

IN RESPONSE - DIVINE GUIDANCE, PART I

by Dennis Prutow
Volume I, Number 6

In discussing different "Views of the Bible" in our local morning Sabbath School class, the question of divine guidance has arisen several times. It is a question that relates directly to the Bible because, for the most part, the effort is continually made to circumvent the written revelation of Scripture in favor of some form of ongoing special revelation. For many this may come in the form of certain impulses, feelings, sensations, or thoughts. And when these physical manifestations are experienced, the individual often expresses them in terms of having a "word from the Lord" or by saying, "The Lord told me...." But if pressed on the matter, the individual will be constrained to admit that there was no verbal communication from God, except where thoughts may be involved. Rather there has been a dependence upon other physical manifestations.

It is my intent in possibly three articles to speak to this whole issue by first looking at how certain biblical passages are misused. This will come in two parts. Then hopefully we can look at proper views of divine guidance.

First of all, there is all too much confusion over the place of emotions in the Christian faith. We must see that, *we* do not prepare our emotions or the emotions of others for the gospel. Often times the emotions are manipulated in hopes of engendering a commitment to Christ. This we oppose! On the other hand, *God* will and does prepare us emotionally for the gospel through conviction of sin. And this does not exclude the use of means. For example, the preaching of the Law is the God ordained means of bringing about conviction of sin (Romans 3:20). But it is God who uses the Law to bring about conviction as the Holy Spirit applies the Law to our hearts (John 16:8).

Not only so, true faith in Christ does have an emotional content. We must come to grips with our sin and sense our deep need of salvation through Christ. But these emotions are a *response* to the written Word of God. In the one case the response is to the Law. In the other case there is a response to the sacrifice of Christ for my sins! The point

to grasp is that the emotional response is just that, a *response*!

Second, there is often confusion over the witness of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." Now the point is that the Spirit is not providing a form of special revelation to us. "We are not to construe this witness of the Spirit as consisting in a direct propositional revelation to the effect, 'Thou art a child of God'"¹ Rather, this witness comes in response to the written Word of God. How so? The Bible pointedly describes the Christian as a person who believes in Christ as the only adequate payment for his or her sins. And the Bible says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life" (John 3:36). Now when a person does trust the Son, the Spirit bears witness with that person's spirit to the truth of the Word of God! Again there is *response* to the written Word!

Third, there is often much confusion over the concept of "peace." Philippians 4:8-9 says, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you." Note that Paul exhorts us to practice what we have learned from Him. Today, this means we are to practice the Word of God. Then, says Paul, we can expect the peace of God to be with us. Once again we see that peace is the result of action taken upon the Word of God. We do not seek peace! We seek to do the will of God and peace follows! When we seek the peace without placing emphasis on practicing the Word of God, we have things backwards. The God of peace being with us is the *result* of our practice of the Word of God!

Fourth, there is often perplexity in the minds of men and women over the "hearing of voices." Is it me? Is it God?

Is it the devil? Here again there is reliance upon subjective experience for guidance. And therein lies the confusion! But 2 Peter 1:19 says, "And so we have the prophetic word made more sure." The King James Version says, "And we also have a more sure word of prophecy." Peter is talking about the Bible. This written Word is more sure than *any* voice we may hear. The comparison is being made with the voice of God heard on the Mount of Transfiguration, "For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased' -- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the mountain" (2 Peter 1:17-18). In contrast to this audible voice of God the Father, Peter says, "We have also a more sure Word of prophecy." Scripture is therefore more sure than the audible voice of God let alone other voices. Following "voices" can get us into trouble. But we do well to take heed to the more sure *written* Word, the Bible!

Fifth, we are often disconcerted by the "sense of oughtness" we experience. But what is this "sense of oughtness." Luke 17:10 gives us a clue, "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'" The word "ought" means we "owe" our master something. And what we owe is the performance of our duty. In other words, there is a standard of duty we have to perform. That standard is set forth in the Bible. The "sense of oughtness" is therefore a *response* to the Word of God! When we feel we ought to visit someone in the hospital, we are responding to the teachings of Christ to visit the sick (Matthew 25:35-40).

This brings us to the question of the place of conscience. First Samuel 24:5 helps us here, "And it came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe." It was an act of disrespect contrary to the Law of God for David to humiliate God's anointed, King Saul. And David, knowing the Word of

¹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 297).

God, found that his conscience *hurt*. This is often the case with each of us. When we violate the commandments of God, our consciences hurt. Once again, this inner sense which we experience is a *response* to the written Word of God. Conscience is therefore a spiritual mechanism which *responds* to what we already know is right or wrong!

The question then is, should we seek after impressions, impulses, feelings, sensations, or voices as guides for our lives? The answer is "No!" The Bible, which is the written Word of God, is to be our guide! And what we see in the Scriptures is that a sense or feeling or emotion *may* be a *response* to the objective teaching of Scripture and our endeavor to follow the Scriptures! This is the important sequence to grasp. Failure to understand this sequence leads many to seek impressions, impulses, feelings, and sensations as a guide for their lives rather than taking Scripture as *the* only inerrant guide. This also means that we are only to follow the voice of God speaking by way of the words of Scripture! Any other voice will lead us astray! This includes our own inner thoughts which are not in conformity to the written Word of God set forth in the Bible.

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