

## “Does God Speak Today?”

**2 Peter 1:12-21**

April 29, 2007

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About five years ago a forty-five-year-old, twenty-year member of our church came to me and said, “I recently had a dream about you that I have not wanted to tell you. But God kept telling me I had to.”

That far in that conversation I heard one thing:

Somehow this person understood the dream to be from God.

The person continued. “In my dream I saw you at your desk here at the church. The hard part is that you were slumped over from a heart attack. I don’t know what it means, I don’t know if you were dead; I just know I had to tell you.”

At that point in the conversation I also knew that this person believed they were commissioned **by** God to speak to me **for** God.

If you had been me, what would you have said?

I suspect I stood there with a blank look on my face but several unedifying thoughts raced through my mind.

Jon Haley told me that several years ago he was sitting next to a man on an airplane who toward the end of their flight turned to Jon and said, “God told me to give this to you.”

At that he handed Jon a \$100 bill.

God has always liked Jon better than me (joke).

While the examples may be somewhat egregious, the root experience is all-too common even in evangelical circles today.

It seems an increasing number of Christians are experiencing and even expecting God to speak to them.

And when they say that, they aren’t saying they hear a voice or see a vision but they do mean that they expect God to directly reveal to them through thoughts, dreams or impressions what they and even others are to do in certain situations.

In Charismatic circles they speak of it quiet boldly.  
 In our circles the language is muted but the expectation  
 seems the same.

This idea of God revealing himself to us, not only through Scripture, but directly has crept into our music and into the way we talk about our relationship with God.

“Lord, speak to me.” “We wait upon the Lord.” “We listen for the ‘still small voice’ of God.” “We say we heard from God” or “The Lord said to me” or “The Lord told me to say or do such and such.”

But when we sing or talk like that what do we mean and what are we expecting?

Our text for today, in our continuing study of 2 Peter, deals with knowing who speaks for God.

2 Peter 1:12-21

“So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. <sup>13</sup> I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, <sup>14</sup> because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. <sup>15</sup> And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. <sup>16</sup> We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. <sup>17</sup> For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” <sup>18</sup> We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. <sup>19</sup> And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. <sup>20</sup> Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

In verses 12-15 of our text, Peter begins by saying that he realizes they have heard these things before and that they are rather mature in their faith, but he wants to remind them of these truths anyway.

Furthermore he says, I won't be around much longer and I want to do everything I can to ensure that you will remember these fundamental truths.

Then Peter moves on to the more specific reason for writing his letter.

2 Peter 1:16 "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

As will be clearer in chapter 2, false teachers were causing problems in the churches and Peter is responding.

But already here, he indicates that Peter's and the other Apostles' teaching was being characterized as "cleverly invented stories."

### **Again the issue is who speaks for God?**

Beginning in chapter 3 it will become more obvious, but even here we see that the specific teaching that was coming under attack by the false teachers was the issue of Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.

If Jesus is not coming again it undermines the entire gospel.

The good news is that God is in the process of recreating his creation; that sin, injustice, fear, and death are not the end.

God will bring the great change to completion – Jesus will come again and usher in the fulfillment of the age to come – resurrected bodies, a new heaven and earth.

No, Peter says, our teachings were not "cleverly invented stories;" they were not fraudulent, deceitful, quackery.

Two things confirm what we have told you about the coming of Jesus:

1. In verse 16 he says, "We were eyewitness of his majesty;" we saw Jesus in his transfigured, glorious, state; we saw him as he will be when he comes again.

2. And secondly, in verse 19, “we have the word of the prophets made more certain;” we have the completely reliable “word of the prophets.”

In the first of those, Peter says you should believe us because we are eye and ear witnesses of an actual historical event that corroborates who Jesus truly is.

And what Peter proceeds to do is remind them in few words of the Transfiguration of Jesus.

2 Peter 1:17-18 “For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”<sup>18</sup> We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.”

My guess is that at least some of you are like me in that you’ve never thought much of the Transfiguration of Jesus.

But here in 2 Peter, Peter connects the Transfiguration to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.

And, in a minute, when we look at where the Gospel writers place the event in their retelling of it, we see they too connect it to the Second Coming.

To better understand this we need to revisit the event.

Matthew 17:1-9 “After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.<sup>2</sup> There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.<sup>3</sup> Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”<sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”<sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.<sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.”<sup>8</sup> When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.<sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

In that experience God allowed Peter to see Jesus as he is without the encumbrance of his human nature.

Peter and the others saw Jesus in his glorious majesty.

As God is described elsewhere as unapproachable light so Jesus stood before them in the full radiance of his glory.

And the point is, it is this glory in which he will return.

He may have come the first time taking on the vulnerability and weakness of a human baby but when he comes again it will be as majestic King of kings and Lord of lords.

Peter says I've seen what he will be like.

As I said earlier, the Gospel writers also seem to connect this Transfiguration of Jesus with his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.

In all three accounts (Matthew, Mark and Luke) the Transfiguration event is told immediately after Jesus speaks of his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.

I only have time to show you Matthew's account but the others are the same:

Matthew 16:27-17:2 "**For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory** with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done... "After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. **There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.**"

Peter would never forget that experience on the mountain and he speaks of it to confirm for his readers that he and other Apostles are the ones who have actually seen and heard from God.

But as we have already seen, there is a second reason why Peter says he, rather than the false teachers, speaks for God.

2 Peter 1:19-21 "**And** we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the

morning star rises in your hearts. <sup>20</sup> Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Most scholars recognize that the phrase, “word of the prophets” is synonymous with the Holy Scriptures.

But what does he mean that the Scriptures are “made more certain.” Does this mean that the experience of the Apostles authenticates the Scriptures?

That’s the way it looks in the NIV translation.

But I propose that exactly the opposite is what Peter is saying. I don’t often point out what I think are less than the best translations of a Greek text, but it is worth noting that the word “made” is not in the Greek.

The English Standard Version and the alternate translation in the New American Standard Bible make better sense of the wording:

ESV “And we have something more sure, the prophetic word”

NASB. “We have the more sure prophetic word”

Now the idea makes sense: It’s as if Peter said, “If you don’t accept our experience then go to the more certain Scriptures.

Experience, even the most unusual and most spiritual experience, doesn’t validate Scripture, but Scripture validates or invalidates our experience.

I’m getting ahead of myself but the only words from God that I can know with certainty are his are those spoken through the Scriptures.

It is hard to overemphasize the Apostles’ regard for the Scripture.

Whenever the Apostles wanted to authenticate their witness to an experience they went to the OT.

Jesus himself didn’t appeal to experience but to the Word.

On the road to Emmaus He showed them himself **from the Scriptures.**

All the way through the books of Acts, Romans and Hebrews, the authors' final appeal time and time again is to Scripture.

I recall many years ago Billy Graham was asked on a morning talk show, "How do you know Jesus is alive?"

He responded, "Because I talked to him this morning."

With all due respect to Dr. Graham, and with an understanding of what he meant, I would still say we don't **know** that Jesus is alive because we talked to him this morning; we **know** he's alive because the Word of God says so.

As I said a couple of weeks ago:

I don't **know** that God is faithful most of all by my own experiences.

I **know** that God is faithful because of the faithfulness of God demonstrated and interpreted by God **in the Word of God**.

I don't **know** that God loves me because I feel his love.

I **know** that God loves me because **his Holy Word** demonstrates and declares his love.

Where I'm headed with this is toward an understanding of the sufficiency of the Bible.

Many Christians believe in the authority of God's Word but they don't believe in the sufficiency of it.

Many want an additional "word" from God, when God says he has already given his Word.

Peter concludes his remarks with verses 20-21: "**Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.** <sup>21</sup> **For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**"

Because I have spoken on these verses very recently, I won't repeat myself but simply note that Peter is saying the words of Scripture are exactly what God said.

I do want to come back to that in a couple of minutes.

We now go back to where I began this message.

Who speaks for God?

Who can say, “God said...” or “God told me...”?

Peter says the Word of God, the Bible, is the voice of God.

Paul says the same even more descriptively:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

What is the Scripture useful for? Knowing how to live godly lives.

And how sufficient is the Scripture? “That the man (or woman) of God may be *partially* equipped? No. That they may be “**thoroughly** equipped” for every good work.

So what about this idea of, apart from Scripture, listening for God, hearing from God, and “The Lord told me...”?

Does God speak today?

If the answer to that question is “yes” then the answer demands explanation.

When we say, “God speaks today” we must be referring to either the doctrine of “Illumination” or the doctrine of “Revelation.”

**Illumination** is the act of God’s Spirit whereby he enables us to understand and apply the Scriptures to our thoughts and actions.

1 Corinthians 2:11-14 “No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us... The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he

cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (understood).

Theologian J.I. Packer defines illumination well: “It is not a giving of new revelation, but a work within us that enables us to grasp and to love the revelation that is there before us in the biblical text as heard and read... Sin in our mental and moral system clouds our minds and wills so that we miss and resist the force of Scripture... The Spirit, however, opens and unveils our minds and attunes our hearts so that we understand.” (J.I. Packer, *Illumination, The Holy Spirit Gives Spiritual Understanding*. See full text below)

It is in this sense that hymn writers and preachers of the past spoke of hearing from God.

The Scripture was the Word of God and the Holy Spirit enabled them to truly “hear” meaning “understand” its significance to their lives.

**Revelation**, however, is a different issue.

Revelation is not just a matter of understanding God’s Word but is in fact the very Word of God - God speaking.

Catholics and Mormons, among many others, believe that God has revealed himself authoritatively in ways other than the Bible and creation.

Catholics believe that God speaks through church tradition and also when the Pope speaks *ex cathedra*.

Latter Day Saints believe that God spoke through the Prophet Joseph Smith as recorded in the book of Mormon.

Most Protestants and more specifically Evangelicals roundly reject those ideas.

For reasons I have neither the time nor the qualification to explain, Evangelicals have always maintained that special revelation, Scripture, the Word of God, ended with the book of Revelation.

Well if revelation ceased with Scripture then what is this “word from God” or “The Lord told me...” that we hear about today?

Do they truly mean that God directly revealed something to them that is not in the Scriptures?

Do they thereby mean that the Scripture is not sufficient for life and godliness – that they need to have other words from God to know what to think, say or do?

Here is what one Evangelical author has written: “In order to fulfill God’s highest purposes for our lives we must be able to hear his voice both in the written word and in the word freshly spoken from heaven . . . Satan understands the strategic importance of Christians hearing God’s voice so he has launched various attacks against us in this area. One of his most successful attacks has been to develop a doctrine that teaches God no longer speaks to us except through the written word. Ultimately, this doctrine is demonic even [though]

Christian theologians have been used to perfect it. Jack Deere as cited in Mark Thompson, “Spiritual Warfare: What Happens When I Contradict Myself,” *The Briefing* no. 45/46 (24 April 1990): 11. This quotation, originally taken from a 1990 conference talk by Jack Deere, is cited without denial, qualification, or retraction by Deere in his essay “Vineyard Position Paper #2: The Vineyard’s Response to *The Briefing*” (Anaheim, Calif.: Association of Vineyard Churches, 1992), 22-23. See the full context in Fowler’s article in the notes below

The easy, but I think, rather careless statement made by many today is that we do still hear from God directly today but we must always evaluate it in light of the Bible - It can’t be inconsistent with the Bible.

What’s interesting to me is that most Evangelicals who believe they hear from God directly today **will readily say** that they aren’t always certain they have it right.

They will couch their “revelations” from God with pious hesitations or evasions.

But when I go to the Scripture I find no such hesitations or evasions.

The prophets boldly declared, “Thus saith the Lord!”

And they knew that the test of a prophet was 100% accuracy. Anything less was punishable by death because they dared to speak for God when God had not spoken.

Some will wish to argue that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14, writes about testing the prophecies to determine what elements in the prophecies are accurate and which are not.

I believe, as do others, that Paul was talking to Christians before the Scriptures were completed about how to tell which prophets were from God and which were not.

Those verses are no basis for saying that a word from God today might or might not be completely accurate.

When God spoke it was always accurate!

Philip Jensen and Tony Payne in their good book, *Guidance and the Voice of God*, write of the tendency of many Christians to try to find out **directly** from God exactly what it is they are to do in a given situation.

We want to know who we should marry, where we should live, whether this house is the right one, whether we should be a missionary, and so on.

And so like Dallas Willard, whom I greatly respect but on this point could not disagree with more, the person waits to hear from God.

Willard writes, “Often by the end of the hour or so there has stood forth within my consciousness an idea or thought with that peculiar quality, spirit and content that I have come to associate with God’s voice.” (In Greg Gilbert’s review of Willard’s *Hearing God IVP 1999*)

But Jensen and Payne accurately assess the situation by saying we are often asking the wrong questions:

“The point is this: if we ask the wrong question, we either get the wrong answer or no answer at all. And if we get no answer, we are tempted to turn elsewhere to find an answer. Many of our problems with guidance stem from precisely this: we ask the wrong questions, and then wonder why we cannot find answers... (For example) we are terribly concerned about choosing between Druscilla and Mary-Lou. We think the success of our whole married life will depend on the right choice, and we agonize over it. However, God’s priority is for us to be godly, whether we are single or married, and whether we marry Druscilla or Mary-Lou. (85-86)

But too often we keep seeking information from God – “the” answer - when God promises wisdom.

Wisdom is not information but “wisdom” is the Scripture-saturated and Holy Spirit-enabled ability to apply information.

James 1:2-5 “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

When a person is facing a trial, a most difficult experience, isn't that when they most want information?

But does God promise information; does he promise special revelation given just to us as a Word from the Lord? No!

He promises “wisdom” – the principles of godliness laid out in his word by which we may move in the right direction.

For example, I don't think God is going to tell us which car to purchase.

He does tell us in his Word about stewardship and motives.

But, someone cries, how do I know what God wants me to do?

Hear me carefully: seek to live by the principles of God's Word and for God's glory and do as you please!

“But what if I'm wrong?” someone says.

First of all you probably won't be wrong unless you persist in thinking there is only one right job or one right man or one right car and you have to find it.

Secondly, if it is important to God and you have taken a wrong direction, do you think God rubs his hands in glee that he tricked you into making a mistake or do you think he loves you enough to show you?

Theologian Wayne Grudem thinks people should hear directly from God today.

I disagree with him strongly, and I think his own cautions should move him to disagree with himself.

He writes, “People who continually seek subjective “messages” from God to guide their lives must be cautioned that subjective personal guidance is not a primary function of New Testament prophecy. They need to place much more emphasis on Scripture and seeking God’s sure wisdom written there.”

Then Grudem cites several charismatic writers who agree with this caution:

Michael Harper ‘Prophecies which tell other people what they are to do – are to be regarded with great suspicion.’

Donald Gee, ‘Many of our errors where spiritual gifts are concerned arise when we want the extraordinary and exceptional to be made frequent and habitual. Let all who develop excessive desire for “messages” through the gifts take warning from the wreckage of past generations as well as of contemporaries...The Holy Scriptures are a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.’

Donald Bridge, ‘the illuminist constantly finds that “God tells him” to do things...they are treading a dangerous path. Their ancestors have trodden it before, and always with disastrous results in the long run. Inner feelings and special promptings are by their very nature subjective. The Bible provides our objective guide.’ In Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1058-9

Another objection I have to those who say, “The Lord told me...” is that they intentionally or unintentionally communicate an authority they have no right to communicate.

Such words leave the both the speaker and the hearer without any objective way to evaluate the truthfulness of what is said.

It would be far better if God’s people understood the biblical doctrine of illumination and depended on the Spirit of God to guide us into godliness through his written Word, which is what he promises!

Instead of saying, “The Lord told me to...” what if we said “It seems to me that it would be consistent with what God says in his Word if I were to...”

Anytime someone says, “The Lord told me...” or “God impressed upon my heart...” he or she has taken the position of speaking for God.

And if what they are saying is not in the Bible, they have thrown open the door to new “revelation.”

Who speaks for God?

2 Peter 1:19-21 and we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention... Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

I have an additional 25 pages of notes on the subject appended to the sermon text on line at “Sound Living” at SGC.org.

Included are notes on a book by Jensen and Payne on how we get spiritual guidance.

## **From the Cambridge Declaration Of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals**

**(A current statement of faith)**

*We reaffirm* the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured.

*We deny* that any creed, council or individual may bind a Christian's conscience, that the Holy Spirit speaks independently or contrary to what is set forth in the Bible, or that personal spiritual experience can ever be a vehicle of revelation.

### **"The Guidance of the Holy Spirit," in Collected Writings of John Murray, Volume 1: The Claims of *Truth* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976:**

"We must rely upon the Holy Spirit to direct and guide us in the understanding and application of God's will as revealed in Scripture, and we must be constantly conscious of our need of the Holy Spirit to apply the Word effectively to us in each situation. The function of the Holy Spirit in such matters is that of illumination as to what the will of the Lord is, and of imparting to us the willingness and strength to do that will . . . As we are the subjects of this illumination and are responsive to it, and as the Holy Spirit is operative in us to the doing of God's will, we shall have feelings, impressions, convictions, urges, inhibitions, impulses, burdens, resolutions. Illumination and direction by the Spirit through the Word of God will focus themselves in our consciousness in these ways . . . It is here, however, that careful distinction is necessary. The moment we desire or expect or think that a state of our consciousness is the effect of a direct intimation to us of the Holy Spirit's will, or consists in such an intimation and is therefore in the category of special direction from him, then we have given way to the notion of special, direct, detached communication from the Holy Spirit. And this, in respect of its nature, belongs to the same category as belief in special revelation. The only way whereby we can avoid this error is to maintain that the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit is through the means which he has provided, and that his work is to enable us rightly to interpret and apply the Scripture in the

various situations of life, and to enable us to, interpret all the factors which enter into each situation in the light of Scripture. (pp. 188-89)

**Page 790 of Nov 11, 1883 sermon by Spurgeon**

“We often meet with a fanciful religion in which people trust to impulses, to dreams, to noises and mystic things which they imagine they have seen— all of it is fiddle-faddle! And yet they are quite wrapped up in it. I pray that you may cast out this chaffy stuff—there is no food for the spirit in it. The life of my soul lies not in what I think, or what I fancy, or what I imagine, or what I enjoy of fine feeling, but only in that which faith apprehends to be the Word of God!”

DOES GOD SPEAK TODAY  
APART FROM  
THE BIBLE?©

*R. Fowler White*

[http://www.the-highway.com/God\\_Speak.html](http://www.the-highway.com/God_Speak.html)

The **Underlined** and **bold** emphases are by Jerry Nelson

**E**vangelical Protestant faith has always affirmed, as a central tenet of its understanding of divine revelation, that the Word of God must have supreme authority in religion. Evangelicalism has historically held this view in close conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit. The truth can be stated this way:

The living and true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is supreme head of a living church, is not mute. He speaks — and He speaks clearly — by His Spirit and through His written word, the Bible.’<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, as the author of Hebrews aptly puts it, we must see to it that we do not disregard "Him who *is* speaking" (Heb. 12:25)<sup>2</sup>

These statements are among the claims that define those who have traditionally identified themselves as evangelicals. They are my own affirmations as an evangelical theologian. They are, further, the affirmations of the contributors to this present volume of essays. Certain evangelicals, however, have begun to add an additional proposition. It is extremely important that we understand this additional proposition and the effect it is having on present evangelical thought and practice. A crisis is on the horizon, and those who are unaware may well be caught off guard.

**This new proposition states that God also speaks to His people today *apart from the Bible, though He never speaks in contradiction to it.* As qualified as this statement seems to be, few evangelicals today would question whether it is true. After all, if nothing that God may say today apart from the Scriptures actually *contradicts* what He has already said in the Scriptures, **what is the big deal?** **Simply put, the big deal is whether or not it is actually true that God speaks to His people apart from the Bible. Is this new affirmation itself a contradiction of the Scriptures? Has God, in fact, told His people in the Bible that they should hear His voice in both spoken and written words? Does not this new view threaten to set aside the historic doctrine of the sufficiency and finality of Scripture?****

Lest anyone be prematurely self-assured of having the right answers to these questions, consider the issue from another point of view. If we deny that God speaks today apart from the Scriptures, are we quenching His Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19)? Some, such as William DeArteaga, have said exactly that.<sup>3</sup> Others state the matter in an even more serious way. Jack Deere, a former Dallas Theological Seminary professor, now conference speaker, author, and Presbyterian (PCUSA) pastor, has made the following assertions:

In order to fulfill God's highest purposes for our lives we must be able to hear his voice both in the written word and in the word freshly spoken from heaven . . . Satan understands the strategic importance of Christians hearing God's voice so he has launched various attacks against us in this area. One of his most successful attacks has been to develop a doctrine that teaches God no longer speaks to us except through the written word. Ultimately, this doctrine is demonic even [though] Christian theologians have been used to perfect it.<sup>4</sup>

Shocking words for sure, but arresting, aren't they? We need a good deal of candor if we are to fully appreciate what is being said here. If DeArteaga, Deere, and others of similar mind are right, if the Bible does indeed teach the church to hear God's voice both through its pages and apart from them in words "freshly spoken from heaven," then the contributors to this present volume and those who agree with them are at least guilty of quenching the Spirit, if not of outright refusal to hear the very voice of God. We, of all people, are especially in need of fanning into flame those gifts of the Spirit through which God would speak to His church today (cf. 2 Tim. 1:6).

With this fuller appreciation for what is at stake, I will evaluate certain key arguments that have led others to affirm that God still speaks today apart from the Bible. In the past we might have turned to Pentecostal and charismatic teachers for such argumentation, since this affirmation has been a defining trait and *modus operandi* of their circles. But in recent years a whole new wave of evangelicalism has arisen among teachers from historically non-Pentecostal and non-charismatic circles. These teachers and authors have been at the forefront of the whole discussion regarding the hearing of God's voice. Because of this new group of influential teachers, we will focus our particular attention on the arguments advanced by them, principally Wayne Grudem and Jack Deere. Though this may mean that I must entertain some views unique to Grudem and Deere, it is nevertheless my aim to take into account what is distinctive to *all* who affirm the doctrine that God speaks today apart from the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

### DEFINING OUR TERMS

We need to ask ourselves, first, what does it mean to say "God speaks today"? Keeping in mind the traditional meaning that "God speaks today through the Bible," the phrase has come to be used in two other senses. For some, the words "God speaks today" are simply a popular, if misleading, way of describing the fact that God guides and directs His people by His Spirit in the application of His written word through promptings, impressions, insights, and the like. Most non-Pentecostals and non-charismatics have explained these (more or less) intuitive experiences in terms of the Spirit's works of illumination, leading, and conviction. A few would even acknowledge that, among those who fit a given psycho-spiritual profile, these experiences might be accompanied by things seen or heard. All of these experiences are, however, carefully distinguished from the Spirit's work of revelation.<sup>6</sup> Hence, though the Spirit's illumination and guidance may sometimes focus on phenomena such as promptings or impressions, those phenomena are not specifically interpreted as involving the biblical ministry-gifts of revelation, such as prophecy and tongues or their correlates (e.g., visions, dreams, auditions).

Others, of course, use the words "God speaks today" to mean that He guides and directs His people by giving them words of direction through all the same media that the Bible portrays Him as using in the past (e.g., visions and auditions, prophets and angels). As Deere says, "God can and does give personal words of direction to believers today that cannot be found in the Bible. I do not believe that he gives direction that contradicts the Bible, but direction that cannot be found in the Bible."<sup>7</sup> We find the evidence for this claim, Deere argues, in the various methods God has used in the past to speak to His people.

For example, during the age of the Old Testament, Deere observes, "God spoke to his children ... in an audible voice, in dreams and visions, through circumstances and fleeces, through inner impressions, through prophets, through angels and through Scripture."<sup>8</sup> Turning to the Gospels, Deere notes that 'one of the basic keys to the ministry of Jesus was that he only did what he saw his Father doing and he only spoke the words that his Father gave him to speak.'<sup>9</sup> According to Deere, the same pattern can be seen in Acts:

"Special guidance [was] given to the apostles and others by visions, angelic voices, the Holy Spirit, etc."<sup>10</sup>

Finally, in the New Testament epistles, Paul instructs the churches concerning their use of the revelatory gifts of "prophecy, tongues, words of wisdom, words of knowledge, and discernment of Spirits [sic]."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, as Deere understands it, the author of Hebrews expresses his belief that angelic visitations were possible in his day when he reminded his readers that "some have entertained angels unawares" (13:2 KJV).<sup>12</sup>

By contrast, then, with the previous definition of the phrase "God speaks today," Deere concludes that "on a prima facie reading of the Scriptures, one would expect God to continue communicating to his children throughout the church age with the same variety of methods he has always used."<sup>13</sup>

### WORDS SO BROADLY DEFINED

**Let's admit it: the idea that God continues to communicate with us using exactly the same methods that He has always used is not only provocative but has a certain attraction.** Making it all the more interesting, Deere's contention that the issue of whether God speaks today apart from the Bible is basically a matter of recognizing that God uses the same means to communicate today as He used in the past.<sup>14</sup>

As we ponder this claim, let us not make the mistake of saying that God has never spoken apart from Scripture, for indeed He has done just that. For example, though Moses had committed to writing the words God spoke to him, God continued to speak apart from those Scriptures through the prophets who came after Moses. Having elicited this acknowledgment from us, however, **Deere wants us to take an additional step: he urges that, as God has done in the past, so we should expect Him to do in the present.**

As noble as Deere's conclusion may sound, it is a seriously deficient theological view precisely because it does not respect the biblical link between the means through which God spoke and the content He conveyed through those means, namely, His very *words*. In this light we must observe that, despite his intentions to the contrary, Deere actually depreciates the means through which God has communicated in the past. He insists that those means are always connected with "words of direction" from God without defining those words in other than personal and ministerial terms. But, by defining these words so broadly, he leaves the impression that the words God spoke long ago are on a par with the words He speaks today. That parity is actually crucial to Deere's whole agenda. The simple problem is this: It is not true. To see this fact, we need only reconsider Deere's examples.

**As the Old Testament portrays it, whenever God spoke apart from Scripture in the past, He never spoke, or had others speak, anything**

**other than His very own words. Just how radically true this was in Old Testament days is emphasized in Deuteronomy 18, arguably the fundamental biblical text on the role of the Old Testament prophet. Speaking of the prophets to and through whom He would speak after Moses, God Himself says, "I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. . . . Whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him" (vv. 18-19)<sup>15</sup> Therefore, during the Old Testament period, the words of direction that God spoke "apart from the Scriptures" (i.e., apart from, say, the writings of Moses) were His own words, always expressing accurately what He intended to communicate and invariably invested with absolute authority.**

What was true of God's speech alongside the Scriptures during the Old Testament period was also true of his speech alongside the Old Testament Scriptures during the ministries of Jesus and the apostles. The words that the Father spoke to Jesus, and that Jesus spoke in turn to His hearers, were not less than the Father's very own words. Deere is right to call our attention here especially to John's gospel, which has a particular interest in the Father's communication with and through His Son (see John 3:34; 7:16; 8:28; 12:49-50; 14:10, 24, 31).

Similarly, the words of direction that God communicated to and through the apostles were His very words. This is the import of Jesus' remarks to the apostles during His Farewell Discourse: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you (John 14:26). Again Jesus said to them:

When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. (16:13-14)

Thus, Paul, whom Christ added to His apostolate, says of himself and his fellow apostles, (1) the Holy Spirit made known to them the things freely given to us believers by God (1 Cor. 2:10, 12), and (2) they spoke of those things, "not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those [words] taught by the Spirit" (2:13)—words invariably accurate and fully authoritative.<sup>16</sup>

The same is evident in Acts: the words of direction that God communicated to and through the apostles and others were always His very own words. Deere and those who agree with him are fond of citing Acts 16:9-10 (Paul's vision of the Macedonian call) as an example of the personal-ministerial and extra biblical revelation that does not contradict God's revelation in Scripture.<sup>17</sup> Certainly the revelation in this passage is "personal-ministerial and extra biblical," that is, apart from Scripture, as it existed at that

point. But, just as certainly, it is nothing less than one of those always accurate, invariably authoritative words from God.

Consistent with this portrayal of the apostles in Acts, the New Testament prophets are, at least ostensibly, depicted in Acts as following in the footsteps of their Old Testament forebears — that is, they too receive words from God through the Spirit that are His very own words. There are only three occasions in the New Testament where the actual contents of a specific post-Pentecost prophecy are recorded: the two prophecies of Agabus (Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-11) and the prophecy of John in the book of Revelation.<sup>18</sup> We may leave aside the example of the book of Revelation, since no one discussing the issue before us questions that the visions in that book communicated God's own words.

As for Agabus, Luke portrays this New Testament prophet as one who spoke whatever words the Holy Spirit had to say. In fact, in Acts 21:10, 11, "Agabus' use of dramatic symbol and quotation formula [tying his own hands and feet with Paul's belt and introducing his oracle with the words 'This is what the Holy Spirit says'] would have signaled to his audience that [his] prophecy was the same in kind as oracles delivered by OT prophets."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, though some persist in questioning the accuracy of Agabus's prophesy in Acts 21, "in every respect, Luke expected his readers to view Agabus in continuity with OT prophets."<sup>20</sup>

We cannot discuss them here, but other instances from Acts confirm that the words communicated to the apostles and others through many different media were invariably accurate, fully authoritative words from God (e.g., Acts 8:26, 29; 9:10-12; 10:9-19; 13:1-3; 18:9-10). As for the angelic visitations to which the author of Hebrews refers (Heb. 13:2), the only words the Bible ever represents God's angels as speaking or otherwise communicating were God's very own (Heb. 2:2; Gen. 18-19; Zech. 1:14-16; Rev. 1:1; 22:6).

**My aim in all that I have considered so far is to demonstrate that — for all the interest Deere has in teaching us the biblical model of hearing God as practiced by Jesus, the apostles, and others — he fundamentally misrepresents the very model he has chosen. Deere creates the impression that the revelatory words God spoke in biblical times are on a par with the words He speaks today. Even if he is right that the "words of direction" in the Bible are both personal and ministerial words, he has still not produced a single incontrovertible biblical example in which those words are anything other than God's very own words.** To the contrary, in every example that has come to my attention, God saw to it that whatever He intended to communicate was always accurately expressed and invariably invested with His authority. This brings me to some important evidence I have not yet considered — namely, Paul's instructions regarding the church's use of the revelatory gifts.

**NO LONGER SPEAKING AS BEFORE**

**Deere's aim is to persuade that just as God used revelatory gifts to give words of direction to His children in biblical days, so He still does today but this is simply not the whole picture. For Deere, the words God speaks today through those gifts are simply not on a par with the inerrant, fully authoritative words that He spoke in the past.<sup>21</sup> To find the basis of Deere's affirmations here, we must turn to Professor Wayne Grudem's influential writings on New Testament prophecy<sup>22</sup>**

**Grudem's position can be summarized this way: In the New Testament gift of prophecy (and its correlates — visions, dreams, auditions, words of knowledge, and wisdom) the church should find a source of practical, though fallible, guidance. To adequately consider this proposition, we must notice that Grudem says very plainly that God now speaks as He has never previously spoken. Though the means through which God speaks are purportedly the same, the words He speaks are different from everything He has said before — to the Old Testament saints, to Jesus, to the apostles. In short, the words God speaks have been redefined, for they are no longer His very words, inerrant and authoritative.**

If the Bible actually says that this is the case, then so be it. But we need to consider Grudem's evidence from the Bible. Aside from his treatment of Agabus the prophet, Grudem's chief support for prophecy as a source of *fallible practical guidance* comes from two texts: 1 Corinthians 14:29 and I Thessalonians 5:20-22.

In 1 Corinthians 14:29, Paul writes, "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment." The issue relevant to our concerns is the unidentified object on which "the others pass judgment." Is it the true and false elements in each oracle,<sup>23</sup> or is it the true and false oracles (of true and false prophets, respectively) among the many oracles the church heard? As others have done, Grudem takes the former view, primarily because the Greek verb (*diakrino*) translated "pass judgment" involves a sorting or sifting activity.<sup>24</sup> In favor of the latter view, note that Paul refers to "prophets" (plural) speaking their revelations in 14:29-30, not to mention "prophecies" (plural) in 1 Thessalonians 5:20. In other words, the apostle presupposes that the churches would be hearing multiple prophecies from multiple prophets. In this light, Grudem's interpretation is clearly not in keeping with Paul's exact words. **The apostle does *not* instruct the churches to sort out the true and false *elements in any particular prophecy*. Rather, he instructs them to sort out the true and false *prophecies among the many they would hear*.**<sup>25</sup>

When we compare this view of 1 Corinthians 14:29 with the use of the verb *diakrino* within and outside the New Testament, we find that it is perfectly consistent with that usage: The verb is applied to sifting wheat from chaff (Philo), distinguishing the clean

from the unclean (Josephus), separating the guilty from others (Josephus), discerning good from evil (*Testament of Asher*), sorting true from false (Philo), distinguishing Jews from Gentiles (Acts 15:9; cf. 11:2), distinguishing certain people from others (1 Cor. 4:7), and forming a right (instead of a wrong) judgment of oneself (11:31)<sup>26</sup> This evidence falsifies Grudem's claim that the New Testament prefers - and Paul would have preferred — the verb *krino* over *diakrino* "when speaking of judgments where there are only two possibilities, such as 'guilty' or 'not guilty', 'right' or 'wrong', or 'true' or 'false'."<sup>27</sup> But we look in vain for *any* examples where *diakrino* implies judgments involving more than two possibilities.

To round out our discussion of *diakrino*, notice its use in 1 Corinthians 6:5: "Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren?"<sup>28</sup> Contrary to Grudem's argument, in the context immediately following 6:5, Paul shows his awareness of only two possible outcomes when a believer has a grievance against his neighbor: one will be wronged or defrauded (v. 7), the other guilty of wrongdoing or defrauding (v. 8). The pertinent point, however, is that the wise man's duty, as implied by *diakrino*, is to sort out the wrongdoer from his victim on the basis of the evidence. By analogy in 1 Corinthians 14:29, the duty of "the others" is to sort out the true prophet from the false prophet on the basis of their oracles (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 12:3; 14:37; cf. Eph. 4:14-15 with 4:4-6,11).

My conclusions are virtually the same when I consider 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22. In 5:20 Paul warns the Thessalonians not to despise prophecies. Clearly the Thessalonians' esteem for prophecy was not what it should have been. But why? As 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, 15 suggests, they had overreacted to an influx of false prophecies that were confusing them and threatening to lead them astray.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, in 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22, Paul corrects the Thessalonians' overreaction by directing them to test everything and, having done so, to adhere to what is good and to avoid what is evil. Paul's exact wording in 5:20 ("prophecies" [plural]), coupled with the testing for good and evil in verses 21-22, implies that he was expecting the church to test multiple prophecies among which they would find false prophecies as well as true ones.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the instructions to the Thessalonians mirror Paul's command in 1 Corinthians 14:29: The testing of prophecies presupposes that the prophecies heard in the churches might well have included both true and false prophecies (from both true and false prophets, respectively) among them.

In light of these factors, we have to say that Grudem fundamentally misunderstands Paul's directives in 1 Corinthians 14:29 and 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22. The accuracy of the interpretation presented here, however, is confirmed by its consistency with the broader teaching of the Bible. According to that teaching, the church, like Israel, judged prophecies in order to separate the true prophets from the false (Deut. 13:1-5; 1 Kings 13; Matt. 7:15-20 with 12:32-37 and 24:23-26; 1 John 4:1-6; cf. Rom. 16:17-19). In carrying out this responsibility, the church exercised discernment based on the explicit, absolute standards of good and evil (1 Thess. 5:21-22), truth and error (1 John 4:1-6), and thus determined the source of the prophecies they heard, whether they were from the Holy Spirit or from some other source.<sup>31</sup>

We may say, therefore, that for Paul and the rest of the New Testament authors, the judging of New Testament prophecies was a process of evaluating the prophets' oracles in order to pass judgment on the prophets themselves and thus discern the source of their oracles. This interpretation, we submit, is alone able to account for the admonitions that Christ and His apostles gave to the church regarding false prophecies and false prophets. The church was told in no uncertain terms not to tolerate prophets whose words were false or evil and were thus a threat to lead them astray (Matt. 7:15-20 with 12:32-37 and 24:23-26; 1 John 4:1-6; 1 Thess. 5:22; 2 Thess. 2:3, 15; Rev. 2:20-23; cf. Rom. 16:17-19).

## CONCLUSION

Some present-day evangelicals, **Jack Deere and Wayne Grudem among them, believe and teach that God speaks today apart from the Bible. According to these teachers, God gives words of personal or ministry direction to His people using all the same means that He used in the past. Yet, when we consider the evidence for these views, we find that their resemblance to what the Bible actually depicts is more apparent than real. Whatever else Deere is teaching, he is not teaching the model of hearing God's voice as practiced in the Bible itself. Similarly, Grudem has transformed Paul into an eccentric who is patently out of step with other New Testament authors, indeed with all other biblical authors, when it comes to the crucial matter of judging prophecies.**

In my judgment,<sup>32</sup> what these teachers and their disciples fail to appreciate is that, in the Bible, God's activity of speaking apart from the Scriptures occurred at a time when those documents were still being written. Interestingly, during that long history of Scripture writing, God's people did live by a "Scripture plus" principle of authority, and, in keeping with that principle, God employed various means to speak His extra scriptural words to them. But today the church is faced with a new situation: now, with centuries of Christian orthodoxy, we confess that the writing of Scripture is finished, that the canon is actually closed.

**But *why* does the church affirm that the canon is closed? The only demonstrable basis for this affirmation is that God's giving of revelation, spoken and written, is always historically joined to and qualified by God's work of redemption.**<sup>33</sup> Now that God has accomplished salvation once-for-all, in Christ, He has also spoken His word, once-for-all, in Christ and in those whom Christ authorized and empowered by His Spirit (Heb. 1:1-2; 2:3, 4; Matt. 16:15-19; John 14:26; Eph. 2:19, 20). With the completion of salvation in Christ comes

**the cessation of revelation. Consequently, the church now lives by a "Scripture only" principle of authority To tamper with this principle invites a host of theological and pastoral problems.** The proof of this observation can be seen in the effect of these "prophecies" upon many who are being led far afield from the sufficiency of the gospel itself. Its finality and complete sufficiency is, in reality, subtly assaulted by these claims to modern prophecies.

Finally, the Bible gives us no reason to expect that God will speak to His children today apart from the Scriptures.<sup>34</sup> Those who teach otherwise need to explain to God's children how these words "freshly spoken from heaven" can be so necessary and strategic to God's highest purposes for their lives when their Father does nothing to ensure that they will ever actually hear those words. Indeed, they must explain why this is not quenching the Spirit. Moreover, the promise of such guidance inevitably diverts attention from the Scriptures, particularly in the practical and pressing concerns of life. Let us never underestimate just how serious this diversion really is. In the Bible the church hears God's true voice; in the Scriptures, we know that He is speaking His very words to us. Advocates of words "freshly spoken from heaven" should beware: **By diverting attention from the Scriptures, they quench the Spirit who is speaking therein.**

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## NOTES

1. Throughout this chapter, the terms the *Bible*, the *Scriptures*, and *Scripture* will refer to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, excluding those books commonly called the Apocrypha.
2. The *New American Standard Bible* rightly brings out the ongoing nature of God's action of speaking by translating the present participle (ton lalounta) in Heb. 12:25 as "Him who is speaking." The accuracy of this insight is confirmed by the fact that His speaking is contrasted with God's past warnings in the same verse.
3. William DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit: Examining the Centuries of Opposition to the Moving of the Holy Spirit* (Altamonte Springs, Fla.: Creation House, 1992).
4. Mark Thompson, "Spiritual Warfare: What Happens When I Contradict Myself," *The Briefing* no. 45/46 (24 April 1990): 11. This quotation, originally taken from a 1990 conference talk by Jack Deere, is cited without denial, qualification, or retraction by Deere in his essay "Vineyard Position Paper #2: The Vineyard's Response to *The Briefing*" (Anaheim, Calif.: Association of Vineyard Churches, 1992), 22-23.
5. For an informative, detailed, and (virtually) no evaluative survey of charismatic views of prophecy, see Mark J. Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy: A Definition and Description," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994): 79-1 20.
6. Illustrative of this viewpoint are the following words from John Murray ("The Guidance of the Holy Spirit," in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Volume 1: *The Claims of Truth* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 19761]):  
We must rely upon the Holy Spirit to direct and guide us in the understanding and application of God's will as revealed in Scripture, and we must be constantly conscious of our need of the Holy Spirit to apply the Word effectively to us in each situation. The function of the Holy Spirit in such matters is that of illumination as to what the will of the Lord is, and of imparting to us the willingness and strength to do that will . . . As we are the subjects of this illumination and are responsive to it, and as the Holy Spirit is

- operative in us to the doing of God's will, we shall have feelings, impressions, convictions, urges, inhibitions, impulses, burdens, resolutions. Illumination and direction by the Spirit through the Word of God will focus themselves in our consciousness in these ways. . . . It is here, however, that careful distinction is necessary. The moment we desire or expect or think that a state of our consciousness is the effect of a direct intimation to us of the Holy Spirit's will, or consists in such an intimation and is therefore in the category of special direction from him, then we have given way to the notion of special, direct, detached communication from the Holy Spirit. And this, in respect of its nature, belongs to the same category as belief in special revelation. The only way whereby we can avoid this error is to maintain that the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit is through the means which he has provided, and that his work is to enable us rightly to interpret and apply the Scripture in the various situations of life, and to enable us to, interpret all the factors which enter into each situation in the light of Scripture. (pp. 188-89)
7. Deere, "Vineyard Position Paper #2," 15. The similarity between Deere's teaching and that of Pentecostal theologian J. Rodman Williams (*Renewal Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988-92], 1:43-44 and 2:382) is worth noting.
  8. Deere, "Vineyard Position Paper #2," 23.
  9. Ibid.
  10. Ibid.
  11. Ibid.
  12. Ibid.
  13. Ibid. Deere's description of hearing God's voice is profoundly similar to the (more or less) typical charismatic description. See Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy," 82-99.
  14. See not only Deere's "Vineyard Position Paper #2," 22-24, but also his *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit: A Former Dallas Seminary Professor Discovers That God Speaks and Heals Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 213-15.
  15. In Numbers 12:6-8 and Deuteronomy 13:1-5, God links the activity of the prophet with the dreams and visions of the seer. Notice that, even when God employed different media to speak with the prophets after Moses, that distinction did not change the nature of what they spoke: they, like Moses, spoke the very words of God.
  16. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 60-61.
  17. I first heard Deere cite this passage in a paper presentation at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society November 1991. See also his "Appendix 7: The Sufficiency of Scripture and Distortion of What Scripture Teaches About Itself," in *The Kingdom and the Power: Are Healing and the Spiritual Gifts Used by Jesus and the Early Church Meant for the Church Today?* ed. Gary S. Greig and Kevin N. Springer (Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 1993), 440.
  18. Richard B. Gaffin, "A Friend's Response to Wayne Grudem" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, 21 November 1992), 2.
  19. John W Hilber, "Diversity of OT Prophetic Phenomena and NT Prophecy," *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994): 255. Also, the introductory phrase Agabus uses (*tade legei*) is identical to the phrase John uses to introduce his direct quotation of Christ's messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14 (Robert L. Thomas, "Prophecy Rediscovered? A Review of the Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 119921:91). Moreover, the words are equivalent to the phrase "what the Spirit says to the churches," which closes each of Christ's messages (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Furthermore, as Hilber (p. 255 n. 47) points out, Grudem fails to take into account that Agabus's introductory words are the quotation formula in the Greek Old Testament for "Thus says the Lord." Clearly, this is the most relevant background for our interpretation of Acts 21:11. In fact, Hilber (ibid.) points out that Agabus's "substitution of 'Holy Spirit' for 'Yahweh' [the LORD] is consistent with the theological tendency in Acts to attribute divine work to the Holy Spirit."
  20. Hilber, "Diversity of OT Prophetic Phenomena," 256. Hilber notes that Grudem concedes the accuracy of Agabus's prophecy in Acts 11:28. On the accuracy, if imprecision, of

- Agabus in Acts 21, see Hilber (pp. 250 n. 31, 255-56) and the literature he cites, as well as David B. McWilliams, "Something New Under the Sun?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (1992): 325-26.
21. Deere has intimated his agreement with Grudem's position on New Testament prophecy, which denies the infallibility of present-day prophetic utterances (see n. 22 below). Nevertheless, in his published comments on God's "fresh words from heaven," Deere has not explicitly ruled out the possibility that those words may be God's own words unmixed with words from other sources. All he has said is that they do not contradict the Bible. The latter affirmation does not preclude the infallibility of these "fresh" words of direction, provided Deere believes that God reveals His will on two tracks, one public and one private. On this latter point, see the conclusion to this chapter.
  22. See Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1988); and Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1049-61. Though not explicitly stated in his writings to date, Deere's indebtedness to and general agreement with Grudem are discernible and otherwise well known among those who have heard him comment on the subject of New Testament prophecy. In a planned forthcoming book, tentatively entitled *Surprised by the Voice of God*, Deere's own thoughts on the New Testament revelatory gifts will be published. For the present essay, the broad outline of his teaching and its compatibility with Grudem's views have been gleaned from "Vineyard Position Paper #2," 14-15, 22-24; and from *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, chap. 10 ("Why God Gives Miraculous Gifts") and Epilogue ("Hearing God Speak Today").
  23. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, 74-79; cf. 104-5.
  24. *Ibid.*, 76-79. Of I Corinthians 14:29, M. M. B. Turner ("Spiritual Gifts Then and Now," *Vox Evangelica* 15 (1985)) has written, "The presupposition is that any one New Testament prophetic oracle is expected to be *mixed* in quality, and the wheat must be separated from the chaff" (p. 16).
  25. For a similar conclusion, see Hilber, "Diversity of OT Prophetic Phenomena," 256-58.
  26. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, 76.
  27. *Ibid.*, 77.
  28. *Ibid.*
  29. According to 2 Thessalonians 2:2, a false prophet or an oracle of a false prophet ("spirit" NASB; "prophecy" NIV; Gk. *pneuma*) had disturbed and was threatening to deceive the Thessalonians. Contrary to Grudem's analysis (*The Gift of Prophecy*, 104-5), we have no indication that they had overreacted to Paul's teaching that true prophecies were less authoritative than Scripture.
  30. Contrary to Grudem's inference (*The Gift of Prophecy*, 104-5), Paul's words do not imply that there were many things that were not good in the true prophecies the Thessalonians were hearing.
  31. In line with this picture we find Paul citing standards by which the congregations should judge prophecies (1 Cor. 12:3; 14:37; 1 Thess. 5:21-22; 2 Thess. 2:15; and perhaps Eph. 4:4-15 with 4:4-6, 11). These standards are in stark contrast to Grudem's graded scale of value and truth in New Testament prophecies. See Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, 76-77. Strikingly, Pentecostal theologian Williams (*Renewal Theology*, 2:382 n. 164, 2:386 n. 187) emphatically rejects Grudem's interpretation of New Testament prophetic oracles as a mixture of true and false and of the judging activity applied thereto.
  32. For a more complete exposition of the concerns broached in this conclusion, see Gaffin, "A Friend's Response to Wayne Grudem," 6-12. See also Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ.: Presb. & Ref., 1979), 97-99, and his "The New Testament as Canon," in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate*, ed. H. M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 172-81.
  33. See Herman N. Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures*, 2d rev. ed., trans. H. De Jongste and rev. R. B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presb. & Ref., 1988), *passim*, esp. p. 31. Of special note, though Deere teaches that the canon is

- closed, he fails to grasp the relationship between revelation and redemption and can therefore provide no rationale or basis for his teaching.
34. It remains for those who differ with this conclusion to produce the evidence that shifts the burden of proof from themselves to others.

### Author

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### ILLUMINATION THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING by J.I. Packer

<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/packer/Illumination.html>

*The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1 CORINTHIANS 2:14*

The knowledge of divine things to which Christians are called is more than a formal acquaintance with biblical words and Christian ideas. It is a realizing of the reality and relevance of those activities of the triune God to which Scripture testifies. Such awareness is natural to none, familiar with Christian ideas though they may be (like “the man without the Spirit” in 1 Cor. 2:14 who cannot receive what Christians tell him, or the blind leaders of the blind of whom Jesus speaks so caustically in Matt. 15:14, or like Paul himself before Christ met him on the Damascus road). Only the Holy Spirit, searcher of the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10), can bring about this realization in our sin-darkened minds and hearts. That is why it is called “spiritual understanding” (spiritual means “Spirit-given,” Col. 1:9; cf. Luke 24:25; 1 John 5:20). Those who, along with sound verbal instruction, “have an anointing from the Holy One... know the truth” (1 John 2:20).

The work of the Spirit in imparting this knowledge is called “illumination,” or enlightening. **It is not a giving of new revelation, but a work within us that enables us to grasp and to love the revelation that is there before us in the biblical text as heard and read, and as explained by teachers and writers.** Sin in our mental and moral system clouds our minds and wills so that we miss and resist the force of Scripture. God seems to us remote to the point of unreality, and in the face of God’s truth we are dull and apathetic. **The Spirit, however, opens and unveils our minds and attunes our hearts so that we understand** (Eph. 1:17-18; 3:18-19; 2 Cor. 3:14-16; 4:6). As by inspiration he provided Scripture truth for us, so now by illumination he interprets it to us. Illumination is thus the applying of God’s revealed truth to our hearts, so that we grasp as reality for ourselves what the sacred text sets forth.

Illumination, which is a lifelong ministry of the Holy Spirit to Christians, starts before conversion with a growing grasp of the truth about Jesus and a growing sense of being measured and exposed by it. Jesus said that the Spirit would “convict the world” of the sin of not believing in him, of the fact that he was in the right with God the Father (as his welcome back to heaven proved), and of the reality of judgment both here and hereafter (John 16:8-11). This threefold conviction is still God’s means of making sin repulsive and Christ adorable in the eyes of persons who previously loved sin and cared nothing for the divine Savior.

The way to benefit fully from the Spirit’s ministry of illumination is by serious Bible study, serious prayer, and serious response in obedience to whatever truths one has been shown already. This corresponds to Luther’s dictum that three things make a theologian: oratio (prayer), meditatio (thinking in God’s presence about the text), and tentatio (trial, the struggle for biblical fidelity in the face of pressure to disregard what Scripture says).

End of Packer article.

### **Revelation outside of the Canon**

Ra McLaughlin

<http://www.thirdmill.org/answers/answer.asp/file/99954.qna/category/t/h/page/questions/site/iim> (found on Monergism)

Regarding the nature of the Canon, one cannot be properly called "Reformed" without adhering to *sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone"), which states that Scripture alone is the final authority in all matters of doctrine and religion. If one argues that special revelation (e.g. dreams, visions, spectacular prophecies) has not ceased, and that current special revelation is authoritative (i.e. on the level with Scripture), then one necessarily rejects *sola Scriptura*. One may still adhere to a Calvinistic system of salvation (i.e. the Five Points), and

to covenant theology, but these in and of themselves are not sufficient to classify one as "Reformed."

There are people, however, who believe in the actual or potential post-apostolic presence of spectacular gifts of special revelation, but who do not believe this new special revelation to be authoritative. These, while accepting new revelation, do not challenge *sola Scriptura*. Generally, they argue that new special revelation is fallible, unlike biblical special revelation, and therefore that it is not as authoritative as Scripture.

A somewhat different version of the position is that new special revelation is true because it comes from God, and therefore it is infallible. It is not, however, authoritative. That is to say, infallibility/truth is not the source of authority -- God is. Because God has not commissioned any new authoritative covenant emissaries (the apostles were the last), there cannot be any new authoritative revelation. Thus, not only must all new special revelation be subjected to the judgment of Scripture to judge its truth, but it also must submit to the authority of Scripture. New special revelation does not in and of itself have the authority to bind believers or their consciences -- even if the new revelation is true. This may have been the case with non-apostolic prophecy even in the New Testament (1 Cor. 14:29).

So, there are a couple different possible scenarios in which one might believe in the modern manifestation of spectacular gifts like prophecy and tongues, yet still affirm *sola Scriptura* by saying that there is no new authoritative/canonical revelation. If one affirms *sola Scriptura* and the closure of the Canon, then there is no inherent inconsistency in also believing in the continuation or modification of the gifts.

### **Greg Gilbert's Review of Two books:**

[http://www.9marks.org/partner/Article\\_Display\\_Page/0.,PTID314526%7CCHID775980%7CCIID1562250,00.html](http://www.9marks.org/partner/Article_Display_Page/0.,PTID314526%7CCHID775980%7CCIID1562250,00.html)

**Jensen, Philip and Tony Payne, *Guidance and the Voice of God*.  
(Matthias Media: 1997)**

Greg Gilbert: “Most of us spend at least some part of every day wondering what is God’s will for our life, and the tendency is to treat that question like some sort of cosmic game—God sending us the clues and we trying to figure out what they all mean and piece them together into a recognizable pattern. Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne, in their book *Guidance and the Voice of God*, set out to show us that to approach life and decisions in that way is a most confusing way to live our lives, and in fact not at all worthy of a people who claim to serve a God who speaks clearly and forcefully into the world. Even if a person believes absolutely in God’s sovereign guidance of our lives, this is the point where we most often find ourselves confused. This is the point where we begin looking for signs and wonders and writing in the sky and talking donkeys to tell us what God’s will is. Jensen lists five propositions about how God guides us (64):

1. God, in his sovereignty, uses everything to guide us ‘behind the scenes.’
2. In many and varied ways, God *can* speak to his people, and guide them with their conscious cooperation.
3. In these last days, God has spoken to us by his Son.
4. God speaks today by his Son through his Spirit in the Scriptures.
5. Apart from his Spirit working through Scripture, God does not promise to use any other means to guide us, nor should we expect him to.

The questions of *who* we should marry, *which* church we should attend, or *where* we should live and work are ones that occupy our minds almost every day. Those are the questions we are interested in, so doesn’t that mean they are also the *right* questions? Jensen and Payne say that in fact they aren’t.

The point is this: if we ask the wrong question, we either get the wrong answer or no answer at all. And if we get no answer, we are tempted to turn elsewhere to find an answer. Many of our problems with guidance stem from precisely this: we ask the wrong questions, and then wonder why we cannot find answers. (85)

Then, of course, we turn away from the Bible thinking that it isn't helping us much, and look to other sources of guidance—signs, “fleeces,” “a sense of peace,” inner promptings, etc. If we were asking the right questions, though, we would find that the Bible has all we need to know.

We are terribly concerned about choosing between Druscilla and Mary-Lou. We think the success of our whole married life will depend on the right choice, and we agonize over it. However, God's priority is for us to be godly, whether we are single or married, and whether we marry Druscilla or Mary-Lou. (85-86)

Looking to the Bible, we would find that God wants us to marry someone who is a Christian, who is not already married, and who is of the opposite sex. And he wants us to love that person as Christ loved the church. Within those parameters, we may choose to marry anyone we please. Of course, God has a sovereign plan for who you are to marry, if at all. But that does not mean that He will reveal that plan to you in advance. He may simply give you the guidelines in His word, call on you to conform to them and make a decision, and then have you look back in a few years to realize that all the while He was guiding you “behind the scenes” to the right person. If your life and decision is conformed to the guidelines laid out in the Scriptures, you cannot make a sinful or wrong decision. Anything within those guidelines is good and right.

One of the best parts of this book is Jensen's description of the three basic categories of decisions that we make in everyday life. First, there are matters of **righteousness**, which are decisions clearly addressed by the word of God (i.e., do not commit adultery). When we come against one of these decisions, we should simply obey. Second, there are matters of **good judgment**, which is where wisdom is so absolutely necessary. There are many times when more than one option seems right. Good judgment and wisdom help us to know that some decisions simply work out better in this world. In the third category are matters of **triviality**. When we finally stand before the throne of God and see our lives from his perspective, I wonder if we will be shocked to find out how many of the decisions we agonize over in this life actually fall into this category.

The whole discussion of these categories falls into a great section on wisdom, which Jensen defines as “the art of living successfully in God's world,” (88). Because so many of our decisions in life fall into the “good judgment” category, any Christian should

eagerly desire to have wisdom, to be able to look at a situation and be so instructed by the Word of God that the best course of action seems clear. One of the best ways to so train your mind and heart is to read the book of Proverbs. Each of those verses that you hide in your heart is one more principle you can apply to any given situation in order to come to a sound and wise decision. But what if we make a decision that is unwise? What happens then?

Will I have to suffer the consequences? Most likely, yes. God wants us to learn wisdom, and very few people learn wisdom if their folly is continually rewarded. However, God does protect his people—we do not need to be anxious about it. He won't allow us to be lost because of our own folly or to be tempted beyond our strength. He will pick up the pieces and make sure that we survive and grow through the experience. If it is in our best interests to suffer the consequences of our folly, then God will bring them to us, but if it isn't, then God will spare us. We can trust his generosity and power to do so. (95-96)

**Willard, Dallas, *Hearing God*. (Intervarsity Press: 1999).**

“As with all close personal relationships, we can surely count on God to speak to each of us when and as it is appropriate,” (10).

“Still small voice” Elijah 1 Kings

In determining whether he has heard from God he writes, “Often by the end of the hour or so there has stood forth within my consciousness an idea or thought with that peculiar quality, spirit and content that I have come to associate with God’s voice. If so, I may write it down for further study . . . Or I may decide to reconsider the matter by repeating the same process after a short period of time,” (200).

“It is a similar situation when we are given a word from God and are sure of it, but the events indicated do not come to pass. Others may be involved, and *they* may not know or may not do the will of God. And God may not override them,” (209). Let me get this straight—God tells me He is going to bring something to pass, but because all the ducks don’t fall into line, His plans are thwarted and the still, small voice ends up crawling back to me with an embarrassed “Oops” and a blushing shrug of the shoulders. Wouldn’t it make more sense to say that perhaps Willard is simply mistaken in thinking that what was “given” to him as a “word from God” really *wasn’t* in fact a word from God? It seems like it would make more sense to question his own

interpretation of the firings of his mind than it would to question the power of God to bring His purposes to effect.

## "God told me" and the Sufficiency of Scripture

[http://www.9marks.org/partner/Article\\_Display\\_Page/0..PTID314526%7CCHID598016%7CCIID1552702.00.html](http://www.9marks.org/partner/Article_Display_Page/0..PTID314526%7CCHID598016%7CCIID1552702.00.html)

By Mark Dever

I was dumbfounded (a pretty rare occurrence). This fellow had just told me that his supervisor had assigned him the task to make a master-plan for a new church plant, and that when he prayed about it God told him just to use the words of Jesus. Let me be clear. He said that God told him that in his planning for this new church, he was only to consult, reflect upon, quote the words of Jesus.

This fellow was a full-time employee of a Christian organization. He was evidently himself a Christian. Too, unlike other employees of this organization, he had a Masters of Divinity. And that from an evangelical seminary. He had been then, we are to assume, carefully trained in the Bible and theology. We should also assume that he had provided credible and helpful leadership to a local church somewhere, if he was now in the very responsible position that he was in. And it was this person who stood there and told me in all sincere piety and simple trust that God told him only to consult the words of Jesus when planning for a new church.

If you've ever seen those old Key-stone Kops movies where all of these 1910-circa cops with high, rounded hats and billy-clubs come rushing in to a scene in an over-crowded car, get out, rush around, and then all converge on the same point, creating mayhem and humor, you have some idea of what it felt like was going on in my brain as I listened to this friend. Except for the humor. "Jesus only mentioned the church explicitly twice!" I thought. "There are more than 20 other books in the New Testament that were composed as letters to churches to instruct them!" I thought. "How did you get this responsibility?" I thought. "What did they teach you at seminary?" I thought. "How did God tell you?" I thought. "What else has 'He' said?" I thought.

There were more. I said nothing, partly out of surprise, partly out of fear of what I might say. After a few more brief questions and rambling answers, I decided to say something simple about how there were other books in the New Testament that Christ's Spirit had inspired particularly for the direction of churches, and that I hoped he would consider them as well, and then I made a quick exit. I hoped my awkwardness wasn't evident.

It was exchanges like this one—many of them—over the last few years that has encouraged me to consider afresh the importance of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. **This doctrine was a keystone in the Protestant Reformation. One of the principal disputes between Rome and the Reformers was whether God had promised that He would continue to provide inspired, unerring instruction through Peter and his successors. Rome said that that's what Jesus taught in Matthew 16. The Reformers denied this, saying that, instead, the Scriptures themselves were sufficient for our instruction, albeit with the Holy Spirit's illumination of our minds. They taught that the Scriptures would be perspicuous—that is, clear—and sufficient. Matters important to us would be reasonably clear, not obscure. And the Scriptures taken as a whole would suffice for our needs for divine guidance. Many other issues are related, but the one we're considering is simply that the Scriptures are sufficient.**

While evangelical Protestantism as a whole has continued to teach this—flanked by the claimed authority of the Roman church and tradition on the right, and by the subjective claims for the authority of each person’s “inner light” by the Quakers on our left—there has grown up within evangelicalism another thought. More in our piety than in our written theology, **there has grown up the idea that God’s Word written must become God’s Word to us personally by some sort of powerful encounter with it or its meaning.** This isn’t conceived of in tomes of divinity, as Neo-Orthodox theologians like Karl Barth developed it, but in simple, regular practice. I think of another friend who attended an evangelical student fellowship, where for two hours the students sang and prayed earnestly and pleadingly that God would speak to them, all the while with their Bibles lying there closed on their seats. This is the problem that “God told me” piety brings for the sufficiency of Scripture. **And where we pastors and elders do not understand that Scripture is sufficient, we cannot be surprised if our church members, in sincere search for the truth, wander off to Rome on the one hand, or liberal subjectivism on the other looking for some kind of sufficient authority.** Mormons particularly exploit evangelical weakness on this issue of being uninstructed about Scripture’s sufficiency.

This issue is of vital concern to us as pastors, particularly as pastors who realize the centrality of Biblical exposition to our ministry. An understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture is the context in which we assert, maintain and practice the centrality of Scripture in the life of the church.

Twenty years ago, in the midst of the flurry of writing about the inerrancy of Scripture, little was being written about the sufficiency of Scripture. It appeared in writings about the Reformers’ views of Scriptures. So you could read R. C. Sproul’s fine essay, “Sola Scriptura: Crucial to Evangelicalism,” in *The Foundations of Biblical Authority*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Zondervan, 1978), pp. 101-119. More recently, Wayne Grudem has written a largely fine chapter on the Sufficiency of Scripture in his *Systematic Theology*. The final few pages are dedicated to practical applications of the doctrine, and in them is much wisdom. He clearly asserts that “when we are facing a problem of genuine importance to our Christian life, we can approach Scripture with the confidence that from it God will provide us with guidance for that problem,” (p. 131).

More recently still, Timothy Ward has written a careful piece considering traditional claims to the sufficiency of Scripture in light of contemporary hermeneutical issues, “The Diversity and Sufficiency of Scripture,” Paul Helm & Carl Trueman, eds., *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the nature of Scripture* (Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 192-218. Don Kistler has edited a more popular volume *Sola Scriptura* (Soli Deo Gloria, 1995) in which John MacArthur has a clear chapter on “The Sufficiency of the Written Word,” (pp. 151-183). The Banner of Truth has once again served us well by bringing out a whole volume on the topic by Noel Weeks entitled simply *The Sufficiency of Scripture* (1988). And David King and William Webster have recently collaborated to bring us a three-volume set which defends the thesis that the early church fathers believed and taught that the Scriptures were authoritative and sufficient (*Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith*, 3 vols., (Christian Resources, 2001).

On the 9Marks Ministries website, we now offer you another resource, coming at this from the other direction, so to speak. We are looking at this challenge not from formulations of the doctrine of Scripture. (For that vital work, see the books and articles cited above.) **We, rather, are considering this issue from the perspective of the average Christian, wondering how they should know God’s will. It’s very often here, in the culture of your congregation that the sufficiency and therefore the centrality of Scripture is first, and most thoroughly, and most disastrously undermined.** So, we asked our own Greg Gilbert to review a number of works (there are many more out there) currently published on this question of knowing the will of God. We hope that you find them of some help. Feel free and reprint them in your church newsletter, perhaps in a series. Simply give credit and refer to the 9Marks Ministries website address.

If we are going to be committed to centering our shepherding on feeding the sheep and leading them by God’s Word, then we had best be able to consider what it means that the Scriptures are sufficient. We need to know, consider, explain and teach that the Scriptures are sufficient. I know they are. God told me. All

Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for **every** good work," (II Timothy 3:16-17).

## INSPIRATION

The following is from Michael Bremer <http://www.mbrem.com/bible/bible.htm>

The apostle states,

"All Scripture is *inspired* by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tm. 3.16).

Inspired is the Greek word *theopneustos* and means, "God-breathed." When we say that God inspires Scripture we mean the same thing as the apostle Paul, that Scripture is God-breathed. At onetime, this definition was adequate for defining the doctrine of inspiration, but the constant attacks on this doctrine have made it necessary to particularize the definition of inspiration.

### THE MEANING OF INSPIRATION

(i) Some insist that not everything in the Bible is Scripture, but only what is inspired can rightly be called Scripture. Not surprisingly, they decide what is inspired and what is not. To illustrate the problem, a person can say that he believes Scripture is inspired by God, yet does not believe that the events in Genesis 1-3 are actually historical events. He can deny the Virgin birth, the resurrection, or anything he does not like because he believes not everything in the Bible is inspired, therefore, not everything in the Bible is Scripture. Obviously, the word "Scripture" does not have the same meaning with all, therefore, it is important in any discussion on inspiration that all do have the same understanding of what Scripture means. Those who hold to Biblical view of inspiration agree that the word "Scripture" refers to the whole Bible, all sixty-six books. From Genesis to Revelation, all Scripture is God-breathed.

(ii) The Scriptures are verbally inspired. Verbal inspiration means every word of Scripture is exactly the words that God meant. This view is supported by both Jesus statements on the subject, and by His use of Scripture.

On one occasion Jesus said of the Scriptures,

"Do not think that I came to abolish the law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and

earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished" (Mt. 5.17-18).

Jesus believed that not only the words of Scripture are inspired, but also the very letters that form the words are inspired from God.

On another occasion, the Sadducees came to Jesus attempting to disprove the doctrine of the resurrection. Jesus said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God. . . . But regarding the resurrection of the dead, **have you not read that which was spoken to you by God** saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Mt. 22.29-33).

Jesus' remark, "Have you not read that which was spoken to you by God," demonstrates that Jesus believed that the Scriptures were verbally inspired. Also, note how Jesus defends the doctrine of the resurrection on the very tenses of the words: "I am the God of . . . " Jesus considered the Scriptures to be the inspired word of God even in the very tenses of the words.

Although the Scriptures teach verbal inspiration, they do not teach the idea of mechanical dictation. The mechanical dictation theory of inspiration teaches that God used the writers of Scripture as robots, only writing as God dictates, and their personality was not a factor in the Scripture's composition. The Scripture, however, teaches the Divine-human authorship. Every word divine; and every stroke of the pen human.

(iii) The original Scriptures are without error, "Thy word is Truth" (Jn. 17.17). Both the Old and New Testaments are without error in all that they affirm. They are truth without any mixture of error.

(iv). Inspiration is plenary, meaning the whole Bible is inspired. The apostle Paul states, "All Scripture is inspired of God" (2 Tm. 3.16), not "Some Scripture is inspired of God." However, there are some who do not believe that *all* Scripture is inspired of God. We will now consider some of these partial inspiration views.

## PARTIAL INSPIRATION VIEWS

(i) One partial inspiration view teaches that only the thoughts or ideas are inspired. This view teaches that God gave the basic message to the writers of Scripture, without any supernatural influence on the writers, but allowed the writers to express themselves as they desired. Without this influence, the writers were naturally influence by

their backgrounds, presuppositions, and at times, their mistaken ideas about science and history. Obviously, this view of inspiration holds that there are errors and discrepancies in the Scriptures. Orthodox Christians, however, maintain the impossibility of separating thoughts and ideas from the words that express them. Ideas are expressed in words. The assertion that thoughts and ideas are inspired, but not the words that express them, is absurd. Hodge rightly observed, "Infallibility of thought cannot be secured or preserved independently of an infallible verbal rendering (A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* 67).

Second, the Scriptures themselves claim to be verbally inspired. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Tm. 3.16 that not only are the thoughts and ideas "God-breathed" but also the Scriptures themselves are God-breathed. Likewise, Jesus said the words (not thoughts) I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6.63). [See also: Ps. 19; 119.9-11; Mt. 5.17; 22.23-32; Gal. 3.16]

(ii) Another partial inspiration view is that the Scriptures are inspired only in matters of faith and practice. This view denies the inspiration of Scripture when it comes to matters regarding history or science. Therefore, according to this view, the Scriptures contain many historical and scientific errors, but are inspired and without error when speaking about matters regarding faith and practice. However, the problem with this view is since many fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith are so interwoven with historical events, i. e., the fall of Adam, the incarnation, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, etc. Denying the inspiration of historical events, therefore, brings these very fundamental doctrines into question.

Furthermore, if God is able to ensure the Scripture's inspiration and accuracy regarding matters of faith and practice, then why is He not able to do the same regarding history and science? The orthodox position is that the whole of Scripture, including its historical and scientific contents, is God-breathed.

(iii) The Scriptures are not the word of God, but they become the word of God as the reader "encounters" God in them. In other words, God makes the Scripture inspired to the individual. What the Christian is asked to believe in this view is that even though the Scriptures are full of errors and discrepancies, God makes them inspired to the seeking believer. Forgetting the fact no Biblical support for this view exists, this view of inspiration is a greater miracle than the Biblical view of inspiration. Although God could not ensure the accuracy of

the Scriptures through its human authors, He nevertheless takes what is inaccurate and makes it inspired for the seeking believer-- Truly miraculous!

All partial views of inspiration have one significant fault. Who decides what is inspired in the Scriptures and what is not? If Scripture is only partially inspired, then who decides what parts are God's word and what parts are not? Does this crucial responsibility belong to the fallible theologian? Who is "qualified" to separate the inspired from the non-inspired? The problem with all partial views of inspiration, is they cunningly take the Scriptures out the believer's hands by making its exposition dependent on so-called experts who are as fallible as their fallible Scriptures they claim to expound.

Summarizing, the Scriptures, all sixty-six books of the Bible, are verbally and plenary inspired by God, and are therefore without error in all that they affirm.

#### DIVINE-HUMAN AUTHORSHIP

"For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1.21).

By misunderstanding the nature of Scripture's Divine-human authorship some assume the Scriptures must contain errors. This false assumption is the result of not distinguishing the Divine element in the divine-human relationship of inspiration. The Scriptures are indeed the composition of human authors, and their environment, personality, religious background, education, intelligence, etc., can be easily traced throughout their writings. Considering also the fact "to error is human," it is understandable that some hold the position that human authorship necessarily introduces the element of error-- understandable, that is, if only viewed from the human side of inspiration.

The Scriptures, however, are the result of Divine-human authorship, by "men moved by the Holy Spirit." Young, in his excellent book, *Thy Word is Truth*, explains:

"What kind of God is He who cannot reveal to the world a message that is free from error? Surely, He must be limited and restricted indeed! Those of us who from time to time engage in a bit of writing are happy to have a stenographer who types our work accurately. If we discover the stenographer is constantly making mistakes in her typing, and that these mistakes are of so serious a nature that our

work is actually obscured and marred thereby, we shall probably change stenographers. God, however, if the position we are considering now is correct, cannot even do this. God is far more limited than we mortals. We have the ability of hiring someone who will do our work for us as we desire it done; God, on the other hand, cannot even do that. When God would speak to mankind in writing, He cannot get His message across without having it cluttered up with irritating errors . . . . If indeed man can thus thwart Him, it is pertinent to ask, Is He really worth knowing after all" (p. 73).

### THE AUTOGRAPHS

Some suppose that since the original writings of Scripture, called autographs, no longer exist, any argument for or against the doctrine of inerrancy is pointless. However, this conclusion is groundless. In construction, they construct a building with the help of a benchmark, a reference point for the measurements of the building. Before construction begins, a survey crew will set a post in the ground and on this post place a benchmark. This mark now becomes the take off point for the measurements of building. If the benchmark was some how moved or lost after construction began, it could be accurately reproduced by going to a place where the bench mark had been used, preferably one or several closest to the original benchmark. By doing this, the original benchmark could be reliably reproduced. However, to find that the benchmark itself was inaccurate is altogether different matter, and in construction such an error could be catastrophic, for now the entire foundation could be wrong.

A further illustration may help. Suppose a Schoolteacher asked her seventh grade class to copy the Gettysburg Address as she accurately read it to them. It is reasonable to assume that some students would perform the requested task without error, while others would, in varying degrees, make errors. Is it possible to reconstruct accurately the Gettysburg Address from only the student's copies, even if some, or even all, contain errors? All we need do is gather up all the copies and compare them one with another and eliminate the errors. For example, the teacher collected thirty copies from her students, and out of thirty, twenty-eight began with "For score and seven years ago" while the remaining two read "Four score and five years ago," and "Seven score and four years ago" respectively. Since the students did not make identical errors, one is easily able to

discern that the correct rendering is "For score and seven years ago." Following this procedure all the way through the student's copies, one can very accurately determine the original Gettysburg Address. The process described is a *very simplistic* model of textual criticism. Textual criticism provides believers with a highly accurate translation of the Scriptures. The numerous manuscripts available to the textual critic have made it possible to reproduce translations that are nearly identical to the original writings. Various Scholars have put the figure at 999 out of a 1000 words to be identical to the original writings. The believer, therefore, can rest assuredly that he has a near-perfect text. Now, the whole point of all this is, if the originals are errant, then despite how many copies exist, or how accurately the original is reproduced, it is still errant. Believers would be left without a sure foundation.

In discussing inspiration, inerrancy and the autographs, it is interesting that neither Jesus nor the apostles possessed the original Scriptures of the Old Testament, yet they would quote the Old Testament as authoritative. Clark Pinnock notes:

"The respect for the extant Old Testament text which Jesus and the Apostles held expresses their confidence in the providence of God which assured them that these copies and translations were indeed substantially identical to the inspired original" (*A Defense of Biblical Infallibility*, P. 16).

Regarding 2 Peter 1:20-21: To be sure there is a human and a divine dimension to the communication of God's Word.

Doug Moo formerly of our own seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and now of Wheaton Graduate school, describes it this way: "This human-divine interplay is called 'concurrency.' In this process, we believe, God prepared specific human beings, through birth, environment, etc., to communicate his word. These human beings genuinely spoke their own words. But the words they used were also just those words that God wanted them to use. Imbalance on this point is fatal. To deny the human element in Scripture is to ignore the reality of the individual personalities, writing styles, situations, etc., that make up much of the richness of God's Word. But to deny the divine element or to reduce it simply to a vague influence is to deprive

the words of Scripture of their truthfulness and, therefore, ultimately, of their authority.” (Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, 85-86)