

## DREAMS, VISIONS, AND VOICES

- A. Introduction: We are talking about the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives as part of a bigger discussion about becoming God-inside minded. John 14:17; I John 4:4
1. If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, God, by the Holy Spirit, has indwelt you. You are now the temple or dwelling place of God. The great apostle Paul prayed that Christians would become conscious of the fact that God is in them and then live accordingly. Eph 1:19,20; I Cor 6:19
    - a. The Holy Spirit is in you to empower you to live in obedience to God as well as to transform you by conforming you to the image of Christ (make you like Jesus in character and power, holiness and love). Rom 8:3,4; 12,13; 29,30; I John 2:6
    - b. The Holy Spirit is also in us to guide us. John 16:13,14--But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it know to you. (NIV)
      1. Truth is a Person (John 14:6) who is revealed in a Book (John 17:17). The Spirit of Truth (the Holy Spirit) works with the Word of truth (the Bible) to reveal the Truth (the Lord Jesus).
  2. The number one way the Holy Spirit guides us is through His written Word (the Bible) which reveals the Living Word (Jesus). He leads us in line with His Word.
    3. The Holy Spirit inspired the men who wrote the Bible and He gives us understanding as we read. Ps 119:105; II Tim 3:16; I Pet 1:11,12; II Pet 1:20,21
  - c. The Bible is 50% history, 25% prophecy, and 25% instruction on how to live. The Scriptures reveal God's will, plans, and purposes. And, it gives us guidelines and principles of wisdom to help us make wise choices in the affairs of life.
    1. In areas where there are no specific Bible passages to direct us, the Holy Spirit guides us through an inward witness or assurance. Prov 20:27; Rom 8:16
    2. The Holy Spirit communicates with us, not through audible words, but through bearing witness or testifying to and with our spirit.
2. It's very common amongst Christians to hear people say: "the Lord told me such and such." Others talk about the dreams and visions they believe the Lord gives them. You can find courses on interpreting dreams in bookstores and online. Is it real? In this lesson we're going to address the more spectacular examples of God directing people through audible voices, dreams, visions, and angelic visitations? We could do a series on the topic, but hopefully what follows will be helpful to you.
- B. Human beings have a hunger for the supernatural. We were created to interact with a supernatural Being (Almighty God) and live supernatural lives. Supernatural means of or relating to an order of existence beyond the visible, observable universe.
1. We all have a desire to contact the realm beyond the seen world and receive guidance from beings with greater knowledge and power than ourselves. We want to know the future and receive direction in the affairs of life. That's why people consult psychics, go to fortune tellers, and read horoscopes.
  2. However, for a Christian, this desire to interact with the unseen must be brought under the direction and protection of the written Word of God (the Bible) for several reasons.
    - a. First, there's a lot of carelessness amongst Christians today. People overuse the phrase "the Lord told me" and attribute every thought, idea, and feeling they have to the Lord.
      1. It makes it sound as though God actually talks to them audibly and that He is directing their every move down to which pair of socks to put on in the morning. But God doesn't direct people in this way. How do I know? Because there's nothing like that in the New Testament.
      2. People attribute statements to God that never comes to pass and credit Him with advice that produces poor or ungodly results. If God is telling everyone everything people say He's telling them, then He often contradicts Himself, gives bad advice, and doesn't keep His word.

A. I can't tell you the number of woman I've had reveal to me that the Lord told them they'd be married by age 35, with two children, and in fulltime ministry with their husband. It doesn't happen and they get mad at God or they get another word from that they'll marry at age 45. I've had others say the Lord told them to marry a certain man. But, he turned out to be a wife-beater so God told them to leave. None of this is glorifying to God.

B. I'm not criticizing anyone, but I am saying we need to be more precise in how we describe our interactions with the Lord. We get an idea or really want to do something, and we decide this must be from God. However, There is a big difference between: the Lord spoke to me and I have an idea that I think came from God.

C. Add to that, very few people can tell the difference between their soul (mind and emotions) and their spirit (where God directs us). (This discernment only comes to us from reading the Bible) So, when we get excited about something, we wrongly take that emotional feeling as the leading or even the voice of God.

3. All of this imprecision makes us more susceptible to information from the "dark side". There really is a devil and he and his cohorts present all of us with thoughts in an attempt to influence our actions and draw us in ungodly directions. Familiarity with the written Word of God helps us tell the difference between our spirit and soul, and helps us recognize outside influences from the devil. Heb 4:12; Eph 6:11-13; Ps 91:4

b. Second, we must recognize and be aware that the times we're living in are rampant with deception.

1. Jesus Himself said that religious deception will be a hallmark of the years preceding His return, warning that there will be false Christs and false prophets who demonstrate what seem to be supernatural signs and wonders (Matt 24:4,5; 11; 24). Paul echoed Jesus' words when he also wrote of lying signs and wonders just before Jesus returns (II Thess 2:8,9).

A. In other words, there will be what appear to be supernatural signs that seem to be from God and many will be deceived. To be deceived means to believe a lie. The only protection against deception is the truth. The Spirit of Truth is here to guide us into all truth by exalting the written Word (the Bible) which reveals the Living Word (Jesus).

B. The Bible is our only 100% objective, accurate revelation from God. Supernatural experiences like voices, dreams, visions, and angelic visitations must be judged in the light of the written Word of God.

2. Sadly, Bible knowledge and reading amongst Christians is at an all time low (reputable surveys bear this out), leaving people vulnerable to being misled by false supernatural demonstrations. Added to this is the fact that in many Christian circles today, the importance of the Bible is downplayed.

A. I've seen books in Christian bookstores that say revelation through prophecy, dreams, and even feelings is on a par with the Bible, exalting subjective experiences over Scripture.

1. Churches services are held where people sit on the platform and paint as part of the worship. The idea is that the painters are getting revelation from the Spirit through their painting. There's nothing like that in Scripture.

2. Sincere Christians attend meetings because there's a prophet in attendance and they want to get a word from God. Or they go to meetings where people prophesy to each other. How is that any different than going to a fortune teller?

B. Well known ministers make statements like this: "We don't want to be Bible eggheads with all word and no spirit." But it isn't an "either or choice". We need both. However, a true demonstration of the Spirit of God will magnify and glorify the Living Word, Jesus, and will draw men to, not away from the written Word of God.

3. I'm not saying that the Lord doesn't speak to us through audible voices, prophecy, and dreams or that He never moves in spectacular supernatural ways. I'm saying that because of the times in which we live, with people seeking supernatural experiences, along with increasing ignorance of the Bible and

rampant deception, we need to read the Bible like never before.

- a. It will help us recognize genuine demonstrations of the Spirit of God. And it will protect us from being misled by our own emotions or lying signs and wonders.
- b. For the rest of the lesson we're going to look at the New Testament and see how the Holy Spirit interacted with the first Christians.

C. When we read the Book of Acts which describes the disciples' activities as they went out to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus, we see that Holy Spirit led the disciples by the inward witness, by speaking to them, and by more spectacular interaction such as dreams and visions. Note these points.

1. In last week's lesson we found that the first thing the Holy Spirit did in the lives of the disciples was give them revelation concerning who Jesus is along with understanding of the Scriptures (Matt 16:16;17; Luke 24:43-45). Notice also some common traits among these disciples.

- a. These people left all to follow Jesus. When Jesus' teachings became hard for some to accept and many quit following Him, He asked His disciples if they would leave too. Peter's response was: Where else would we go? You have the words of life. Matt 19:27; John 6:66-69
- b. They desired God's glory above their own good. When they were jailed and beaten for preaching the resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem and were ordered not to do it any more, their response was: We serve God, not man. It's right for us to do what He's told us to do. Acts 4:18-20; Acts 5:29

2. Consider a few examples of how the Holy Spirit directed the apostles in the Book of Acts. Notice that all the direction they received served redemptive purposes and led to the gospel going forth and people coming to saving knowledge of Jesus.

- a. Acts 8:26-38--An angel spoke to Philip and directed him to go from Jerusalem to Gaza where he met an Ethiopian eunuch and, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, he preached Jesus to the man.
- b. Acts 9:10-12--Ananias of Damascus had a vision where the Lord directed him to minister to the newly converted Saul (Paul).
- c. Acts 10:9-20--Peter had a vision of a sheet filled with all types of animals (clean and unclean).
  1. He heard a voice tell him to kill and eat, admonishing him not to call unclean what God has cleansed. Peter wasn't sure what the vision meant.
  2. While Peter pondered the vision, the Holy Spirit told him to go with men who just arrived at the place where he was staying. They took him to the home of a man named Cornelius and Peter preached the gospel to Gentiles for the first time.

d. Acts 13:1-4--At Antioch, as elders ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit directed them to set Barnabas and Saul apart for the work to which they were called.

e. Acts 16:6-10--Paul and Silas preached in a number of places and weren't sure where to go next. The Holy Spirit forbade them from going to Asia. When they tried to go to Bithynia, the Spirit didn't permit them to go. Then Paul had a vision where a man from Macedonia asked him to come help them. Paul and Silas went and had a successful preaching trip.

f. Acts 27:10; 23-25--While being taken as a prisoner to Rome, Paul perceived or discerned that the next leg of the voyage would be disastrous if they set out then. No one listened to him and the ship ended up in a deadly storm. An angel appeared to Paul and told him the ship would be lost, but all on board would survive. It all came to pass as it was spoken.

3. By using these examples, I'm not implying God won't direct us in our personal lives. But so much of the Christianity to which we've been exposed in modern America is very self-focused. It's about making our lives the best they can be as opposed to seeing people come to Jesus. Because our priorities are often out of order, much of the so-called direction from God people get can't be trusted.

- a. Do you ever think in terms of asking God to guide you to a prayer project in your neighborhood, someone you can pray for, that laborers will come into their life and share the gospel with them?
- b. Do you ever think in terms of asking God to work in you and make you more Christ-like in character so that lost people will see Jesus in you. Or is your focus only on which car to buy and

whether you should purchase a three bedroom home instead of a two bedroom one?

c. Do you ever think in terms of what would most glorify God in your situation, or is it always about what would be best for you?

4. We've moved so far away from the picture of Christianity we find in the Bible. Consider one example. I mentioned earlier that interpreting dreams is really big in many Christian circles today.

a. You can buy dream interpretation manuals that tell you what certain colors and symbols mean in your dreams. People are instructed to keep a notebook by their bed and write down anything they remember about their dreams as soon as they wake up, before they forget.

b. However, there's absolutely no Bible basis for any of that. If we did some lessons on God-given dreams recorded in the Bible we would find dreams of warning, dreams of predictions, and dreams with specific instructions from God regarding His will. Gen 20:3; Gen 28:12; Gen 31:11; 24; Gen 37:5; Gen 40:5; Dan 2:1; Dan 7:1; Matt 1:20; Matt 2:12; Acts 16:9; etc.

1. All the dreams relate to advancing God's plan of redemption in some way. The people who received the dreams didn't need a dream interpretation manual to understand it. God made the meaning clear to them, if not immediately, in a timely manner. If God gives you a dream you'll know what it means. You won't have to consult the color code in the dream manual.

2. I'm not saying God doesn't give people today dreams. (He does, but they aren't as spectacular as an angel telling Joseph Mary is pregnant with the Messiah, Matt 1:20,21). I'm saying that lack of Bible knowledge, combined with using experience to determine God's will, along with attributing every idea we have to "God telling us" is a recipe for disaster.

c. It's not unusual to hear Christians say to other Christians: The Lord told me to tell you. Then they proceed to give directional or correctional advice to that person. We need to be very careful and honest with ourselves before we do something like that.

1. All of us (including me) sometimes feel the pressure to add the phrase "the Lord told me" to things we share with others because it gives us an elevated authority as we speak. After all, it's not me; It's God whose talking to you.

2. If someone gives you a word from God for you, it shouldn't be a surprise. It should confirm what the Holy Spirit has already been testifying to your spirit. Under the new covenant, we don't have to go through a man to get to God. We can know Him individually. Heb 8:11

D. Conclusion: I'm not trying to discourage you from expecting God to guide us in these more spectacular ways. I'm saying that there's a lot of silliness in the church today. And some of it is dangerous.

1. The return of Jesus is near and the deception level is ramping up. Perilous times are upon us and we need to learn to follow the leading of the Spirit of God like never before.

2. Feeding on God's Word and praying in other tongues will make you more sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit because it helps you become familiar with His voice. More next week!!