

Divine Guidance: Dangers

It is far too often that we hear Christians saying, “God told me to do this” or “God spoke to me and I know this is His will.” One of the major errors of the Charismatic movement (which began in the 1960s) is absolutizing “hearing the voice of God.” When someone absolutizes any truth (even the truth that a follower of Christ can hear God's voice), then dangerous error is lurking around the corner.

Subjective and Objective

More often than not, someone uses the statement “God told me to do this” as an excuse for *not* doing God's will. A classic illustration of this is when a man or a woman decide to commit adultery because they know it is God's will for them to do so. The rejoinder is usually this, “I love this person; this person loves me. What is wrong with pursuing this course of action?” What is wrong with this course of action is that God's word tells us plainly, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” *To say that one's perception of love overrides God's law-word order is the highest form of deception and arrogance.* Sometimes “true love” is sin.

Deception and Protection

Biblical Christians should realize above all else that “the heart is deceitfully and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). Notice that I use the phrase Biblical Christians. A Christian may claim to be a follower of Christ, but if a Christian does not live “according to every word the proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4), then that Christian is not a Biblical Christian. Biblical Christians presuppose that God speaks to them through the Scriptures under the piercing authority of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 4:12, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

Being a Christian is no guarantee that one cannot be deceived or blind. The author of this essay can confirm that, as a Christian, he has been blind to many clear directives from Scripture. This blindness was due to a heart condition, a heart condition that wanted to do what he wanted to do, not what God by His Word required him to do.

Is not this the crux of the matter? Whose will is ultimate? Mine or God's? How do I determine whether what I “hear from God” is really a “word from God?” Isaiah 8:20 affirms, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” God, through His word, has given us everything pertaining to life and godliness (II Timothy 3:15-17).

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Deuteronomy 29:29, “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

Psalms 119:128, “Therefore I consider all your precepts to be right; I hate every false way.”

If you justify your decisions in life merely and only by a subjective “God has told me,” then be ready to walk into a pit of destruction (you will get what you want). In the words of Rousas J. Rushdoony, “Those who want to bypass the Word of God too often claim a 'divine' guidance known only to them. A fine Christian layman told me yesterday that, when he hears such talk about 'divine' guidance apart from Scripture, he expects the next voice to be the devil's. I can believe that” (*California Farmer*, 243:2, August 9, 1975, p. 33).

Checks and Balances

God's enscriptured word is a check and balance regarding divine guidance. Are there any other “checks and balances” that will guard one from jumping headlong into the pit of destruction? God has gifted Christians with, using military terms, a “chain of command.” There are levels of authority. There is structure and order *for the purpose of gracious protection*. In a marriage, a fallible wife and a fallible husband graciously check each other in God. In a family, children are to honor parents in the Lord (even if parents are fallible - and what parents are not fallible?). In a church, fallible elders and pastors graciously check a fallible congregation and fallible church courts graciously check fallible elders and pastors. In employment, a fallible employer checks fallible employees. In this fallen world, we dare not remove ourselves from God's protective governments. If we attempt to do so, we join ranks with anarchy where “every man does right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6).

In the author's 40 or so years of studying fallible men and women (including his own life), he has seen time and time again what many people do when they stubbornly reject God's ordained and protective authority. Let us say that Mr. Smith decides that a certain pathway is correct. If possible, he then gathers his “peers” (those people who agree with him, whether the same age or not) justifying his chosen direction by giving only his side of the story. Then, when people who do not agree with the pathway chosen by Mr. Smith confront him, Mr. Smith simply ignores them! He ignores them by shutting off all communication with them. He ignores them by running away. This shutting off and running away can be evidenced by refusing to answer the mail, phone calls, or any other attempt at communication. Sometimes Mr. Smith will allow communication but it is a communication *only on his terms*. Scripture says, “For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 24:6). By multitude of counselors, the Scripture does not mean counselors who merely “rubber stamp” a direction without hearing all sides in justice.

Another way in which Mr. Smith can reject God's ordained authority is through classic *ad hominem* argumentation. If Mr. Smith does not want to submit to God's gracious “chain of command” authority,

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then he enjoins *ad hominem* and “throws dirt” at the authority figure. No one in authority is without sin. Therefore, Mr. Smith can uncover imperfections in any authority figure. Mr. Smith throwing this “dirt” is evidence of disrespect, not only of God-given authority figures, but of the God who has given that authority. Remember that the Psalmist David refused to disrespect the office of the King (in the person of Saul, a King living outside of God's righteous order), invoking the premise “touch not God's anointed” (I Chronicles 16:22, Psalm 105:15). David knew the principle of blessing – instead of disrespecting King Saul, he continued to honor Saul by leaving him (and ensuing circumstances) in God's hands. By doing so, God honored David - I Samuel 2:30, “... Be it far from Me; for them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.” By “touching God's anointed” in the person of Saul, David knew that God would dishonor him. This principle of honor was one reason why God recognized David (and David was full of imperfections – see II Samuel 10-11) as a “man after His own heart”(I Samuel 13:14).

Consequences and Truth

The issue in divine guidance is obedience versus disobedience to God's clear directives, hearkening to God's instruction and God's counselors vs. rebellion. Let us not embrace any Hegelian dialectical synthesis at this point (unfortunately, thinking in accord with the Marxist dialectic has infected much of Evangelical Christianity where disobedience is rationalized and justified by a litany of excuses). God's word is an antithetical word; either you are walking in obedience or walking in disobedience. Let us be reminded from Scripture, “Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness as iniquity and idolatry” (I Samuel 15:23). One who thinks that subjective guidance or “feelings” is absolute (the standard by which all things are adjudicated) is making subjective guidance an idol.

A sad consequence of pursuing a course of action outside of the parameters of God's word is that it damages others, especially those close to the situation, be it family or friends. Sometimes, due to the blindness of sin, someone pursues a crooked path *with the purposeful intent of damaging others*. According to Scripture, any decision made with the purposeful intent to damage others is disobedience to the proscribed will of God.

James 3:13-4:3 (Weymouth translation), “Which of you is a wise and well-instructed man? Let him prove it by a right life with conduct guided by a wisely teachable spirit. But if in your hearts you have bitter feelings of envy and rivalry, do not speak boastfully and falsely, in defiance of the truth. That is not the wisdom which comes down from above: it belongs to earth, to the unspiritual nature, and to evil spirits. For where envy and rivalry are, there also are unrest and every vile deed. The wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceful, courteous, not self-willed, full of compassion and kind actions, free from favouritism and from all insincerity. And peace, for those who strive for peace, is the seed of which the harvest is righteousness. What causes wars and contentions among you? Is it not the cravings which are ever at war within you for various pleasures? You covet things and yet cannot get them; you commit murder; you have

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passionate desires and yet cannot gain your end; you begin to fight and make war. You have not, because you do not pray; or you pray and yet do not receive.”

Although self-willed decisions damage others, they ultimately spoil the inner spirit of the one who inflicts such damages. Those who sow the damage of rebellion and stubbornness are sowing to the wind. The prophet Hosea warns, “For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no heads, it shall yield no meal; if it were to yield, aliens would devour it” (Hosea 8:7).

Pride and Humility

James 4:6, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

How does the Holy Spirit resist rebellion, stubbornness and pride? A humble man submits to God's word and God's ordained “protection authority.” What constitutes a proud man? *What constitutes a proud man that God resists?* The Holy Spirit speaks gently to the heart. He speaks through the Scriptures and through other God-ordained means. If a man is proud, then that man stops reading the Bible (or if he reads it, he reads in superficially or selectively; he is not totally engaged in his reading of Scripture). A proud man will not engage his heart in Scriptures like Proverbs 16:8, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” A proud man who is not engaged in the reading of Scripture will not be engaged in the hearing of it in the assembly of the saints. He may even stop listening to God's word being preached from the pulpit (or listen “selectively” - how often do we do that?). If a man will not listen to Scripture directly, then God will speak to him through His ordained pastors and elders (including parents). If a man refuses to listen to the Holy Spirit speaking through the structure of the church and the family, then God will engineer circumstances to thwart the proud. I am paraphrasing a bit from Christian apologist C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) but the following is his essential counsel:

“God whispers to us in the still small voice of conscience under submission to Scripture. If we do not listen to that whisper, then God will speak audibly to us through His people. If we do not listen to this audible voice, then God will scream at us through pain.”

We choose which voice to hear: the whisper, the audible, or the scream. The truth that God resists the proud should be of great encouragement to every Christian. When a Christian is trapped in the blinding prison of pride (and this does unfortunately occur), then God's great love (as shown by His resistance) will be the corrective. By nature, an unbeliever lives in pride as a lifestyle and God, in His preventive and calling grace, resists that pride in bringing the unbeliever to repentance and conversion.

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Heart of Stone and Heart of Flesh

When God the Holy Spirit generates a “heart of flesh for a heart of stone” (a miracle, indeed!) and the foolish wanderers repent of their self-will, then the grace of forgiveness will bring restoration. There is hope. God is in the business of restoration and reconciliation, “And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you” (Joel 2:25). The author of this essay can testify, in his personal life, to such a gracious restoration.

In closing, consider these words from Rousas J. Rushdoony, “The Bible speaks to our total life. The Lord makes clear throughout Scripture what He requires of us. We are plainly and richly guided. The question is this: will we obey? Will we be guided? Sinning is bad enough, but to bypass the Word of God and to call our often sinful wishes divine guidance can only compound sin. The next time someone claims 'divine guidance,' ask him where in the Bible he got it. If he has no scriptural authority, his guidance is not of God” (*Ibid.*).