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How Do We Discern between Our Own Inner Voice and the Holy Spirit Telling Us What We're Supposed to Say?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to discern between our own inner voice and the Holy Spirit telling us what we are supposed to say if, according to Matthew 10:20, "it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you" at the right moment and whether Acts 11:17 indicates we can get in God's way when he is speaking to us.

* If "it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you" at the right moment, as Matthew 10:20 says, how do we discern the difference between our own inner voice of our previous training and the Holy Spirit telling us what we are supposed to say?

* In terms of God speaking to us, can we get in God's way (see Acts 11:17)?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Greg Kockel and this is the hashtag SDRask Podcast from Stand to Reason. It is. Okay, Greg, are you ready for your first question? I'm not sure.

If you ask me, I'll tell you. Okay. This one comes from Carter.

Oh, I'm not ready for that. Okay. Okay.

Okay. In Matthew 10.20, it says, for the Lord of the Lord, I'm not ready for that. Okay.

Okay. The Lord is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. How do we discern the difference between our own inner voice from our previous training and the Holy Spirit telling us what we are supposed to say in the right moment? Okay.

It's interesting how that was phrased and the Holy Spirit telling us what to say in the right moment. Okay. That isn't what Jesus was referring to.

Jesus was referring to the capability or the reliability of the Holy Spirit to give us what

was needed in the moment. He's not indicating that there's a kind of a dictation that goes on. And I don't know that people have even ever interpreted historically that way, but because I think there is this practice in evangelicalism that about hearing the voice of God, especially in circumstances like this, we think that there's kind of the spirit of sitting on our shoulder whispering in our ear in some sense.

I had an occasion when I was at UCLA, and there's a very long time ago, I was a fairly new Christian, and there was a guy in the free speech area that was really blasphemous, and lots of people were listening to Amino as an outdoor circumstance, and I was so bugged by what he said, I just got up and started addressing the crowd, okay? Now, I wasn't even sure what I was going to say. I just started saying something, and my confidence in that circumstance, I wasn't unintelligible, I said something meaningful, but I didn't have it all planned out, okay? My confidence in that circumstance was that, whereas I look at it, when I stepped out for the Lord in a hostile environment, that God was going to give me whatever I needed. Now, give me doesn't mean he's whispering in my ear, and now I'm telling in some sense, and now I'm saying, how was the phrase there, and that question dictating with the... How do we discern the difference between our own inner voice from previous training and the Holy Spirit telling us what we were supposed to say in the right moment? There it is, telling us what we were supposed to say.

That isn't how it works. We don't have any evidence of that anywhere in Scripture unless the text says, thus say it the Lord, the Holy... Here's what? Agabus. Here's what the Holy Spirit told me, the man who wears this belt is going to be bound in this way, okay? So you've got a reference to the source, but this isn't the way this works on a normal basis, okay? In Matthew chapter 10, I'm very familiar with this passage.

This is where Jesus is sending out his disciples on their first missionary journey. What's really interesting, and I make this point actually in, I think, the first chapter of street smarts, what's interesting is that Jesus doesn't say this when he first gathers his disciples. Okay, you guys? You volunteered? You followed me? Great.

We're going out. Let's get out there. What do we say? Don't worry.

The Holy Spirit will tell you what to say. This is Matthew 10. Jesus started out by saying, follow me and I will make you fishers of men, okay? And then he's training them and working with them.

And after he's trained and worked with them, then he sends them out and tells them that the Holy Spirit is their ally to help them. In fact, in the upper room discourse in Matthew, I'm sorry, in John 15 or 16, or thereabouts when he talks about the Holy Spirit. Role in the disciples' life, it's interesting speaking to those disciples, he says, the Holy Spirit will bring to remembrance all that I have taught you.

So now there's a reaffirmation of the Holy Spirit's role in their life, even though Jesus will no longer be there, because it is the teaching and training that Jesus has been giving them for three and a half years, that the Holy Spirit will use to draw to their remembrance. Now, it doesn't mean the Holy Spirit can't take a brand new Christian and give them all kinds of information. That isn't what's being said here, though.

That isn't what's being done. Jesus has trained them, and then he says, you go out and do this stuff. And by the way, the Holy Spirit's going to help you.

And when you say these things, don't worry about what you're going to have to say, because the Holy Spirit is going to be there for you to give you what you need. But there's no intimation there, that there's anything like a dictation for which you have to say, wait a minute, was that me? Thinking that, or was that the Holy Spirit telling me? There's nothing like that. If you think of it, and it seems appropriate, then you say it.

Okay, that's the simple advice here. There's none of this, you know, ear cock to the heavens kind of thing. I'll tell you, I've never done that.

And partly because I don't think that's what's being taught here. But there is this aberrant teaching that is thick in evangelicalism that we have to learn to hear the voice of God. And the people that are most effective in doing what they do in evangelism or whatever are the ones that are really tuned in.

And they are hearing what God's telling them to say. They are able to decipher this difference between their thoughts and God's thoughts. And then they do the thing that God is telling them to do, or to say.

Now that practice as such is not in the New Testament. I'm not saying God can't do whatever He wants to do. But when you go to the New Testament, when God speaks, there's no question.

Book of Acts happens 14 times where special directions are given. It's almost in every case that we have the phenomenology explained to us, it's all supernatural. And Saul hears a voice, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And Saul says, I'm not sure if that's my thoughts or is that God's thoughts kind of in my head? No, it's a supernatural.

In fact, other people heard the noise. They didn't hear the voice. Or maybe they saw the light or whatever.

But there was third person awareness of what was going on, but the detail was for Paul directly. And it was obvious. It wasn't an indistinct sound that he couldn't quite figure out and he had to learn the ability.

And by the way, he didn't even have the Holy Spirit then. So this is one evidence that when God speaks with a special revelation, He speaks clearly. If He's not speaking in a

supernatural way and characteristically, in the book of Acts, this was visions, appearances of angels, or appearances of Jesus, or dreams.

Or I think prophetic word in the case of the first missionary journey. If that's not what's going on, then you do, whatever comes to mind that you think in your best judgment is appropriate, then you do it. Trusting that God's going to work through it.

That's the way, I think, Paul's a rather Jesus' exhortation is meant to be understood in Matthew 10. So just to sum up what you've said, Greg, I think you've covered pretty much all this question. We don't have to figure out, we don't have to listen for God and then repeat what He said to us.

And I think that the wording of this even speaks to that. It says, it is your Father who speaks in you. It doesn't say, who speaks to you and then you listen and then you tell them, you step out and He is speaking in you.

He is working through you and you can be confident in that. And that's why, you know, we have the confidence to step out because we don't have to wait for some sort of special message that we can then give. That's right.

He's working in us all the time. By the way, I think of Matthew 16, where they're at Caesarea, Philippi, and Jesus says, who do you say that I am and Peter then speaks to them? You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And then Peter says, here's the origin of what you just said.

It's the Father. Peter wasn't repeating what he'd heard from the Father. He had a conviction that he expressed and then Jesus identified it as, you didn't figure this out on your own.

The Father has revealed this to you. So that fits hand in glove with what you just said, the wording of Matthew, chapter 10. It will be the, you have it in front of you, I think.

It will be the Father. Oh, no, I've already looked on to this. Oh, okay.

But the way you read it, you know, it's not speaking. Oh, yes, it has it. Is the spirit of your Father who speaks in you? There you go.

So the same thing is happening, I think, in Caesarea, Philippi, where you have this encounter and this question by Jesus, the same dynamics going on. It's not mystical. It's not like we've got to tune in.

God doesn't whisper. I'm just saying. There's no place in the scripture where God is attempting to speak and he doesn't get through to the person that he's speaking to.

So our next question is going to address that. Let me ask you one more thing about this. And I think you did touch on this at the beginning of your answer, but I just want to ask

this explicitly.

Does this verse mean that we should not plan and learn? Does this mean that God will, like whatever situation we're in, God will just give us the words to say. We were capable of going out there and doing whatever is speaking to others. No, it doesn't mean that.

And go back to the earlier thing I said, Jesus spent ten chapters worth of material in Matthew, whatever period of time that was, training his disciples. And by the way, in Matthew, that's three chapters of the servant on the Mount. Lots of stuff going on there and lots of times spent with the disciples to bring them to a point where he can send them out on their short-term missionary enterprise.

And so they were prepared. They were being taught. They were being instructed.

Now, in that passage, right in that same area, Jesus tells the disciples, do not fear three different times. Okay? And it is in the context of them being frightened about going out in a vulnerable circumstance that he is reminding them that they have an ally in the Holy Spirit to help them. Not to tell them, not to dictate to them, not to drop words in their mind that come off of their lips, but to be there and give them whatever it is they need to face whatever challenges they face.

And incidentally, the challenges that Jesus was describing there were not simply the challenges they were going to face in that missionary journey. It was much more extensive. He's talking about you will be before kings and princes and whatever.

And that's when he mentions this about the Spirit. Don't worry. And you're going to suffer and you're going to be opposed by your family members.

So he's giving broader characterizations of the challenges that they'll face. And at the same time, reassuring them that the Spirit is going to be there to give them whatever they need to persevere and to answer the challenges they're facing. And it seems to me like, I guess I would make a distinction between, you know, there are there are prophets in the New Testament where God gives them something new that they then share with somebody.

But this seems to be more... Agabus for example. And I think that it's important for you to speak to these other people. And so I think this is both an encouragement to input as much as you can to know as clearly as you can who God is and the truth about him.

But it also gives you courage because you don't have to worry that you're just going to stumble all over yourself. But I don't think this is about some sort of prophecy specifically. It's not any revelation that's going to be given in the sense that normally you think of revelation.

Here's a propositional revelation. So I had one other occasion I had to do public

preaching at UCLA. I didn't know this was the case.

I got hired by a UCLA group to come out and give a talk. And then me just in front of a Bruinwalk there. And I said, okay.

And Melinda was with me. And they said, okay, here's the crowd. There you go.

There's your audience. I didn't even have a microphone. Oh my gosh.

So I had to figure out something to do. And that was a tough spot. Now I will never do that again partly because it's not a good use of my voice because if I'm yelling in a public forum like that, I'm going to hurt my voice and then it's not good for other things.

But I had to figure out something. And my sense was that God gave you the wisdom to address that audience at that point. And I've experienced that too where I've been having an interaction on Twitter or whatever it is.

And you just, there's this sense that you are expressing something very clearly, not only that, but you have this courage to, I think that's part of it also. But I have experienced that in an insight maybe in the moment. What I did in that circumstance is I started to rail against Christians really loudly.

And I started telling stupid Christians or and all the dumb things and I just whole deal. Of course, that's going to attract the crowd. People like to hear that.

And then I said, that's all that I, that's what I used to believe. Five years ago when I stood at this very spot here at UCLA, that's what I used to believe. But I found out I was wrong.

So that was like, okay, that's where did that come from? I don't know. I don't know. It just came.

It was just something I thought would kill me to do it. And that's how I was able to get resolved that circumstance. But anyway, I think that's the way that works.

And it isn't like I'm waiting to hear. Now, by the way, some people will characterize this. They will say they get an idea that ends up working.

And the way they will describe what just happened is they will describe the phenomenology as God telling me to say this. Then the Holy Spirit led me to say this, that or the other thing. Sometimes they're just meaning I got this idea and God was in it.

But it's a very misleading way of characterizing it because it implies one thing that's happening phenomenologically. Like how is this being perceived by the perceiver, the Christian in this case? Is it an idea that pops into their head? Is it a voice they hear in their head? Is it a voice they hear from the outside? You know, that's the phenomenology. But it turns out to be just oftentimes a direction that they think they

should go and it works out.

And so they describe it as God telling them. And that's why I think some of the confusion arises. I'm fully happy in both of those cases that I described at UCLA of giving God credit for helping me say what needed to be said in that circumstance.

Okay, but I don't want people to think that what I'm doing is getting a directive, a message, a dictation of any sort. Oh, this is where I feel that. I didn't feel that.

You know, I felt led, actually, L-E-A-D. The other kind of led. Like I don't want to talk here.

I don't want to start barking to all these people walking down Bruin Hall, but Bruin Walk. But nevertheless, I did. And this is something that I think God enabled me to do as I stepped out.

And this is, I think, the heart of the message that Jesus is describing. There are Matthew 10. So to circle back to what you said a little bit earlier, let's go on to the next question from anonymous.

In terms of God speaking to us, can we get in God's way? And anonymous gives a verse, Acts 11 17, which I have right here, if you'd like me to read that for you, 11 17. Therefore, if God gave to them the same gift as he, God gave to them the same gift as he gave to us also after. Oh, sorry, I was afraid this was the wrong way, but now I see where it's going.

After believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way? Okay, so this passage, Acts chapter 11 is Peter describing two other Jews about what happened in Acts chapter 10. Acts chapter 10, he gets a supernatural sign. This is a vision.

And at the same time Cornelius is getting a corresponding supernatural revelation and angel appears to him. And by the way, this fits perfectly with what I was describing beforehand. When God gives special direction like this, in the book of Acts, people think it's, oh, it's just filled with God speaking and telling him to do this in that.

Well, we got 30 years in the book of Acts. It happens 14 times. And it follows a very specific pattern.

It's supernatural. Okay. So those are important observations to make.

But in chapter 10, Peter preaches to Cornelius in the middle of his preaching about Jesus. Cornelius and all those gathered to listen. These are all Gentiles.

They all start speaking in tongues and glorifying God and manifesting the evidence that the Holy Spirit has been given to them already in the middle of the speech. No altar calls. They're just manifesting this the very same way that it happened with the disciples in Acts chapter 2 in the upper room.

And so what the Jews were doing was objecting to Peter here in chapter 11. Why did you go to a Gentiles house? You're not supposed to do that. That's bad.

So wait a minute. God told me to do it. Quite literally.

God told me to do it. And this is why the men came. And there was the vision Peter had and then instructions from the Holy Spirit.

Okay. And their men downstairs go talk to them and they filled out the story. They went and met and all this happened.

And now he's saying, who am I to standing God's way? In other words, who am I to say that these are Gentiles? They can't be saved when God saved them. And he gave the same evidences of their salvation that he gave to us. This is not tricky.

And it's not a counter example of the things I'm talking about. It's a totally different enterprise. The answer to this is, no, you can't stand in God's way.

Because those people, those Gentiles were saved by the Spirit and God was working through other Gentiles. Nobody's going to stop what God's doing. But one could posture, put himself in the road, so to speak.

We're not going to talk to these people. You can't do that kind of thing. And many were drilling that.

Okay. And so in a certain sense, you could say in a figurative way, you're trying to stand in God's way. But it wasn't going to inhibit what God was doing.

What Peter was arguing was that God did it. Who am I to say, no, God, you can't do this. I.E. stand in his way.

It wasn't about hearing a message from him. It was about standing in the way of giving the message to Gentiles. Standing in the way of his opposing what God was doing, basically.

It has nothing to do with hearing the message or anything like that. And the opposing would not have been effectual anyway. And that's why he's saying, who is I? Look, they gave the Holy Spirit to us just like to them like he gave to us.

It's interesting. Let's see. What's the verse? As he's described it, he does say in verse 11, and the Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings.

Okay. So the Holy Spirit, there is a direct communication by the Holy Spirit. That's the phenomenology.

All right. And so after the vision, then the Spirit says, go. Okay.

Then these things happen. And he says, as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as he did upon us in the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how we used to say John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, after believing in the Lord Jesus, who is I to take exception with it is the point. And notice there's no question about what he heard. There was no standing in the way of what he was hearing.

That message was completely clear. That is nothing to do with what he was resistant to. Right.

So, yeah. So I hope that becomes clear that the application someone is making here, that is tempted to make to the kinds of things that we're talking about. It's not.

It's not what's going on there. Well, thank you, Carter and Anonymous. We really appreciate your question.

Send us your question on X with the hashtag SDRask. We look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.