

Commentary — From the Margins

Acts 13:2

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1-3)

A proof text Trinitarians use to justify their assignment of personhood to the Holy Spirit [Πνευμα Ἅγιον] is Acts 13:2, where Luke writes, “λειτουργούντων δὲ αὐτῶν τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ νηστεόντων εἶπεν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅλιον, Ἀφορίσατε δὴ μοι τὸν Βαρναβᾶν καὶ Σαῦλον εἰς τὸ ἔργον ὃ προσκέκλημαι αὐτούς” (translated as, “Ministering and they to the Lord and fasting, said the spirit the holy, ‘Set apart then for me Barnabas and Saul to the work which I have called them’”). What Luke writes certainly has the *pneuma holy* [πνεῦμα τὸ ἅλιον] or “breath holy” speaking to those who were ministering and fasting. But does this mean that this *breath* has personhood? Or is it the Father that speaks to those who were fasting, and what is heard are His words coming through His divine Breath?

When Saul, who would be renamed Paul, was on his way to Damascus to do more mischief, a light suddenly flashed from heaven—and falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me” (Acts 9:4). Saul heard the voice of the Lord. He asks, “Who are you, Lord [κύριε]” (v. 5). And the speaker identifies Himself, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (same verse). So Saul heard the voice of Jesus, who was then a life-giving spirit and not a man speaking through controlled modulations of physical breath, with these modulations causing sound waves to travel through the air by one gas molecule bumping into another, transferring energy to it, until a human voice is heard feet or yards away by pulsating air molecules bumping against eardrums. Saul heard the voice of the glorified Jesus through modulations of the Breath of Christ [πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ — from Rom 8:9]; he heard the spirit [πνεῦμα] of Christ speak within his mind.

To hear with the ears requires sound waves to be formed in the envelope of air surrounding a person’s head, but the divine words of God are not heard with the ears but within the mind.

The Psalmist wrote,

O Lord, how manifold are your works! / In wisdom have you made them all; / the earth is full of your creatures. / ... When you hide your face, they are dismayed; / when you take away their breath, they die / and return to dust. / When you send forth your Spirit [breath], they are created, / and you renew the face of the ground. (Ps 104:27, 29-30)

The divine Breath of *YHWH* creates life and renews the face of the ground—*YHWH* is two [θεὸς & θεόν] that function as one spirit as Adam and Eve were one flesh (Gen 2:24).

All things were created by θεός (John 1:3); thus, it was by the divine Breath of θεός that life was created. This, now, leaves the divine Breath of θεός to renew the face of the ground ... in the structure of Hebraic poetics, being created is physical, the work of *Yah* [YH], whereas renewing the face of the ground is spiritual, the work of the conjoined *YHWH*. To renew what has been created is to cause the physical to become spiritual in a manner similar to the coming of the new heavens and new earth after death has been thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 21:1).

When the *Logos/Theos* entered His creation as His only Son (John 3:16), the man Jesus of Nazareth, He spoke only the words of the Father [θεός]. But these words of the Father were (for lack of a better phrase) too big to be conveyed by modulations of air; thus, the recorded healings that Jesus performed are part of the speech-acts of the Father that Jesus delivered through the Father's divine Breath: Πνευμα Ἅγιον, usually now translated as the Holy Spirit.

- In the seven recorded Sabbath healings, the words Jesus spoke coupled with the healings constituted the speech-acts of the Father as He, the Father, delivered a message to Israel through Jesus on these Sabbath days.
- When Jesus asked the Father to glorify His name, a voice came from heaven that the crowd heard as thunder (John 12:28-30). "Sound" was heard for the crowd's sake, but this *sound* was not intelligible to the crowd even though some said that an angel had spoken to Jesus.
- When the prophet Daniel was by the Tigris, he lifted up his eyes and saw a vision. Only he saw the vision. The men with him felt a great trembling and fled (Dan 10:7).
- At Sinai, when the Lord spoke, the people heard thunder and the sound of trumpets, and they saw flashes of lightning and the mountain smoking. They were afraid, and they asked Moses not to let God speak to them lest they die (Ex 20:18-20)

No mortal man is able to hear the voice of God as His divine Breath [Πνευμα Ἅγιον] conveys His words or to see God unless God has specifically chosen the person to be an instrument for Him. The utterances of God must cross dimensions, and they don't come across as precisely enunciated words in a human language that all men can hear; rather, for most of humankind, the utterances of God occur as groaning of the Spirit, perceived through feelings and subconscious suggestions. Yet for the person whom God has chosen to do a work for Him, the utterances of God will be heard as perfectly enunciated words, and not as feelings arising from a person's subconscious. The man Jesus heard the words of the Father as Moses heard the words of *Yah* and as Saul heard the words of the glorified Jesus when he was on the road to Damascus.

When Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, he asked to speak to the people. And he recounted the story of his conversion. He said,

And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there [Damascus], came to me, and standing by me said to me, "Brother Saul, receive your sight." And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. And he said, "The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard." (Acts 22:12-15)

Ananias told Paul that he, Paul, was commissioned to be a witness for God, reporting what he saw and heard. To be this witness, Paul would—

1. Know the will of God;
2. See the Righteous One;
3. And hear the voice of the Righteous One.

Paul writes to the saints at Corinth that, “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation ... no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Co 3:10-11). Elsewhere, he writes, “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized” (1 Co 14:3-38). So Paul writes that he, not others who came from Jerusalem, knows the will of God, and lays the foundation for the spiritual house of God. This claim is both bold and based upon Paul receiving his gospel not from any man but “through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:12).

Certainly Paul preached his gospel privately to those who seemed influential in Jerusalem in order to make sure he was not running in vain (Gal 2:2). About this he writes, “And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me” (v. 6).

Paul learned nothing [*added nothing to me*] from the first disciples in Jerusalem fourteen years after his calling; so the testimony of Paul is that he, Paul, learned the will of God directly through revelation and not from any person. His testimony is that he knows the will of God through revelation.

Addressing the second point, Paul writes, “I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it. I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven ... [a]nd I know that this man was caught up to paradise ... and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” (2 Co 12:1-4).

When Paul was caught up to the third heaven, he would have seen the Righteous One. He cannot say for certain whether he was in the body or out, apparently meaning that he saw himself in the third heaven but he didn’t know whether the experience was entirely within a vision or whether he actually saw himself in heaven. Either way, he heard things he was not able to relay to others. So Paul records the fulfillment of the second of the three things Ananias told him.

Since Paul recorded the fulfillment of the first two of the three things Ananias prophesied, disciples should expect to find in Scripture confirmation of the third thing: hearing a call from the mouth of the Righteous One or hearing the voice of God.

The utterances of God will be—and really can only be—conveyed by the divine Breath of God [Πνεύμα Ἄγιον]. Thus, for Paul to hear the voice of God, he must hear the Holy Spirit [again, Πνεύμα Ἄγιον] speak in words to him.

- If an anointed one hears the voice of God, this anointed one hears the Holy Spirit speak words rather than merely “hearing” the Holy Spirit through the groaning of the spirit conveyed in feelings and subconscious thoughts.
- Ananias prophesied that Paul would hear the voice of God, the sound of which can only be conveyed through utterance by the Holy Spirit.

Too many disciples sloppily speak of the Holy Spirit telling them to do this or to do that when they have heard nothing with their ears or their minds. Rather, they have had a

feeling of some sort, and they conclude that the feeling they experienced was the Holy Spirit speaking to them ... indeed, that feeling might have come from the deep groaning of the Spirit, or it might be from the person's mind recalling nearly forgotten knowledge. There is no reliable way to truly distinguish one from the other.

How can the person know for certain if a feeling has come from the Holy Spirit or from another spirit? The answer: only by testing the spirit.

Did the Holy Spirit tell WWII veteran Max Archer, then an infantry corporal in the winter of 1944, to throw his boot across the room one night when his patrol was getting ready to go out? Hearing no voice but feeling a strong urge, he threw his boot across the room while getting dressed. And just as soon as he threw the boot, he thought about how stupid the act was. He retrieved his boot and put it on. But the few extra minutes that it took for him to get his boot caused him to leave late. Every other member of the patrol was killed before he caught up with his squad.

Years later, as a Sabbatarian disciple Max credited the Holy Spirit for intervening and saving his life. He retold the story by saying that the Holy Spirit told him to throw the boot across the room. Yet he acknowledges that he heard nothing with either his ears or his mind. What he experienced was a feeling—and for most disciples, this is how communication through the Spirit occurs.

But the Apostle Paul was an exception: he heard the voice of God. He heard uttered words as apparently did those with Paul on several occasions.

When Max Archer told the story of his brush with death his breath didn't need personhood for the words conveyed by his voice to be heard by those near him. Nor does the Breath [Πνεύμα] of God need personhood for the voice of God to be heard by those chosen to hear words with the mind and not to just feel the groaning of the Spirit.

Hearing a call from the mouth of God (what was prophesied for Paul) is, in this era, a rare circumstance reserved for those appointed for a specific task. This rare occurrence has been devalued by the many who claim to have heard a call, yet preach lawlessness to Israel. Therefore, it is here expressly stated that unless a person hears actual words within his or her mind, words that the person cannot easily distinguish from words heard by the ears, the person has not heard the Holy Spirit. At best, all the person has *heard* is the groaning of the Spirit. Usually, however, the person hears his or her own ego at work. The person is deceived by the desires of the flesh.

When the Holy Spirit or Breath Holy [Πνεύμα Ἅγιον] spoke to Barnabas, Saul, and the others praying and fasting, the words were those of the Father, heard through modulations of the Father's divine Breath as actual words from the mouth of the Righteous One. What Luke records is the fulfillment of the third point that Ananias prophesied.

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