



The Reflector

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Pardon Me, If I Seem Skeptical . . .

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More and more I hear and read of brothers and sisters who claim to be receiving *direct* communication from God. Some claim being directly led by the Spirit in their daily walk even to the point of leading them to an empty parking space when late for work or an appointment. Some openly testify that God “spoke” to them on certain occasions, even quoting what God said to them. Some claim day to day *direct* guidance and comfort of the Holy Spirit that dwells in them. Some claim to be receiving *direct* assurance from God in their hearts of their salvation. After “praying about” a situation or a decision some claim that God has *revealed* the “answer” to them. We are often told that on certain occasions that God *directly* “spoke to their hearts.”

I am skeptical, not because I doubt the honesty or sincerity of such claimants, but because all such claims are subjective. In the scriptures, when people made such subjective claims of receiving direct communication from God, it was accompanied with objective evidence to substantiate the claims. Jesus, his apostles, and others who claimed direct communication from God, did not ask to be believed on their testimony alone – they were able to offer *objective* confirmation of their claims in the form of miraculous signs.

The Hebrews writer affirms that regardless of how God may have spoken to people in times past, he speaks to people in the last days by His Son. (Heb. 1:1,2). The logistics of the Son speaking to us is outlined in chapter 2. It was first spoken by the Lord and confirmed unto us by those that heard him with God confirming their claims by “both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will.” We have the entirety of God’s communication to man in the

writings of these inspired witnesses. There is absolutely no objective evidence that God has continued to speak *directly* to the hearts of men and women about any matter after “the faith” was once delivered unto the saints. In the Scriptures we have the “perfect” or complete revelation of God.

So, where did the concept that God continues to directly and immediately communicate with us today? It is not from reading and understanding the Scriptures. It is from drinking heavily at the fountain of denominational jargon – especially laced in charismatic emotionalism.

The longer I live and more I study, the less I am inclined to spend much time in arguing over *how* the Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian. All I know about the Holy Spirit’s dwelling in me is what the Scriptures reveal. I accept that He does “by faith” which comes from hearing God’s word (Rom. 10:17). Do I understand all about *how* the Holy Spirit dwells in me? No. Nor do I understand all about *how* my spirit dwells in me. But I accept both as facts because of what is revealed in the Scriptures. I also know from the Scriptures that the New Testament scriptures are God’s complete and final revelation to man. (Jude 3)

What do the Scriptures reveal about what the Holy Spirit’s dwelling in us does for us? First, He does nothing *to* us separate from the Spirit inspired written word – that includes instructing, admonishing, convicting and comforting us. Some wonder, that since He does none of these things *to* us, then what good does He serve in dwelling in us? The benefit of His indwelling in us does not lie in what He does *to* us, but in what He does *for* us.

Now as to what he does *for* us or on our behalf. I can think of at least a couple of things.

1. He makes intercessions for us on occasion:

*“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession **for** the saints according to the will of God.”* (Romans 8:26-27 NKJV - Emp. mine eob)

Note here, in making intercession, He does not speak **to** us, but speaks **for** us unto God.

2. The Scriptural assurance of His indwelling is indeed comforting and furnishes us with incentive to avoid sin.

“Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Corinthians 6:18-20 NKJV) ■

Let Me Not Wander

From Your Commandments

Bryan Gibson

“With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments” (Psalms 119:10). Impressive, yes, but even more impressive when you consider all that David had to go through, all the things that could have easily made him wander. So take a few minutes to compare your attitude to the one expressed here by David. Would any of the following cause you to wander from God’s commandments?

When brethren rebuke you. David’s afflictions took many forms, including the rebuke he received from the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12). Afflictions didn’t drive him away; they made him cling more closely to God’s commandments. “Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep Your word...It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes” (Psalms 119:67, 71).

When worldly people make fun of you. And make fun of you they will, if you consistently do the right thing (1 Peter 4:4). David faced that, too, and here’s what he said about it: “The proud have me in great derision, yet I do not turn aside from Your law” (Psalms 119:51).

When persecution gets even worse—when enemies lie about you, seek to destroy your name, or maybe even try to kill you. Would any of these cause you to wander from keeping God’s commandments? David experienced all these things (Psalms 119:61, 78, 85-88, 95, 109-110, 157, 161), and yet it did not diminish his resolve. “But I have not forgotten your law...but I will meditate on your precepts...but I did not forsake your precepts...but my heart stands in awe of Your word...yet I have not strayed from your precepts”—David made all these statements in the midst of heavy persecution.

When filled with sorrow and grief—due to sickness, the death of a loved one, the unfaithfulness of a loved one, etc. Again, listen to David who experienced many occasions of sorrow. “My soul melts from heaviness, strengthen me according to Your word...trouble and anguish have overtaken me, yet Your commandments are my delights” (Psalms 119:28, 143).

When God seems so far away, when you get to the point that you ask, “When will you comfort me?” (Psalms 119:82). David certainly knew that feeling, because he was the very one who asked that question. But look at the very next verse: “For I have become like a wineskin in smoke, yet I do not forget Your statutes” (Psalms 119:83).

When the world seems so attractive, when it appears to offer more than Christ does. David was no stranger to the pull of the world, which explains why he made this plea to God: “Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way” (Psalms 119:35-37).

When “smart people” seem to have better answers, when their explanations seem to make more sense than the explanations found in God’s word. As for David, well, let’s just say that he was less than impressed. “You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies...I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep your precepts” (Psalms 119:98-100). David was wiser than any of these men, because he knew God’s wisdom.

Bottom line; don’t let anything diminish your resolve to keep the commandments of God. Don’t let

anything shake your confidence in God or in His word. “Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven...The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever” (Psalms 119:89, 160). ■

Distinctive Preaching

James Hahn

For some time I, and others, have expressed concern about the kind of preaching that is being done in many places today. In expressing this concern I have frequently said that much of the preaching that is being done today could be done in any denominational church without any change and it would be accepted.

Some have interpreted this concern as saying that our “difference from denominations” is the measuring stick for our preaching. No one that I know who has expressed this concern over the lack of distinctive preaching has suggested that this is the measuring stick for our preaching nor have they lamented over the lack of “church of Christ” doctrine in the preaching being done. In fact, the men I have heard expressing concern over the kind of preaching being done have been the ones who have spoken out against the denominational concept of the church and are the ones who emphasize the distinctive message of God’s word. They are the ones insisting that the word of God is the only standard of authority and that we must respect that authority. When this kind of preaching is done on a regular basis you will be teaching men and women what they must do to be saved; that Christ is **the** way and that He is the Savior of **the** church (Acts 2:38; John 14:6; Eph. 5:25). We are not talking about lessons from time to time that may deal with some Bible character or lessons from his life. We are talking about a compromising spirit on the part of far too many who will not preach what the word of God teaches on the plan of salvation, the church, the work of the church, the worship of the church, the organization of the church or the truth on many other moral and doctrinal issues.

I am ready to affirm that when we preach the gospel in its purity and completeness that teaching will not be accepted by denominationalists, not because we have sought to “offend the denominations”, but because it is the truth. Brethren, don’t be deceived into thinking that the willingness of denominations to accept certain lessons you may preach is an indication of their

“closeness to the truth.” That acceptance is based on the fact that the particular lesson may be something with which they agree. For example, I could go to a Baptist Church and preach a lesson showing from the scriptures that baptism is an immersion and every word I say be true and be accepted by them but that would not mean they were “close to the truth” on what the Bible teaches concerning baptism. They still deny the truth on baptism and its purpose.

We need to realize that when we see to be closer to the denominations than we used to be it is not due to the denominations coming closer to the truth; it is due to our leaving the truth. It is a shame when men are criticized and misrepresented when they make an appeal to get back to preaching that will convict men and women of their sins and teach them what they must do to be saved. This kind of preaching will not be accepted by the denominations but it will be pleasing to God and that’s what is of real importance. ■

The Providence of God

Thomas Thornhill

Anyone who studies the Bible carefully comes face to face with the providence of God. His hand is seen in events that unfold throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. If one really believes the Bible one will also believe in the providence of God. Yet, many who see God’s hand in past events will deny that God is still active in the affairs of His universe and His people. The problem is that God’s providence has been cast into mysterious and unexplainable terms, resulting in many unwarranted and false claims of special divine providence. Admittedly it is not easy to understand how God does what he does but does one really need to know **how** God does something in order for it to be accepted and believed. God may be **invisible** to us, but He certainly is not **inactive**. He has not ceased to provide for that which He has created.

What is Meant by the Providence of God?

One of the difficulties encountered in understanding the providence of God is that the word “providence” appears only one time in the scriptures Acts 24:2, and is not used in reference to God’s providence, but man’s. The Biblical use of the word in reference to God is not present, but the doctrine of “divine providence” is very real in the scriptures.

The word “providence” is defined in the dictionary as “the care or benevolent guidance of

God.” The English word comes from the Latin, “providere” which in turn is made up of two words, “pro” (before) and “videre” (to see), thus “to foresee.” The corresponding Greek word is “pronoia” (forethought). Thus, the idea “to see before,” which expresses the idea of foresight and forethought, implies a future end or goal with a definite purpose and plan for sustaining that end. In exercising forethought and foresight, God created a universe that He could control for His own purpose. God’s control cannot be denied, “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:16-17). Paul declared to the Athenians, “God who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth ... gives to all life, breath and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and bounds of their habitation ... for in Him we live, and move and have our being” (Acts 17:24-28). How can one believe in the God Paul proclaimed on that day and deny His providential care today?

When Is It the Providence of God?

People talk much about the providence of God, generally with a misunderstanding of what they are talking about. One talks about being delivered from some serious accident by “the providence of God.” How does one know? Another says “I was providentially hindered” from doing something. Can one be sure that God caused the thing to happen? People need to be careful in attributing to God that which cannot be proved. Mordecai would not affirm God’s providence in making Esther queen of Persia, rather he said, “Yet, who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). Paul did not know that the escape and ultimate conversion of Onesimus was caused by the hand of God. He wrote, “For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother” (Philemon 15, 16).

In reality, no one can speak with certainty about when God exercises His providence, unless it is so stated. The **known** providence of God is recorded as past events. When did Joseph know that God had a

hand in the things that happened in his life? It was years later, after being reconciled to his brothers that Joseph said, “So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He ... has made me Lord of Egypt” (Genesis 45:8-9). He even understood that God’s providence in his life was not for him alone. “But as for me, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day to save many people alive” (Genesis 50:20).

Another problem encountered in a study of providence is the thinking of some that God can only exercise His providence through miracles. Since the age of miracles has now ceased, they assume that God’s providential care has also ceased. In so doing they limit God’s exercise of care and guidance to the past ages. They seem to liken God to a computer programmer, who after setting the program steps back and lets everything run without any further control. So, God after setting things in motion does nothing else for man today.

This is not the God I worship. While it is true that God sometimes used miracles to accomplish His will, on other occasions He used natural means, often unseen by man, to bring about His purpose. We must keep in mind that both the natural and the miraculous are under the control of the Creator. God, by a miracle, created the universe, and then established natural laws by which it would continue. Both are expressions of His will. Both employ a supernatural source.

“Providence employs a supernatural source via a natural means, while a miracle used both a supernatural source and a supernatural means” (Flavil Yeakley Jr.).

“Providence is the working of God through His provision in the natural and spiritual realms, and yet it is a control that violates neither the sovereignty of the human will nor the divine natural and spiritual laws” (Homer Hailey).

People need to recognize their inability to know when and how God directs the affairs of this world. Just accept the fact that He does, even if one never knows **how** He does it. “For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all; that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God” (Ecclesiastes 9:1). My conclusion in this article is that while the supernatural means have ceased, the supernatural source in ways unseen by human eyes, continues to control His universe and His people today. ■