers who are teachers, preachers, and pastors. God may still speak to us in dreams. These dreams, however, do not violate what His Word teaches. We should test these dreams against the authority of His Word (1 John 4:1).

I do believe that scripture provides evidence that prophecies still exist, but it is as a result of God's Word being explained and exposed rather than a still small voice telling a believer what to do. I do not believe that scripture supports claims that believers hear God speak in a still, small voice (if you believe this, I encourage you to always test what it says against the Word of God 1 John 4:1). I do believe that God will use the ministry of the Holy Spirit to direct us by impressing upon us a desire (that fits within the context of God's Word) to do what He wants us to do (our desires can become His desires as we develop an intimate relationship with God John 15:1-7; 1 John 3:22).

We must not depend on still small voices to direct our lives and daily decisions. We must commit to renewing our minds and applying God's Word to the issues we encounter. It is through the persistent application of God's Word that we will be able to experience God intimately (John 15:1-11), sense His direction (Hebrews 5:14), and live wise and please God in a perverse generation (Ephesians 5:15-18; Colossians 1:9-12).

It is a commitment to know and apply God's Word that allows us to be thoroughly equipped for every good work. *"You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:14-17).*