

THE STERLING HERALD

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“GOD SPOKE TO ME”

By: David McClister

It is not uncommon to hear people saying that God has spoken to them. The plain sense of such statements is that God has directly communicated to these people. If you ask how this happened, the answer is usually along the lines that an idea popped into their heads, and they attributed this to God. When you press these people with questions such as “how do you really know that it was God talking to you?” or “how can you be sure that this was a communication from God?,” the answer often is something like “what else could it be?” or “haven’t you ever had an experience when you felt like God was talking to you?”

I can understand why people *want* to think that God speaks to them. It would be reassuring to think that, in times of confusion and difficulty, God would break into our lives and give us the answer. Such an idea provides a sense of relief and security. I can also understand how, when people want something like this, they usually find a way to believe that it actually happens. Our hopes and fears can lead our minds to play tricks on us (as it were). That is, when we are not thinking clearly, and when we allow our emotions to be our guide, then we believe what we want to believe.

The matter becomes more complicated when these folks begin to add a little truth to their arguments. Mixing them with truth makes the incredible parts sound believable. So sometimes these people will say “the Bible has lots of stories about God speaking to people.” Yes, it does. And from that fact they draw a line straight from the experiences of the Biblical characters to their own lives. This is even sometimes bolstered by the line “we believe that the Bible is a pattern for us today, don’t we?” With such an approach, anything that happened to anyone in the Bible can potentially happen to anyone today. Forget contexts. Forget about the important spiritual truths those ancient stories are trying to convey. No, for such people, it is a matter that God directly communicated and intervened with people then, and therefore He does it now too.

But I also understand the power of self-delusion. I see the folly of interpreting emotions as direct communications from God (and why is it, when God supposedly talks directly to these people, that it always comes in the form of a “feeling”?). To put it in other terms, I see claims that cannot possibly be falsified (and thus cannot be verified). I see a selectivity operating in interpreting these experiences of communication so that the only allowable answer is that “God spoke to me.” Never mind that “Satan spoke to me” is a conclusion that is just as possible (and which, by the way, has been claimed by murderers), given the assumptions in play here. And never mind that the only way to draw a direct line between miraculous experiences in the Bible and us today is to ignore many Bible passages that prevent such a procedure.

If you think about it, the hope that God will “speak to me” directly is the lazy person’s way of getting truth from God. It is an approach that says, basically, “I don’t want to read the Bible, I don’t want to put forth the effort that is required to study and understand the Bible. I don’t want to learn something, I don’t want a method that makes me have to think or analyze.

I don't want God telling me something in way that is hard on my brain. I just want God to tell me ____." In fact, it is the way of the person who does not actually trust that the Bible is God's complete revelation to man (not in the sense that God has told us everything there is to know, but that it is all (100%) of what we need to know to live in this world). For these people, either the Bible is not good enough, or not helpful enough.

But God does not cater to human laziness. He did not reveal His will in the Bible only to say, in effect, "Don't worry about reading what I have already said in the Bible, I'll just tell you what you need to know, personally, as you go along." In fact, for God to speak to people directly today would be an admission on God's part that His written word, the Bible, is insufficient for guidance. It would entail God admitting that His word does not really contain all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1.3), and that His word is really not sufficient enough to make us adequate and equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3.16-17).

Once a person accepts the idea that "God speaks to me" directly, apart from the Bible, then such a person must accept the possibility that God is doing the same thing for other people as well. And since (for people who think this way) there seems to be no way to falsify these claims, you would have to accept each person's word for it when they claim that God has spoken to them. With that door open, you would have to accept what the Mormons teach (for they claim God has spoken to them), you would have to accept as truth what the modern Pentecostals teach (for they say God speaks to them too), and you would have to accept as truth *anything anyone said* when they claimed that "God spoke to me." I hope you can see that this is not going to be a productive method for determining the truth from God.

The simple fact is that God speaks to us today through His word, written in the Bible, which is totally sufficient to guide our lives today. God's written message is not limited to any one culture or historical condition. It is valid for every people and every time. "*The word of our God stands forever*" (Isaiah 40.8 and 1 Peter 1.25). In fact, this is God's normal way of speaking to people. In the hundreds of years that have transpired in human history, God has not spoken directly to very many people. If you added up all the Biblical stories in which God spoke directly to someone, my guess is that you would only have a couple dozen instances. That's a couple dozen times in hundreds of years. Clearly, direct communication to an individual is not God's normal way of communicating His will to people. In fact, this truth is acknowledged in Jesus' story about the rich man and Lazarus. When the rich man, in torment, begged for a messenger to be sent to his five wicked brothers to warn them of their sins, the reply given to him was "*They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them*" (Luke 16.29). The rich man objected, arguing that a personal communication from the other world would be more effective than a written document. The reply was: "*If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead*" (v 31).

Do you want God to talk to you? Read His word. That's how God speaks to us today. Here is what the author of Proverbs said about God's revealed word which was taught by Jewish parents to their children: "*My son, observe the commandment of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother; bind them continually on your heart; tie them around your neck. When you walk about, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; and when you awake, **they will talk to you***" (Prov 6.22).

FAMILY MATTERS

NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Please keep Linda Adams in your prayers as she has recently found out that she has COVID-19. Our sister has been going through some difficult times as she lost her husband, lost her sister, and now has found out she has this virus that has swept across the world. Let's be praying for her and encouraging her and helping in whatever way we can.
- Please keep Gene McClung in your prayers as he navigates some difficult health issues. Be praying for Dorothy too as she cares for him.
- Remember Sandlyn Fultz in your prayers as Norman has mentioned her several times. She has had extensive back surgery and has been in excruciating pain. Let's be praying that she finds the relief that she needs, and the doctors will be able to help her with her back.
- Robbin is need of our prayers for her son and her brother Rick Skinner who is having major reconstructive sinus surgery.
- Let's also be praying for our nation. We are living in tumultuous times and challenging times with a pandemic that has affected so many lives, racial division, protests, riots, among many other challenges. Let's be praying to the God who sits upon His throne and rules with perfect justice and righteousness and let's leave here Sunday morning being instruments of His peace in a world of conflict & distress.

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