

Thank You, Mr. Preacher Man, for that Really Bad Sermon!

I recently heard a three-part sermon series that I expected from the beginning (based on the sermon title) would be bad – and I wasn't wrong. The premise in each message was the same: to refute the "*Personal Guidance Model*" of faith. While I had not previously heard this term it was clear very early on that, if he properly explained the essence of the *Personal Guidance Model*, unlike him it is what I believe and consider very important! And his arguments, based on many unsupported statements and the misuse of or carefully ignored *Bible* verses and themes, did nothing to reasonably support his claims.

Since only a minor issue, in this reflection, is this single bad sermon series I will only briefly provide an overview, but it does provide a good example of how bad sermons, if we take advantage of them, can be some of the most valuable sermons we can hear!

Week 1: *Finding God's Will: Stop Reading Signs*

The preacher seemed to have 2 goals in this first sermon:

1. To debunk any notion that God speaks personally to individuals or provides "personal guidance" to anyone.
2. Assuming that is true (as he does), we should not look for or expect personal signs from God.

While there are many people who agree with this preacher (more and more seemly every day) this is exactly what the *Bible* warns us of:

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. ^{2Ti 3:1-5}

We hear an increasing number of sermons today, that if preached 25 years ago, would have resulted in the preachers being bounced out of even liberal churches. One of the key tools of the destruction of faith is by denying God is a personal God. After all, how can God personally listen and speak to millions and millions of people talking to Him at one time? Therefore, many claim (including this preacher) God recorded all He has to say to us in the *Bible* so we can know and follow His Will. There are countless *Bible* verses that refute this error and support personal guidance by God, not as an option or something highly unusual but as a requirement of salvation!

As just 3 examples:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. ^{Eph 2:8-10}

Salvation is personal. The good works prepared in advance for every Christian are personal and the necessity of God communicating these good works is personal and on-going. Which is verified by an important rhetorical proclamation stated in the *Old Testament* and repeated 3 times in *Hebrews*:

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. Ps 95:8, Heb 3:7-8, 3:15 & 4:7

With the clear implication that if we are not personally hearing the Voice of God on a daily basis we should be concerned – this is a very bad sign! For, as Jesus promises, there will be signs for:

“Whoever [in other words, Everyone who] lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” Jn 3:21

Because God not only speaks to every Christian personally, He does so on a continual basis. How He speaks to many millions of people at one time we are not told, but neither do we know how He created and controls what science tells us is an estimated 9.3 trillion stars for every one of the projected 107 billion people who have lived or 10 to 20 billion miles of unique DNA in each of these individuals!

Contrary to what the preacher said, we should not stop looking for signs but acknowledge the many clear signs God places before us all the time!

Week 2: *Finding God's Will: How Many Wills?*

The preacher's theme, in this message, was that the *Bible* contains the entire Will of God – we should seek to know the *Bible*, and if we confront an issue not specifically delineated in the *Bible* we are free to do as we wish. In other words, don't ask God a bunch of questions that are not detailed in the *Bible* – we are free, and have the responsibility, for these decisions.

His mistake here was in limiting God's Voice to the *Bible* instead of understanding the *Bible* is the foundation and framework for all that God's says to us personally. It is vital we are “in the *Bible*,” not only to find all that God says to us there, but so we can test everything we hear to see if what we are hearing is from God, the devil or others.

What child has not tried the “You never told me I could not x?” when both you and they knew the specific x was on any rational basis inconsistent with what you told them many times by theme? There is no way for parents (or God) to tell us every single jot and tittle of life – if we “pray without ceasing,” as we are instructed, God will speak to us personally, but He has not detailed all His personal Will for us in the *Bible* and left us on our own to figure out the rest. The *Bible* has many clear themes that will help (or fully) answer the issues not specifically addressed in the *Bible*.

Week 3: *Finding God's Will: Wisdom and Faith*

This sermon was focused on how we are to make decisions with the preacher saying this means:

1. Submit to God's Sovereign Will.
2. Seek God's moral Will.

3. Consider your personal convictions.

4. Apply God-given wisdom.

But since he was so far off in the first 2 sermons this last sermon was likewise mainly error – mostly man’s, not God’s, “wisdom.”

So, this is an example and synopsis of a very poor and misleading sermon. Rather than simply rejecting it as error, however, we can benefit greatly from similar poor sermons as they cause us to do what God tells us to do:

Test everything. Hold on to the good. ^{1Th 5:21}

and to model one of the *Bible’s* great examples:

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. ^{Ac 17:11}

If God gave us an “out” if we were misled by preachers then we could place our souls in their hands. But He hasn’t – we are expected and responsible today to the “hear his voice.” God is not speaking for His health, but for ours and we are quite often required to:

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. ^{2Co 13:5}

To finish with an analogy of how bad can, in the end, work together for good – a great sermon is very encouraging but a bad sermon can be as equally (or even more) beneficial if it irritates and wakes us up because we know it doesn’t sound and feel right and causes us to search and examine the Scriptures for the truth. It is not too much of a stretch to think God’s view of lukewarm sermons (probably the majority of what we hear today) is no different from the lukewarm professing “Christian” (those having a “form of godliness but denying its power.”):

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!

So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ^{Rev 3:15-16}

For there is more hope for the cold person or sermon than the lukewarm. Two great *Bible* stories show and tell us how and why:

“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

“‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

“Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

“Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him. ^{Mt 21:28-32}

“There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’” ^{Lk 15:11-32}

In both of Jesus’ stories, the “religious” and seemingly “better” was really the fake, lukewarm and lost son while the initially “black sheep of the family” came around and got “hot” to God. Yes, there is far more hope for hot or cold than lukewarm.

So, Thank you, Mr. Preacher Man, for the really bad sermon, it has helped me greatly – I will pray for you that your ultimate fate is not:

“And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.” ^{Mk 9:42}

The following, by example, is a great 5 and ½ minute sermon! It is short, listen carefully, enjoy and be encouraged by it:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oO6uyJcBclw>

And the following is a full sermon, by a well-known Preacher, if you have 48 minutes it is well worth listening to. Rick Warren
Hearing the Voice of God Part 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nd-Pmrx2aZ4>

And if you listen to this sermon, towards the end, Rick Warren tells a story about the Chilean miners - this is a YouTube from one of them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRqI4cDm4pM>