



1 Cor 2:10 -16

VIDEO – God and Doug

I know that video was a bit trite but it makes a point – that as Christians we all have a special relationship with God, and by His Spirit, He speaks to each of us, not quite in the kind of way in the clip but just as clearly nevertheless. All Christians have the Holy Spirit in their lives and He gives us that clear ability to identify what God is saying to us. And He has a whole series of methods of communicating with us by His Spirit.

HOW?

So how does God speak to us today? Let me suggest eight ways – all found in Scripture and all still with us today in my experience.

Through His written word

We've already covered this in previous weeks. It's God's premier way in which He speaks to each Christian. It's the God-breathed message: God's own written revelation of Himself. It's complete and authoritative. And it's a major way in which God speaks to us, both as we get to know God's will through understanding it, and the way God can speak to us through it as we meditate upon it. For a preacher this is standard fare – or should be. The bedrock of all preaching should be the Bible – but as I prepare I seek what God is trying to say through me when I preach it.

Through our minds

The second way God speaks today is through our minds. Let me go to the quote of scripture Paul gave in this passage *15 Whoever has the Spirit, however, is able to judge the value of everything, but no one is able to judge him. 16 As the scripture says: "Who knows the mind of the Lord? Who is able to give him advice?" We, however, have the mind of Christ.*

He refers to a phrase that's used five times in the OT – three of them in Job. To OT writers, understanding the mind and ways of God seemed difficult to understand or imponderable – but we have the mind of Christ. So to ordinary Christians is given by the Spirit that special skill of being able to understand the mind of God. It's that awareness we get of God telling us something. Often it's for us, but often we find it as something intended for others. Whereas each believer perceives the mind of God for ourselves, there is a specific gifting for some to speak God's message for now situations to other believers and to the church – it's of course the prophetic gift and I'll explore that on another occasion in the morning, but we have already started to explore that in the evenings. Prophecy is specifically the gifting of the Holy Spirit but the mind of Christ is what each of us have access to by His Spirit.

There's no standard way in which this tends to happen. Sometimes it's an idea, sometimes it's a word, or something that's developed from meditating on a scripture and sometimes it's a clear statement we can write down and relate to others.

You may be thinking; I'm a Christian and God doesn't speak to me. He does. The question is; how much are you listening? What helps listening is by having a prayer life that waits on God and meditates on His word. Although God in His grace speaks to us and through us, I've got to say that having a good prayer life is something that conducive to understanding the mind of Christ in us because it puts us in a frame of mind to listen.

Through exploration

This is a really common way Christians discern the mind of God and one of the easiest ways to grasp. It's how we usually pick Pastors in Baptist Churches. We pray together and make moves to discern God's way, like pushing open doors and trying things out until we find an open way or God speaking to each of us the same way. It's scriptural – even Paul literally did it.

Acts 16:6 They travelled through the region of Phrygia and Galatia because the Holy Spirit did not let them preach the message in the province of Asia. 7 When they reached the border of Mysia, they tried to go into

the province of Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. 8 So they travelled right on through Mysia and went to Troas.

Paul wanted to go one way, but the Spirit blocked him so he ended up where the Spirit wanted him to go. It's quite easy to do and quite effective, but we limit God if it's the only way we try to discern the mind and will of God because of the other ways in which He speaks.

Through Worship

If you look through both testaments you'll find lots of occasions where God spoke to people when they were worshipping together and seeking God's face.

Here's a good example from Acts: *Acts 13:1 In the church at Antioch there were some prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon (called the Black), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (who had been brought up with Governor Herod), and Saul. 2 While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul, to do the work to which I have called them." 3 They fasted and prayed, placed their hands on them, and sent them off.*

Meeting together to worship is one of the most important things we do as believers as it is through worship, through communion, through prayer and through the teaching of God's word that He speaks to people. Think how often that's happened to you.

Through Others

This is another way that I've found God speaking to me. Sometimes people have a word for me, other times I find the counsel of other people important if not essential as I've perceived God has been speaking to me. That's why corporate leadership and church meetings are important in the life of a church. If it's a God idea rather than a good idea, I often find that He has already been speaking to someone else strongly about it. That's why small groups are important in the life of a church. By praying and studying together, we so often perceived the voice of God together too.

Through Opportunity and Need

Often we see God's will in something because an opportunity presents itself or a need arises where we are in the right place at the right time or that God has provided for that need. Often a sign that something is right is that we have opportunity where needs are met financially or practically, particularly where it is under remarkable even miraculous circumstances.

Through dreams and visions (& angels)

We only had Christmas a couple of months back and central to the Christmas story was the good news of the birth of a Saviour was announced by angels. The Bible is full of miraculous signs, audible voices. Let's go back to *Acts 16:9 That night Paul had a vision in which he saw a Macedonian standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" 10 As soon as Paul had this vision, we got ready to leave for Macedonia, because we decided that God had called us to preach the Good News to the people there.*

It's scriptural for people to hear God and to be given pictures by God in dreams or through their minds. It happened in the NT, it happens now.

Through the Miraculous

Finally, God speaks through the miraculous, although I guess everything we have looked at this morning is the miraculous. People seeing answered prayer in their lives that's miraculous usually makes a huge change to them – they see it as God telling them something. The Philippian jailer came to Christ, not because he was convinced of God speaking to him through preaching or whatever, but because none of his prisoners escaped even though during an earthquake his jail doors miraculously opened and all his prisoners' chains fell off! At that point he realised that God was saying something to him!

TITLE

Now the question I'm sure you're asking yourself is how do I know it's the voice of God? How do you know this isn't all wishful thinking? It's easy to imagine God is wanting to say something either when we study scripture, or think He is speaking through our minds, or having a prayer and discussion in the church, or a situation seeming to be coincidentally miraculous.

There are two tests. They are both in Deuteronomy and although they apply to prophets specifically, we can apply them to any message that we think is coming from God. The first is : DEUT 18: 21 *"You may wonder how you can tell when a prophet's message does not come from the Lord. 22 If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and what he says does not come true, then it is not the Lord's message. That prophet has spoken on his own authority, and you are not to fear him.*

Has something remarkable happened – a miracle, answered prayer, a word that has come to pass? Have we experienced the presence and power of God? Then we need to recognise that whatever we have perceived.

Apart from being wishful in our thinking, satan can deceive us by doing false things that look like answered prayer or miraculous outcomes. DEUTERONOMY 13: gives us the second important test: *"Prophets or interpreters of dreams may promise a miracle or a wonder, in order to lead you to worship and serve gods that you have not worshipped before. Even if what they promise comes true, do not pay any attention to them. The Lord your God is using them to test you, to see if you love the Lord with all your heart. Follow the Lord and honour him; obey him and keep his commands; worship him and be faithful to him.*

You perceive a message from God, or hear someone else saying God has spoken to them. How do you assess it? Do you follow it even though it sounds genuine or miraculous? SLIDE What this passage adds are two things – is what is said and done in God's name or the name of Jesus and for His glory – or does it suit me, or that person or his or her agenda? A good way of testing that is of course God's word. If it is taking you to do something or believe something that doesn't honour Him, or obey His commands in His word and leads us way from God - it's not of God. GOD'S WORD And God's standards are all set out in His word.

ARE WE LISTENING?

Let me close by saying this: God wants to speak to us? Are we listening? Are we placing ourselves in a position to hear His voice: in worshipping and fellowshiping with God's people, in reading and meditating on God's word and spending time with Him in prayer.

Or are we doing this?

END VIDEO

*Preached by Mark Reid
MRBC Felixstowe 28/2/10
© Mark Reid 2010*