

Date: 04-28-2019
Series: The Holy Spirit

WHAT ABOUT INNER IMPRESSIONS? (Selected Scriptures)

Three weeks ago (in our continuing series on the Holy Spirit) we considered the subject of supernatural guidance---does God ever tell someone to do something through an inner voice, an audible voice, a dream, a vision, or something along those lines? We saw that He did these kinds of things in the Old Testament days and in the early church, but we came to the conclusion that the Bible does not tell us that He does these things today. And we saw that Dr. Garry Friesen said that if God *does* do this, it would be highly unusual and rare. We also saw that other scholars said that since the canon of Scripture is closed, God finished saying anything more to us and is directing us through His word and through His word only.

Before we read some Scripture, I would like to share a story with you that I read recently. Author Paul Little wrote:

“Several years ago I knew a girl who had signed a contract to teach. In [the month of] August, she received another offer from a school closer to where she wanted to live. So she broke the original contract. Had she acted on the biblical principle in Psalm 15:4 ... she would not have done that. The department chairman who told me about the Christian girl’s action said her justification was ‘I have a peace about it,’ and he commented rather sardonically, ‘Isn’t that lovely? She’s got the peace and I’ve got the pieces.’” Paul Little continues:

I believe that girl [failed to do] God’s will. She violated a principle which, if she had been alert and had applied it to her situation, would have given her clear guidance in this specific detail of her life. **God guides, then, through His Word and its principles.** This is one of the most neglected dimensions of guidance today. It sounds terribly spiritual to say ‘God led me,’ but I am always suspicious of a person who implies that he has a personal pipeline to God ... we had better be careful. God has been blamed for the most outlandish things by people who have confused their own inverted pride with God’s will (emphasis mine).

The question we want to answer today is this: “Does God use things like impressions, feelings, and promptings to reveal His will and guide His people?” (By impressions, feelings, and promptings, we are referring to inner thoughts, urges, or feelings that a person should speak or act a certain way.)

Many Christians believe that the Holy Spirit guides them by giving them inner impressions so that they can know what God wants them to do in a given situation. You will hear them use phrases such as:

- "I felt God leading me,"
- "God spoke to my heart," or
- "God impressed thus and such upon me."

This is how they have been taught to live the Christian life in the matter of decision making. **So this is a very important topic for us to consider.**

Here's the bottom-line. If God wants us to make decisions based on inner impressions, we should do that. But if He does not, we need to get a clear understanding about this (because the truth of the matter is that all of us get impressions). So, we definitely need to get some biblical insight about this.

Title: What About Inner Impressions?

(Pray)

As I was working on this message this week I thought of something that might help you to understand how important this issue of inner impressions is. I'll put it in the form of a question. How would you feel if I began a message one Sunday on a very difficult passage of Scripture in the Bible and, after reading the passage, I said something like,

"Scholars understand this passage in several different ways. I have studied what many scholars have said about this passage as well. And after seeking God in prayer, the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart through His still small voice that the correct interpretation is actually professor so and so's..."

You wouldn't be very happy to hear me say something like that would you? You might say to yourself, *"Wow, Pastor Bob doesn't believe he has to do the hard work of digging in the Scriptures and using proper interpretive techniques anymore. He believes that he can just ask the Holy Spirit and the Spirit will tell him the correct view."*

Folks, if all we had to do to understand the Word of God was to ask Him to tell us what it means and then wait for Him to give us an inner impression, we would have it made. We would get a perfect answer straight from God without studying. For that matter, we wouldn't even need to read God's Word. If we needed divine guidance about a decision we had to make, He could simply impress us with exactly what He wants us to do. Voila! And God could do that for us about every decision we would ever make. As we shall see from God's Word, that is not the way God operates.

Please turn to Hebrews 1. (NOTE: Q & A at end of message...jot down ?'s)

There are four passages that I would like us to consider this morning regarding how we should view the Word of God.

Hebrews 1:1-2-----¹ God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² **has in these last days spoken to us by His Son**, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds...

(Comments---“has...spoken (past) not “is speaking”---And since God has spoken to us through His Son, we do not need any more NT books or divine revelation. Notice 2 Timothy 3...)

2 Timothy 3:16–17-----¹⁶ All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ **that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

(Comments---equipped by God through HIS WORD!! We get doctrine (teaching), reproof (rebuke), correction, and instruction through it. God uses words and language to speak to us, not feelings or impressions. There is not one place in Scripture where God uses feelings or impressions to communicate with humans. Unfortunately, some believers see impressions as God’s **primary** way to communicate!)

2 Peter 1:3-4-----³ ...His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, ⁴ **by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust.

(Comments---God’s “power” has given us “exceedingly great and precious promises” so we can be like Christ. Notice, the Word of God is the way we become like Christ. We are told nothing about God giving us impressions so we can live like Jesus.)

Jude 3-----³ Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for **the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.**

(Comments---“once for all”---once the NT was closed, we have all we need and we are to “contend earnestly” for the truth of God’s and against false teaching. So once again we see the truth of the fact that God has communicated to us (using words and language) and His words have been written down in a book (the Bible) so we can know what God expects of us and how we can please Him. The Bible is alive and powerful and it is the vehicle the Spirit of God uses to work in our lives. And when we are diligent and obedient, God will use His word to form us into what He wants us to be.

Kevin DeYoung shared a fictional but funny newspaper article he read on the Internet regarding Christian people who wait around for God to “speak” to them. It was titled:

MAN, 91, DIES WAITING FOR WILL OF GOD—Tupelo, Miss.

Walter Houston, described by family members as a devoted Christian, died Monday after waiting seventy years for God to give him clear direction about what to do with his life. “He hung around the house and prayed a lot, but just never got that confirmation,” his wife Ruby says. “Sometimes he thought he heard God’s voice, but then he wouldn’t be sure, and he’d start the process all over again.” Houston, she says, never really figured out what his life was about, but felt content to pray continuously about what he might do for the Lord. Whenever he was about to take action, he would pull back, “because he didn’t want to disappoint God or go against him in any way,” Ruby says. “He was very sensitive to always remaining in God’s will. That was primary to him.”

Friends say they liked Walter, though he seemed not to capitalize on his talents. “Walter had a number of skills he never got around to using,” says longtime friend Timothy Burns. “He worked very well with wood and had a storyteller side to him too. I always told him, ‘Take a risk. Try something new if you’re not happy,’ but he was too afraid of letting the Lord down.” To his credit, they say, Houston, who worked mostly as a handyman, was able to pay off the mortgage on the couple’s modest home.

God has told us what to do. He didn’t tell us to wait for some “still small voice,” He has already told us what to do (including!) to be “steadfast” and “always abounding” in His work!

So, does God ever speak or lead us through impressions—by internal thoughts, urges, or feelings that one should speak or act a certain way. It seems that everything we have looked at in Scripture seems to answer: “no.”

The emphasis in Scripture is that He “has” spoken to us and we are to be obedient. The “leading of the Spirit” in Romans 8:14 is not some kind of inner voice or impression but a reference to God’s people doing what the Spirit has said in God’s word. It’s that simple.

So what do we do with impressions we get? Listen to Dr. Garry Friesen:

“How can I tell whether these impressions are from God or from some other source?” This is a critical question. For impressions could be produced by any number of sources: God, Satan, an angel, a demon, human emotions (such as fear or ecstasy), hormonal imbalance, insomnia, medication, or an upset stomach. Sinful impressions (temptations) may be exposed for what they are by the Spirit-sensitized conscience and the Word of God. But beyond that, one encounters a subjective quagmire of uncertainty ... Tremendous frustration has been experienced by sincere Christians who have earnestly but fruitlessly sought to decipher the code of the inward witness. Impressions are real; believers experience them. But impressions are not authoritative. Impressions are impressions. Call them ‘spiritual’ or attribute them to the Holy Spirit, and they are still the same just impressions. Impressions by any other name confuse the issue and confound the believer in the process of decision making.”

Arthur L. Johnson says:

“The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit will lead us, but we are never told He will do this by some inner urge.”

J. I. Packer wrote:

“...the true way to honor the Holy Spirit as our guide is to honor the Holy Scriptures through which He guides us.”

John MacArthur argues:

“Scripture never commands us to tune into any inner voice. We’re commanded to study and meditate on Scripture (Joshua 1:8; Ps. 1:1-2) ... Those willing to heed inner voices and mental impressions may be listening to the lies of a deceitful heart, the fantasies of an overactive imagination, or even the voice of a demon ... Those who follow subjective impressions are by definition undiscerning [people].”

An unnamed Bible church writer on the Internet said:

“Impressions are no doubt real, but they are not authoritative or conclusive for deciding what is or is not God's will. It is impossible to know the source of impressions, and there are many possibilities ... Because the Spirit works to "renew our mind" with Scripture (Rom. 12:1-2), some thoughts or impressions we may have will be righteous and God-honoring. This is not to say that God is "speaking" or is the source of our impression, rather this indicates that the Spirit has worked to renew our mind through Scripture such that we begin to think Christ-honoring thoughts ... God only communicates and leads believers today through the Bible. Our job is, by the Spirit's power, to faithfully and diligently study the Bible and follow what it tells us to do.”

(Time of Q & A)