

Deuteronomy 18:9-20 ⁹ When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. ¹⁰ Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, ¹¹ or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. ¹² Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. ¹³ You must be blameless before the LORD your God. ¹⁴ The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so. ¹⁵ The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. ¹⁶ For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." ¹⁷ The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. ¹⁹ If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. ²⁰ But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

“Seeking Guidance”

As most of you know this past Monday was my birthday. It was also the Chinese New Year. So, I thought I would consult the Chinese Zodiac to see what kind of a year I'm going to have. Well, it's the year of the Ox which means this will be a year of prosperity through hard work and enduring hardship. Sounds like any other year to me, oh well. But, then there's President Obama. The Chinese feng shui masters are a bit concerned. He's the 44th president and the Chinese number four sounds the same as the Chinese word for death. So, it's like double death. But, they also add this is the year of the Ox and, moreover, there are two earth signs (whatever those are) this year which means healing. So, one good and one bad; if either happens the masters can still be right.

We kind of chuckle about this, but there are a lot of people who believe this stuff works. They consult astrologers, mediums, psychics, and card readers and palm readers in order to get the guidance they need. It's amazing that all that stuff that we read about in Deuteronomy that God told the people not to do is still around and the movement keeps growing. Enquiring minds will of course want to know why. I suspect it all boils down to people feeling like their life is out of control and they want to get a handle on things to reduce the anxiety.

Another question enquiring minds might want to ask is why God is so adamantly against that sort of stuff. Well, the reason isn't because there is nothing to the occult. It has a bit to do with the fact that these things are quite often the vehicle for the demonic to enter a person's life and delude them. But mostly, it is because these practices take the place of faith. They replace a living relationship with the living God with a false sense of security and even control.

“If I know such and such is in store for me because the lines in my hands dictate it or the planets are in line a particular way then, then that’s what I’ll do.”

I’m so glad that I don’t have to live like that. We don’t have to live like that. All people don’t have to live like that because the truth is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit want to give us the guidance we need in life. God wants to replace our insecurities, worries, and anxieties with the sure security of the certain knowledge of God’s love for us and not only that (though that truly is all we need) the Holy Trinity wants to address us concerning the specifics of our lives. God wants to show us the paths in which we should go, indeed lead us through them. If that is not good news, then I don’t know what is. God really wants to and really does want to speak to us about the specifics of our lives.

But, somewhere along the line we’ve been given the idea that God just sits on a throne way far away somewhere and is only concerned about our sin and our beliefs. So, all we have to do is believe the right way about God and accept the forgiveness that Jesus wrought for us and live morally and we’ll go to heaven when we die. That’s all God is there for and anyone who thinks God speaks to them belongs in a mental hospital. Well, I must be crazy. Indeed, I wouldn’t be here at Claude had God not shown me where he wanted me to go. And, if God communicates such things for me then he does the same for you as well. God really does speak to us about the specifics of our lives. Whoa.

I speak with a presumption that we have a strong reticence about God speaking to us. I could almost call it a fear that sounds like, “If God really speaks then I really have to listen and that might mean change.” Moses pointed to this when he reminded the people of the fear they had when God wanted to speak directly to his people, but they were afraid that they would die if they heard his voice. So, because the people were afraid to hear God directly God promised to send a prophet who would speak for him. The first of these was Moses. Through Moses God spoke to his people and, yes, gave them the Law to live by, but Moses also was a judge and through him God addressed the particular matters of peoples lives. This continued after Moses with Joshua and then the judges. Then when the kingship arose God raised up full blown prophets to speak for him to the kings and to the nation.

God’s promise through Moses to send a prophet like Moses came to fruition in Jesus and got even better for Jesus was/is God himself speaking to us. He is the Word of God that brings the Law of Moses to its fullness. He is the Word of God the recreates and brings new life not only to us but to the whole of creation. Jesus the prophet called people to the kingdom of God and enacted it in their lives. His words brought about new creation.

The voice of Jesus is still with us today and speaks through the Bible. This happens in different contexts. First, Jesus speaks in the midst of and through the voices of the body of believers gathered around the Bible not only to learn, but also seeking guidance, seeking to hear God speak directly to the situations of our lives. Too often we relegate the Bible to be simply the guide book for the Christian life and all we have to do is learn what’s in it and live accordingly. Yes, but don’t stop there. In my years of devotional reading of the Bible, just reading the Bible, so many times, countless times, it has happened that what I’m reading

says something to me about a specific situation of my life; everything from words of encouragement to conviction. Oddly, one of the reasons I came to Claude in the first place was something that rose up to me from Scripture. So many times Jesus has spoken to me from the Bible with exactly what I needed to hear that day and it keeps me going. This is why we say the Bible is God-breathed, a living Word for us. We don't need to go to astrologers or palm readers. All we need is to open the Bible and read and better yet gather together a few prayer friends and read together.

Another way Jesus speaks to us is through the preaching of the church. God calls people and anoints them with the ministry of breaking open the words of the Bible and proclaiming the gospel to us specifically pointing to what Jesus has done for us and what that has to do with us. It would be better for someone who isn't preaching right now to say this because I don't want to stand up here and appear to be saying that what comes out of my mouth is the Word of God so you better listen to me. That's the sort of thing cults are made of. Nevertheless, God has placed on me the ominous task of hearing the Word and conveying it on to you. That doesn't mean that every word that comes out of my mouth come sermon time is a word from God. Yet, it is a mystery how this works. The Holy Spirit opens us up to hear what God wants us to hear during worship and the sermon. I have people relate to me after a sermon how much such and such spoke to them and they were hearing something I never said but still somehow it came through what I said. Sometimes we hear nothing and it's just good to be here. A good deal of the time it's just learning. Nevertheless, one of the signs of living church is that people come and hear and perceive that the specifics of their lives are being addressed by God; not everybody all the time, but all of us at sometime. One of my best friends down in West Virginia started coming to church and for about six or seven weeks in a row by the end of the sermon the tears were welling up in his eyes because the sermon that morning just happened to deal with some very real questions he had about the faith and his own faith. God was speaking to him with the answers he needed and he knew it. Another, sign of a living church is that people are growing in the knowledge of the faith and by knowledge I mean both book sense and in trusting God.

One last thing, there is a direct relationship between time spent in prayerful reading of the Bible and hearing God speak. A relationship with God is just like any other relationship. The only time you're going to hear a person speak is when you're actually with them and then when they are speaking you actually have to make the effort to listen. Sometimes people talk to us and we're so preoccupied they might as well be Charlie Brown's teacher, "Buh, blah, bah, buh, blah, bah, buh, blah, bah, blah, buh, blah, bah." So it is with God. Jesus can make himself heard, but he'd rather have us there willing to listen.

This is good to hear and I think it's exciting that God truly wants to and actually does talk to us about the specifics of our lives. He hasn't left us here to fend for ourselves. True faith comes about in the midst of a living, loving, communicative relationship with God. God has not called us to blind belief. He has given us a living faith, and a living hope within a living relationship with himself through Jesus in the Holy Spirit. Amen.