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GOD'S PREFERRED WAY OF COMMUNICATION AND WORKING

I mentioned in the previous messages that it is important for us to distinguish between worldly concepts of strength and power and being truly strong in the Lord. In the area of spiritual power, we must distinguish between what is of God and what is of the evil one. We must not readily assume that manifestations of spiritual power are from the Lord.

The desire for spiritual power and the experience of it is not necessarily a positive thing. It can be damaging to our lives, and can result in serious bondage, especially if our motives are impure, and there are various negative traits or deficiencies in our lives. If we are not knowledgeable about the ways of the evil one and how he deceives us, and if we are not careful in safeguarding ourselves from such deceptions, we can easily become his victims.

God can manifest His power in more obvious and spectacular ways like performing miracles and healings through people, even today. That is His sovereign prerogative. However, we should not be overly impressed and drawn towards such manifestations. We must also recognise that the person through whom various miracles and healings take place may not be truly strong.

Miracles, tongues, healings and casting out of demons are not the only manifestations of the more obvious, dramatic spiritual experiences. There are also the more obvious, direct spiritual communications between God and man, for example, through visions and dreams. In the Old Testament, God spoke to and through the prophets in clear, precise details about what they were to do and what they were to say, and how things were to be done.

God can still communicate with men in such clear, direct, spiritual ways today. But this is an area fraught with dangers.

In this message, I would like to consider with you this proposition: *Although God may speak to us in clear and direct ways, most of the time He prefers to speak to us in less dramatic and less obvious ways, when it is feasible for Him to do so meaningfully.*

God's preferred way of communication – promotes our understanding and participation

In this manner of communication, we would not be hearing His voice telling us to do this or that. In fact, we may sometimes not be conscious that it is taking place, and we may

not be very clear what the Lord is actually trying to communicate to us. Yet we shall see that this in fact is God's preferred way of communicating and working in our lives, generally.

Let us seek to understand the issues involved so that we can respond well to God and cooperate with Him in what He is seeking to do.

This way of communication may take place, for example, when we are reading the Scriptures. As we read prayerfully, the Spirit of God may impress upon our hearts certain truths and principles. He grants us spiritual insight into these truths, and helps us develop stronger convictions. He draws our attention to areas that we need to work on. He helps us make better decisions with the truths and principles we have learned. And all the while, we may not be very conscious that the Spirit of God has been helping us.

This can happen during times of prayer too. When we pray, the Lord may draw our attention to areas that we need to concentrate on and guide us in the direction of prayer. And when we seek the Lord in decision-making, He may help us think through the matter at hand, impressing upon us the relevant issues and principles to consider so that we can make a wise decision.

At times we may not be very clear what the Lord's will is in a particular matter, or how He is actually guiding us. And we may wish for more definite guidance, thinking it would be more desirable and would be a mark of spirituality. But is this necessarily so? Is it better for us to hear a voice, or for the Lord to make very clear His instructions to us and let us know exactly what we should do?

An important point to note in the way the Lord communicates with us is that He wants us to grow in fellowship with Him and, beyond the obvious, learn to perceive the meaning of situations, what actually is taking place. He wants us to learn how to view things from His perspective. We can do this only with His help.

In the Scriptures, God has revealed the major concerns of His heart: How His purposes are to be fulfilled; how church life is to be worked out; and how we can grow and develop spiritually. But we need spiritual perception to be able to understand these truths and principles He has revealed and how they are to be applied.

As far as I can understand it, *God's general approach in communication is not dramatic and in fact this is God's preferred way of communication today, especially to those who have access to the Scriptures.* There are two reasons why I say this:

1. The danger and complications in dramatic forms of communication.

There is a danger in more dramatic forms of communication. For example, if we hear a voice, we may not know whether it is of the Lord or an impersonation by the evil one. It is relatively easy for the evil one to deceive those who rely on this form of communication from the Lord. Those who act on the instructions of the evil one

impersonating the Lord may end up doing things very detrimental to the Lord's work and may also come under spiritual bondage to the evil one and seriously damage their own lives.

2. The less dramatic forms of communication require greater participation and more understanding on our part.

When God does not speak clearly and directly to us, when He does not tell us exactly what to do and what to say, we are "forced" to look to Him, to ponder and try to understand what is taking place, and what He is trying to say to us. This can promote our fellowship with God and is very helpful for our spiritual development and the renewal of our minds. This is at the heart of God's concern for us – our relationship with Him and our becoming believers who are truly strong and mature.

In this kind of communication, there are more reliable safeguards against deception and subjectivity.

For example, we may then tell others, "As I prayerfully consider before the Lord over this matter, this seems to be the decision I ought to make, and here are the reasons I think the Lord is impressing upon me to make this decision." There is a basis for the decision and the matter can be discussed and considered together.

Likewise, as we read through the Scriptures, we may be impressed with certain truths and principles, and think the Lord is using these to lead us towards a certain course of action. These truths and principles and their application can be discussed. The fact that we are not certain it is the Lord speaking to us and guiding us to make the decision in this way can be an advantage. We are less likely to be dogmatic or to categorically say, "It is like this." Instead, we are more likely to be open and say, "Though I understand it this way, it is not very clear to me." And because it is not very clear to us, we are more likely to seek for a clearer understanding on whether the Lord is really guiding us towards that course of action.

There are those who claim to hear a voice, and they confidently say, "God spoke to me, even though I may not be able to tell you how." Or, they may just say, "God clearly impressed upon me that I am to go to Africa." Or, "God told me to get married to this young man." They make bold assertions, but cannot tell you their reasons. In such a situation, it can be very difficult to discuss whether what they have received is indeed of the Lord or is a deception.

There have been instances when sisters have sought counsel because some brothers have told them, "God has spoken to me. You are to be married to me." Without further information, it can be very difficult for the sisters to consider whether it is indeed the Lord's will for them to get married to the respective brothers-in-Christ. It is also very difficult to discuss the matter. At the same time, they are also disturbed because they fear that by rejecting these brothers' approaches, they could be disobeying God.

Although it can be more difficult to discuss whether such things are really of the Lord or are deceptions, it is still possible to try to understand what actually is taking place. We can ask how the person has come to such a conclusion, and what the surrounding circumstances are. These can indicate to us whether this is really of the Lord or, quite clearly, it is deception or subjectivity, or the person's own desires. When we are not clear that it is of the Lord, it is important that we do not act upon it. If there is no clear basis for the claims, we should not simply go along with what the other person says.

I now want to go on to another aspect, which is to highlight a major difference in the way God communicates the truth through His servants in the Old Testament and the New Testament. There are indications in the Scriptures that there is a difference and the implications are relevant to what we are considering.

How God communicated to and through His servants in Old Testament times

The Old Testament

A significant proportion of God's revelation, instructions, exhortations and warnings in the Old Testament consists of clear, direct communication to and through His servants. Very often, God's spokesmen preface their warnings and exhortations with the words: "Thus says the Lord".

God spoke to the prophets very clearly. Sometimes, these words were intended just for the prophets. At other times, they were meant for the people. And the prophets repeated exactly the words of the Lord. These were not the prophets' own words. In fact, the prophets at times might not have fully appreciated or understood the meaning of the words they uttered.

Let us look at some examples.

Instructions through Moses

The detailed instructions concerning the Law and the building of the tabernacle are examples of clear and direct instructions from God to the people of Israel through His servant Moses. God told Moses exactly what to say to the people.

In the building of the tabernacle, we are told the people constructed it "just as the Lord commanded Moses". God gave detailed instructions through Moses, and the people built it exactly as instructed.

The word of the Lord to and through Jeremiah

Jeremiah tells us: "Now the word of the Lord came to me saying," (Jer. 1:4) – they are the very words of the Lord.

Jeremiah 1:5

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
And before you were born I consecrated you;
I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."

When Jeremiah told the Lord he did not know how to speak because he was just a youth, the Lord responded:

Jeremiah 1:7, 9

7 But the Lord said to me,
"Do not say, 'I am a youth,'
Because everywhere I send you, you shall go,
And all that I command you, you shall speak.
9 Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the
Lord said to me,
"Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.

The Lord intended to send him and would instruct him exactly what to say. He would put His words in Jeremiah's mouth.

The following verses show us that God instructed Jeremiah in very precise terms, giving him the exact words to speak to the people of Israel.

Jeremiah 2:1-2

1 Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,
2 "Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the Lord,
"I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth,
The love of your betrothals,
Your following after Me in the wilderness,
Through a land not sown.

Jeremiah 3:1

God says, "If a husband divorces his wife
And she goes from him
And belongs to another man,
Will he still return to her?
Will not that land be completely polluted?
But you are a harlot with many lovers;
Yet you turn to Me," declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 7:1-4

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying,
2 "Stand in the gate of the Lord's house and proclaim there this word and
say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, all you of Judah, who enter by these
gates to worship the Lord!' "
3 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, "Amend your ways and

your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place.

4 "Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'

Jeremiah 8:1

"At that time," declares the Lord, "they will bring out the bones of the kings of Judah and the bones of its princes, and the bones of the priests and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem from their graves.

Jeremiah 8:4, 13

4 "You shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord,

"Do men fall and not get up again?

Does one turn away and not repent?

13 "I will surely snatch them away," declares the Lord;

"There will be no grapes on the vine

And no figs on the fig tree,

And the leaf will wither;

And what I have given them will pass away." ' "

The vision of Obadiah

The whole Book of Obadiah is basically also of this form. Obadiah begins in this way:

Obadiah 1:1

The vision of Obadiah.

Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom—

We have heard a report from the Lord,

And an envoy has been sent among the nations saying,

"Arise and let us go against her for battle"—

"The vision of Obadiah" is basically in the form of words: "Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom". The words came to Obadiah in a spiritual experience that he describes as a vision. The words are not from Obadiah himself, but are directly from the Lord.

The oracle of the word of the Lord through Malachi

The Book of Malachi begins this way:

Malachi 1:1

The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi.

It was the word of the Lord for Israel, spoken through Malachi. The message was clear. It was not adulterated by Malachi's own thoughts and thinking. It was all from the Lord, exactly what the Lord wanted to communicate to Israel through Malachi.

Malachi 1:2

"I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have You loved us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob;

Malachi 2:1-2

1 "And now this commandment is for you, O priests.

2 "If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the Lord of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart.

Malachi 3:1

"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts.

Malachi 4:1

"For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the Lord of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."

How God worked in and communicated through His servants in New Testament times**The New Testament**

In contrast to the Old Testament, a significant proportion of the truths and instructions, exhortations and warnings in the New Testament does not consist of such clear, direct communication from the Lord to His people through His servants, the apostles.

Prominent by its absence are the introductory words: "Thus says the Lord". The difference is not just the absence of this introductory phrase. There is also a difference of significance in God's way of communication in the New Testament.

Much of the exhortations and instructions from the Lord to His people through the apostles are by means of epistles. There is relatively little of clear, direct instructions and words from the Lord in the epistles. In other words, the Lord did not tell the apostles, "I want you to communicate these words to the people", and they then repeated the exact words.

Rather, the epistles or letters were written by the apostles themselves, addressing various people and groups of people in their contexts. The apostles themselves dealt with various issues that they were concerned about. They were speaking from their own

understanding of the situations and issues involved. What they wrote in the epistles flowed forth from what they had learned and attained to, from the store of spiritual wisdom and knowledge they had accumulated, from the spiritual stature that they had attained. The content of the epistles flows forth from this reality, from their heart and from their life.

Let us look at some examples.

The epistles of Paul

In 1 Corinthians, Paul addressed various issues confronting the church in Corinth. Paul did not say, "God told me to tell you this" or "These are the words of the Lord." It was Paul writing to them: "Paul...to the church of God which is at Corinth".

The epistle to the Corinthians begins this way, which is common in the other epistles of Paul:

1 Corinthians 1:1-2

1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,
2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

In 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, Paul exhorted the Christians to be made complete in the same mind:

1 Corinthians 1:10-13

10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.
11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you.
12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."
13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

It was Paul himself, not the Lord, who was exhorting them. Yet Paul exhorted them "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgement". He was an apostle called by the Lord. The words he spoke were said according to his understanding of the situation at hand, but in fellowship with God and in the authority of the Lord.

Paul expressed concerns over various aspects of the lives of the Corinthian believers:

1 Corinthians 3:1-2

1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.

2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,

He addressed and dealt with the problem of immorality in the church at Corinth.

1 Corinthians 5:1, 3-5

1 It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.

3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus,

5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

In chapter 6, Paul addressed the issue of bringing a brother to court:

1 Corinthians 6:1, 5

1 Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?

5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren,

He gave instructions concerning marriage:

1 Corinthians 7:1-2

1 Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

2 But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.

He shared his understanding of how the believers should consider the issues of things sacrificed to idols and spiritual gifts:

1 Corinthians 8:1

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.

1 Corinthians 12:1

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.

Paul also addressed various issues regarding the Galatians, and shared his views. Paul began his epistle to the Christians in Galatia in this way:

Galatians 1:1-2

1 Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),
2 and all the brethren who are with me,
To the churches of Galatia:

In Galatians 4:1, he expressed his view:

Galatians 4:1

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything,

In the Old Testament, God rebuked the people, chastened them and warned them. In the New Testament, we see Paul rebuking the believers in Galatia:

Galatians 3:1-3

1 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?
2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?
3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

These are not directly the words of the Lord rebuking the Galatians. However, because Paul was an apostle "not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Gal 1:1), and because he had attained to that stature where he could meaningfully speak on behalf of God, we could say that God was also rebuking the Galatians through Paul.

What Paul expresses in his epistles are in line with what God wants to communicate to His people. They addressed issues relevant to the groups of people and the various churches the epistles were written to. And, as part of the Scriptures, they are also relevant to God's people of all times.

However, we must bear in mind that the epistles of the apostles in the Scriptures belong to a special category. There are other epistles written by the apostles which are not part of the Scriptures and they do not have the same weight and authority. What God desires to communicate to us through the Scriptures (of which the epistles in the New Testament form a part) is intended by God to form the basis for our knowledge of the truth and how we ought to live our lives.

Paul's epistles are very rich in content, revealing major issues, such as what is in God's

heart, His will for His people, how they should live, and how they can fulfil God's eternal purpose, including church life. Paul's letters do not come in the form of God telling the apostle Paul exactly what to write for God's people. Rather, they come through in the form of Paul addressing various churches according to what he had understood and learned from the Lord. However, what God intends for us to understand and learn from Paul's epistles can go beyond what Paul himself understood in meaning and reality.

Let us make an observation from 1 Corinthians 7.

1 Corinthians 7:25

Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.

It is interesting that Paul says: "I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion". God did not command him to say these things. Paul was giving his opinion. He says: "I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy". It is neither a frivolous nor a fleshly opinion. It is a trustworthy opinion from a trustworthy servant of the Lord – an opinion that flows forth from what the Lord had taught him and the spiritual stature he had attained. It was an opinion that he gave prayerfully. He communicated to the degree he understood of the situation.

Although Paul expressly states "I have no command of the Lord", he is expressing what he has come to understand, which is in line with God's intention and desires. If Paul's spiritual state were not good, if he were not in fellowship with God, then the opinions he expresses would not be trustworthy.

God speaks to us through the epistles

The epistles of Peter, John and James are also letters written by these apostles to the people according to their understanding of the situations and the principles and issues that are relevant and important. What they wrote flowed forth from the reality within their hearts and from the spiritual wisdom, knowledge and stature that they had attained.

We can draw some important principles concerning the way God works in and communicates through His servants. God communicates with us by working through the apostles who were in deep fellowship and partnership with Him. They had great spiritual stature and understanding and wrote the epistles, which form an important part of the Scriptures. God intends that the epistles should communicate what is upon His heart concerning the outworking and fulfilment of His purposes.

The epistles are important documents. They are an important source of revelation and the basis on which God wants us to work out our lives. Yet they come to us not in the direct form of God speaking, but through the lives of the apostles.

God's intention is for us to nurture spiritual reality in our lives

There is a progression in the way God desires to work in and through us, from Old Testament times until today, as can be seen in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

We can say that this is how God desires to work in and through our lives so that we can grow in spiritual stature, wisdom and knowledge. We can then respond to issues, situations and people in fellowship with Him, with understanding that flows forth from the reality within. It is not so meaningful if God were to directly and clearly tell us all the time exactly what to do and what to say, and we merely follow His precise instructions, repeating the words we are to say.

In my understanding, this is God's preferred way of communication to us, from the angle of fellowship, of participation, of our growth and development. And all these have to do with the very heart of God's intentions for man, that we grow in spiritual stature and that we can have a meaningful part in the outworking and fulfilment of His purposes. A person may appear spiritual when he can receive very clearly God's instructions, telling him exactly what to do and what to say, but in fact, this may not be so helpful or desirable in the long term.

The Lord desires that we not only communicate the truth, but also live out the truth. Our lives should be an embodiment of truth – the truth becoming a part of our lives – so much so that when we look at situations and people, we do so from the reality of having seen and lived out the truth in our own lives. When we have such a reality in our lives, our ministry will have a greater impact. We will not just be communicating words, but also spiritual life and reality. The more the truth is lived out in our own lives, the more effective our ministry will be. This communication of truth from our lives will flow forth not just from the words that we speak, but also from the very lives that we live. This is how God wants His children to speak on His behalf and what it means to be faithful representatives of God. We will consider further in the later part of this message how this area of truth can be lived out as we reflect on the pattern and perfect example of the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry.

Having obvious spiritual experiences may not make a difference to the quality and stature of our lives, and may not be evidence of spiritual health and maturity. What is important is to develop true inward quality, to become more and more like the Lord Jesus in the beauty of His character and in His closeness with the Father. This is what it means to be truly strong.

Thinking through vital to the process of growing

Some of us may be concerned that if God does not communicate clearly to us in the way He did to the prophets, we may be in a predicament as we would be unsure what the will of the Lord is. What if we make a mistake?

It is helpful to ponder over these issues. The fact that we are uncertain and the possibility of making a mistake can be rather meaningful in the whole process of growth.

If God were to constantly speak very clearly and directly to us – telling us what to do and what to say at every turn – then it is no longer needful for us to prayerfully consider the matter and the issues involved. If we were to ask the Lord, “Lord, what is Your will?” and the Lord tells us, “Do this”, do we need to think through any further? No. The will of the Lord has already been revealed, and it’s then a matter of getting it done. This is not helpful for our development or for our participation in His work.

When God does not make clear to us in this way, it becomes needful for us to exercise ourselves to prayerfully consider and to think through the issues. The fact that we may be uncertain or may make mistakes helps us to exercise greater care, especially if the issues involved are significant.

It is good to learn to be careful and responsible. The very process of thinking through the issues and the principles involved – trying to understand what is taking place and how to respond wisely – is a very important part of our learning process, and our growth unto maturity. This is what God desires of us, and we must not be complacent, negligent or slothful in these areas.

The Scriptures has been inspired for our learning. The principles are there to guide us. God wants us to think through how to apply these various principles and how they can be more and more a part of our lives. In the process, our minds can be renewed.

Even when we do make mistakes, we can learn from them and try to understand what went wrong.

We can see similar principles at work in the proper way to bring up children. Is it good for parents to always tell their children exactly what to do? Is there not a place to encourage them to think through issues, and within a certain framework, to decide for themselves? If they make a mistake, they can learn from it so they can fare better the next time. However, we must be more careful when major issues are involved. Where there are areas of danger, we need to exercise greater care in supervising and guiding our children. Likewise, God guides and supervises us according to His perfect wisdom for our good and our spiritual growth.

Growing in spiritual wisdom and knowledge

God working in this way is also an incentive for us to seek to grow in spiritual wisdom and knowledge and stature. We learn to highly value spiritual knowledge and wisdom. This is in line with scriptural teaching and emphasis. How well we grow in spiritual knowledge and wisdom is related to our attitude and moral qualities.

Let us look at chapters 1 and 8 of Proverbs, which extol wisdom and knowledge. The

Book of Proverbs begins in this way:

Proverbs 1:1-5, 7

1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:
2 To know wisdom and instruction,
To discern the sayings of understanding,
3 To receive instruction in wise behavior,
Righteousness, justice and equity;
4 To give prudence to the naive,
To the youth knowledge and discretion,
5 A wise man will hear and increase in learning,
And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,
7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Wisdom is associated with "righteousness, justice and equity". There is a moral content to it. It is found in right relationship with God and reverence for God. This passage tells us it is important to learn to be wise, to grow in knowledge, and not to be naive or foolish.

Proverbs 1:20

Wisdom shouts in the street,
She lifts her voice in the square;

Proverbs 1:24-25

24 "Because I called and you refused,
I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention;
25 And you neglected all my counsel
And did not want my reproof;

Proverbs 1:27-28, 31, 33

27 When your dread comes like a storm
And your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
When distress and anguish come upon you.
28 "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer;
They will seek me diligently but they will not find me,
31 "So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way
And be satiated with their own devices.
33 "But he who listens to me shall live securely
And will be at ease from the dread of evil."

These verses warn us not to neglect wisdom and knowledge. We must seek to grow in wisdom and knowledge so we can face any situation that arises.

It takes time to grow in wisdom and knowledge. It is a process. We cannot desire wisdom only when we need it. If we do not value knowledge and wisdom and do not pay

attention to nurturing this aspect of our lives, we will not have the wisdom to respond to situations when we need it. On the other hand, verse 33 assures us that those who pay due attention to this aspect of life "shall live securely, and will be at ease from the dread of evil".

I shall refer to some passages in chapter 8 where wisdom seeks to draw us towards it.

Proverbs 8:8, 12, 13

8 "All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness;

There is nothing crooked or perverted in them.

12 "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,

And I find knowledge and discretion.

13 "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil;

Pride and arrogance and the evil way

And the perverted mouth, I hate.

Again, it shows there is a moral content associated with wisdom. Wisdom is related to righteousness, prudence and discretion and disassociates itself from pride, arrogance and the evil, perverted way.

Proverbs 8:17

"I love those who love me;

And those who diligently seek me will find me.

Proverbs 8:18-21

18 "Riches and honor are with me,

Enduring wealth and righteousness.

19 "My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold,

And my yield better than choicest silver.

20 "I walk in the way of righteousness,

In the midst of the paths of justice,

21 To endow those who love me with wealth,

That I may fill their treasuries.

We should long for wisdom and knowledge and seek for it with the right attitude of heart. With it come the benefits – true riches and honour, enduring wealth and righteousness in God's kingdom.

It is the path of blessedness, abundant life and God's favour. Rejection of wisdom and knowledge results in death and destruction:

Proverbs 8:34-36

34 "Blessed is the man who listens to me,

Watching daily at my gates,

Waiting at my doorposts.

35 "For he who finds me finds life

And obtains favor from the Lord.

36 "But he who sins against me injures himself;
All those who hate me love death."

The importance of wisdom and knowledge can also be seen in the way Paul prayed for the Christians in Ephesus and Colossae. He prayed that the eyes of their hearts may be enlightened and that they may grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding (Eph. 1:17-18; Col. 1:9).

What I have mentioned as God's preferred way of speaking to us and His approach in communicating with us is an incentive for us to seek for true knowledge and wisdom and to grow in that direction.

God's communication through the Lord Jesus Christ – the Logos

Why is the Lord Jesus known as the Logos (John 1:1)? One major aspect has to do with communication. God communicates truth to us in the person and work of the Lord Jesus – the Word of God.

Let us consider what Hebrews 1:1-2 says about God speaking to us through the Lord Jesus.

Hebrews 1:1-2

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,
2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

In the past, God spoke through the prophets in many different ways. But in these last days, God has spoken to us in His Son. He is the God-man. He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's nature (Heb. 1:3). Arising from this perfect reality within the Lord Jesus, God communicates to us perfect, unadulterated truth through His life and ministry, through His conduct and words.

Through the Lord Jesus Christ, God is demonstrating to us that it is possible for divine truth and reality to come forth through humanity. The Lord Jesus is not merely God; He is also human. But His humanity did not blur nor diminish the divine truth and reality that emanates from within. He is the faithful representative and expression of the will, the character and the life of God the Father. He could communicate unadulterated truth in all its fullness and richness of meaning because He is Light and Truth and the exact representation of God's nature.

God's desire for man to be His faithful representative

The Lord Jesus is our perfect example. God desires that we too become His faithful and effective representatives. The divine life and truth in all its depth and richness must

become increasingly real in our lives. As this is lived out and expressed through our lives, we move more and more towards becoming God's faithful and effective representatives on earth.

As God's ambassadors, we are to proclaim the truth. But it is not just the proclamation of words. God wants to communicate the truth to the world not only through the words we speak but also through every aspect of our lives and conduct – in the same way He has done through the Lord Jesus Christ. To be true ambassadors for Christ, we must proclaim the truth with words that flow forth from the realities within. How can this be done? God wants us to learn, to grow and then to live, act and speak with meaning, reality and life. And this is possible because He is working within us. As we submit to His working, our minds are being renewed and our lives transformed. Increasingly, Christ will be formed in us. As we live in fellowship with God, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we not only can meaningfully experience, but also express the life and the reality that God intends for His faithful children and representatives.

Concluding remarks

Those of us who love the Lord would want to serve Him well. To be able to do so, we must learn to say what God wants us to say and serve in the strength which God supplies and not in our own strength. We must be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man as 1 Peter 4:11 and Ephesians 3:16 tell us.

1 Peter 4:11

Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 3:16

that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,

We need to set our hearts on learning and growing well so we may become truly strong. Being truly strong and serving the Lord well is not just a momentary spiritual experience or for specific occasions. It is meant to be a continuing experience and reality. We must become strong in the inner man and we need to work hard and strive to grow in spiritual stature and effective service. But if we do so in our own strength, it will get us nowhere. It must be according to His power.

Colossians 1:29

For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Paul tells us how he laboured and strove according to the power of God which mightily

worked within him. We must learn from Paul's example to labour and strive according to God's power.

2 Thessalonians 1:11

To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power,

We should concentrate on growing well in the Lord, so that we will be transformed and be in a position where God can meaningfully work out His plans and purposes through our lives, in whatever form He sees fit.

Consider the words of the Lord Jesus to Thomas in John 20:29. Thomas had expressed doubts when told by the other disciples they had seen the Lord.

John 20:27, 29

27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing."

29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

The Lord Jesus appeared to Thomas so he could see the risen Lord for himself, as well as feel Him with his own hands. When Thomas then expressed faith in the Lord, the Lord said to him: "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed".

This does not mean that we should just believe whatever we are told. But the Lord Jesus is here trying to communicate an important principle of true faith. When we believe because of obvious, dramatic spiritual experiences, it does not mean that there is quality in our faith.

When we have faith of reasonable quality, we would be able to know the truth, perceive reality and recognise God's ways, even when these are not in obvious forms – this is a manifestation of true faith. Of course it does not mean that we simply believe many things without a proper basis. It is faith in the truth that counts.

In Mark 8:12, we see the Lord Jesus sighing deeply in His spirit. It is not often that the Lord Jesus sighs. So there is something significant here for us to take note of.

The Pharisees were arguing with Him and seeking from Him a sign from heaven to test Him.

Mark 8:12

Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation."

Out of their hardness of heart, they wanted to see a sign – a manifestation of God's power in a more obvious form. The Lord Jesus, sighing deeply in His spirit, said: "Why does this generation seek for a sign?"

In a similar verse in Matthew 12:39, He expresses it this way:

Matthew 12:39

But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;

Let us be careful of our whole approach to life. Yes, we desire to know the Lord and His ways more deeply and to grow well in the Lord. But we must not have an unhealthy desire and craving for the spectacular, for the obvious – for "an evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign".

Let us learn to be able to recognise what is important in the eyes of the Lord, to concentrate on meaning and reality, rather than be unduly impressed with and attracted by outward appearance of things, the dramatic and spectacular and what appears spiritual.

God can work in spectacular ways, according to His perfect wisdom. But let us leave it to the Lord to work as He sees fit. On our part, let us concentrate on what really matters – to learn to grow well, that we can be ready for whatever the Lord desires for our lives.

Let us prayerfully ponder over our lives. Do we seek to understand the will of God? Do we seek to grow in true wisdom and knowledge, with right motives and attitudes? Are we sensitive to what He desires to communicate to us? Are we cooperating with Him? Are we responding well to the different situations and issues of life? Let us seek the Lord in learning to be true, effective, faithful representatives for Him in this fallen world.

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