

Inaudible Certainty

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God has directed His workers to accomplish His work in many different ways, in a variety of circumstances, using various forms of persuasion (Heb 1:1). In the former dispensation He often spoke with an audible voice, whether to the outer ear such that several heard the sound (Acts 9:7) or to the inner ear such that only the one prophet heard His voice (Jer 36:1-4; 32).

God spoke audibly to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), to Moses (Exod 3:10), to Joshua (Josh 1:1-9), to Samuel (I Sam 3:10-14), to Isaiah (Isa 6:8-9), to Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-10) and to many others in the old dispensation to direct them into His service. Saul of Tarsus heard a voice in his native tongue (Acts 26:14).

During the present local church dispensation God does not employ an audible voice to direct His servants. Instead, His Spirit uses His Word to bring conviction and inner certainty. A false spirit may peep and mutter (Isa 8:19-20). A believer is to test spirits whether they are of God (I John 4:1). An audible "call" is most likely a demonic voice.

Inner persuasion may have been God's pattern for enlisting many of His servants. Aaron's call (Heb 5:4) came through Moses (Exod 28:1). Caleb clearly had an inner determination (Num 14:24). Ezra had prepared his heart (Ezra 7:10). Daniel purposed in his heart (Dan 1:8). Timothy was recommended by two congregations (Acts 16:2). A brother serving with Titus was chosen of the churches (II Cor 8:18-19). Even Paul spoke of the inner compulsion to preach (I Cor 9:16). Inner desire to serve as a pastor is commended (I Tim 3:1).

John Wesley proposed three tests of a call to preach, (1) Have they life? (born again, John 3:3, 5), (2) Have they gifts? (apt to teach, II Tim 2:2), and (3) Have they fruit? (II Pet 1:4).

A young man seriously contemplating seminary training in preparation for Gospel ministry might well consider several questions whereby God can use His Word corroborated by His providential guidance to persuade fully and finally. Do not seek, nor accept an audible voice; instead earnestly pray for inner certainty. Weigh your heart response to these questions.

(1) Are you genuinely willing to devote life and energies to God's service? "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (II Cor 8:12).

(2) Do you genuinely desire the standards and responsibilities of Gospel service (I Tim 3:1-7)?

(3) Has God burdened your heart to proclaim the Gospel no matter what (Isa 6:8; I Cor 9:16)? (4) Do you have a deep willingness to spend and be spent for Jesus (John 3:30)? (5) Has the Holy Spirit burdened you to proclaim the blood of Christ as the only answer to man's great need (I Cor 15:3-4)? (6) Have you a burden for the lost (Matt 9:36-38)? (7) Have you maintained a pattern of obedience to the Word of God (Acts 26:19)?

(8) Has God given you gifts, abilities and experiences of reaching lost souls (II Tim 2:2)? (9) Has God given you spiritual fruit in your efforts (John 15:5, 8)? (10) Do you have an inner joy, a lasting satisfaction at seeing such fruit (III John 4)? (11) When you see a precious truth in Scripture, do you have an inner desire to share that truth (Jer 20:9)?

(12) Have fellow Christians encouraged you to Gospel service (Acts 16:2; II Cor 8:18-19)? (13) Have respected mature Christian leaders encouraged you to enter the Gospel ministry (Acts 9:27-29)? (14) Has a congregation taken action to encourage your participation?

(15) Has God given you opportunities for training? (16) Has God opened doors and directed your steps as you stepped out for Him? (17) Has God strengthened you into increasing holiness, a life of separation from the world and unto Him, "a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (II Tim 2:21)?

A young man does not have to answer every question in the affirmative to have inner certainty regarding God's will for his life. He will find that increasingly as he obeys God his heart will be assured of affirmative response in more and more areas. He can be as sure of

his call to the ministry as of his salvation--and the same way, by the Bible.

A traveling preacher observed some years ago that, for every example brought to his attention of someone already in the ministry who "really ought not to be a pastor," he came across a hundred who sorrowfully confided that they once felt moved by God to preach the Gospel, but seeking wealth or concern or cares of this world kept them from following Christ (Luke 9:57-62). It may well be that God speaks inwardly through His Word to many laborers (Matt 9:38) who will not, when Christ returns, be qualified to receive a crown of glory (I Pet 5:4), given to those who faithfully serve the Chief Shepherd.