

How God Speaks to Us Today

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Introduction.

- A. Being a Christian is all about establishing a relationship with God, and, as any marriage book will tell you, having a good relationship is all about communication. We know that we talk to God through prayer, but that's only half of the equation. How does God talk back to us?
- B. There are many in the religious world today who claim that God speaks to them directly. They say that when they write a spiritual song to be used in worship, they write that hymn through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, they claim that the voice of the Holy Spirit within tells them what to say when they are preaching a sermon or teaching a Bible class. Nor do they commonly believe that this guidance is limited to the spiritual realm. They will say that God tells them what routes to take to work, what houses they should buy, and whom they should marry. In fact, they assert that God speaks to them about every decision they will make.
- C. Now, we can certainly question this assertion just on empirical grounds. I've often thought that if all of these claims of inspired sermons and inspired hymns were genuine, then the Holy Spirit must have lost some brain cells in the past two thousand years. The so-called inspired productions of today are obviously inferior to what we read in Scripture. Nor do the people who claim to hear the voice of God appear to have more money, better marriages, or better lives than the rest of us. In the end, though, our think-so's about the truth of these claims doesn't matter. What matters is what God's word has to say. Let's turn to His book this morning, then, to see what the Scripture teaches about how God speaks to us today.

I. Through His Son.

- A. The first thing we need to understand is that God speaks to us today through His Son. Consider, for instance, Hebrews 1:1-2. In fact, one of the main purposes of the book of Hebrews is to assert the superiority of the new covenant as delivered by Jesus versus the old covenant, which was delivered by angels.
- B. In simple terms, friends, this means that when Jesus tells us to do something, we need to do it. This might seem like an obvious thing to mention, but believe it or not, there are brethren who want to call this idea into question. They say that because Jesus lived almost entirely under the Old Law, that His teachings belong to the Old Law, and we don't need to follow them today. Now, you might ask why someone would say such a crazy thing, but the reason is actually quite simple. They don't like Jesus' teachings on marriage, divorce, and remarriage in Matthew 5, and so, in order to get rid of them, they get rid of everything Jesus said.
- C. Of course, none of this makes a lick of sense Scripturally. As Hebrews 1 makes clear, the words of Jesus belong to these last days, not to the prior times of the Patriarchal and Mosaic eras. Also, there's the little matter that when we say we're disciples of Jesus, exactly what we're claiming is that we're taught by Him. We can't ignore the teaching of Jesus and truthfully claim to be Christians at all. This is true with regard to His teachings on divorce, but it's every bit as true with regard to every recorded word of our Lord. Jesus is not a man whom we can dismiss at our whim. He speaks with the voice of God, and we need to listen.

II. Through His Apostles.

- A. However, the literal words of Jesus are not the only way that God speaks to us. Instead, we also receive His word through the apostles. Interestingly enough, just as some want to dismiss the teaching of Jesus, there are also some in the religious world who want to dismiss the teaching of the apostles. They get one of those Bibles that has the words of Christ in red, and they say, "If it's not in red, I don't have to do it."
- B. The problem with this point of view is that it completely, and perhaps intentionally, misses out on the relationship of Christ to the apostles. The apostles weren't free agents. They didn't just go traipsing through the Mediterranean world, making up rules that they thought sounded good and telling people to obey them. Instead, they taught only what they received from the Lord. Look at what Jesus tells them about this in John 14:26. In context, this cannot be a promise that Jesus is making to all Christians. I am certainly a Christian, yet I've never had a conversation with Jesus in my life, so it's impossible for the Holy Spirit to bring to my remembrance something that Jesus never said. Because this is so, and because Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will both teach AND remind his audience, it's certain that Jesus here is speaking only to the eleven.
- C. Because of these promises, though, that the apostles would be taught everything they needed to say by the Holy Spirit, the words that came from the mouths of the apostles had and have the same divine force as the words of Jesus. This is normally not a concept that we struggle with. When our boss at work sends someone else to tell us what to do, we don't defy the messenger because he's not the boss. In the church, Jesus is the boss, and the apostles are the messengers. We need to obey them accordingly.
- D. Now, sadly, there are plenty of people who see the authority that apostles are given to speak, decide they want some of that, and claim to be apostles themselves. I don't think that at any point in the New Testament,

there were more than 12 apostles in the world, yet in this country alone, there are likely thousands who make that claim. What do we make of that? Do we treat these modern-day apostles like the real thing, or are they counterfeits? A passage that answers this question is Acts 1:21-23. In this context, the remaining 11 apostles are choosing a man to replace Judas Iscariot after he killed himself, and they say that in order to be numbered as an apostle with them, the replacement must be a man who traveled with Jesus throughout His ministry and who also saw Him raised from the dead. In order for a man to qualify for the apostleship today, he would have to be around 2000 years old. Obviously, this is impossible. The apostles have died out.

- E. To this, today's apostle wannabes say, "But Paul didn't do those things. I'm an apostle like Paul!" Now, it is certainly true that Paul did not travel with Jesus throughout His ministry, but there are other reasons why we can't follow after the apostleship of Paul today. Consider what Paul says about himself in 1 Corinthians 15:8-9. Paul isn't talking like he's only one in a long line of apostles who will arise after the ascension of Jesus. Instead, he describes himself as the "last of all" to see the risen Lord. If Paul is to be believed, after him, no one is going to see Jesus again until He returns on the Day of Judgment. Similarly, when Paul says that he is one "born out of due time," he's describing himself not as establishing a new rule, but as a solitary exception to the old rule. Paul is a unique case. There wasn't anyone else like him then, and there isn't anyone like him now.

III. Through His Word.

- A. On the surface of things, this appears to leave us with a problem. God speaks through Jesus, but Jesus has ascended back to heaven. God speaks through the apostles, but the apostles are all dead. How, then, can we know what God wants today? Today, we hear Him through His word. Consider Paul's writing in Ephesians 3:3-5. As we already saw, God through the Holy Spirit revealed His will to the apostles and prophets, another class that no longer exists today. Paul, as an apostle, wrote down God's will and sent it to the church in Ephesus, so that when they read the letter, they could understand Paul's insight into the mystery of Christ.
- B. That's what the Bible is: a written revelation of God's will for our lives. There's nothing mystical about the word, friends. There's nothing about it that's too hard to understand. We don't need a preacher or priest or church to tell us what it says. Instead, God wrote the Scripture so that when any person of ordinary intelligence reads it, he can discern what God wants him to do. That's how God speaks to us today.
- C. But what about all of those other folks, the people who claim to preach inspired sermons and write inspired spiritual songs? Should we be writing down what they say and adding it to the Scripture? Well, if the revelation is genuine, that's exactly what we should be doing. God's word is God's word, after all. The problem is, though, that God has specifically told us not to expect new revelation. Look at the words of Jude 3. Jude tells us that we are to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.
- D. So, what's this phrase "once for all" mean? When I say, "I was determined to get those mice out of my house once and for all," what meaning was I trying to convey? Was I trying to say, "I wanted to do an incomplete job of killing the mice, so they could come back later and I'd do it again?" Of course not! I meant that I wanted to destroy them so completely that I would never have to repeat the process. That's the way God revealed the word: completely so that He would never have to repeat the process. All the revelation that ever would be was given in the first century, and that means that 21st-century claims to revelation are false.
- E. But what about other kinds of revelation? What about God telling me whom to marry and what stocks to pick? Folks, that whole idea is an invention made up by people who want to justify their feelings and intuitions as God speaking to them. Go through the book of Acts, the single largest account of first-century Christian life that we have. Find all the places in Acts where the Holy Spirit tells a Christian to go anywhere or do anything. I count five of them. In every case, the Holy Spirit is speaking to an apostle or prophet, and in every case, it has to do directly with that apostle or prophet teaching someone the gospel. You never see God picking husbands or wives for anybody in the New Testament. You never see God giving specific financial advice. Belief that He does has a lot more to do with superstition than with Christianity.
- F. All of this leaves us with one of two choices. Our first choice is to stick with the word of God and believe that God speaks to us only through it. Here's what Paul writes about the Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. This passage tells us first of all that the Scripture is trustworthy, that it does indeed come to us from God. Second, it tells us that the Scripture is spiritually useful. It teaches us both about what we should do and what we should not do. Third, it tells us that the Scripture is sufficient. The word of God alone is enough to make us complete and to equip us thoroughly for every good work. We need nothing but the Bible.
- G. On the other hand, we can choose to believe otherwise. We can choose to believe that God talks to us or others today through little feelings or little voices. We can make that choice, but before we do, we need to consider the warning of Paul in Galatians 1:8-9. This is a solemn passage, friends. Paul instructs us that even if an angel comes down from heaven and says anything different from the gospel, he is to be accursed. There are one of two things that any so-called "new revelation" can be. It can be the same as the gospel, but if that's true, we don't need to hear it, and God wouldn't bother saying it. On the other hand, it can be different from the gospel, but then it brings all who hear it under a curse. Let's hear the Bible instead.

Conclusion. If you haven't been listening to the gospel in your life, now is the time to repent.