

# CONTEMPORARY CHURCH ISSUES

## WEEK 3: DOES GOD SPEAK TO US TODAY?

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- In this 6-week series we are going to discuss various contemporary church issues. These are issues which may not have pertained to previous church eras or they have, but in a different way.
- We must remember that there is nothing new to our own time.
- **Ecclesiastes 1:9 “That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. so there is nothing new under the sun.”**
- This means that the issues which face the church today have been faced by the church before. Perhaps not in every era of the church nor in the same way we face them today. But, in reality, there is no new threat to the church; just an old threat packaged in a new way.
- Week 1: Revival and Revivalism
- Week 2: What’s wrong with singing *all* worship music?
- **Week 3: Does God speak to us today? If so, how can I know that’s it’s Him?**
- Week 4: How should believer respond to the homosexual revolution?
- Week 5: What should the church think about transgenderism?
- Week 6: How can I find peace in an anxiety and fear laden world?
- The overall goal of this class is to give theological understanding and practical wisdom on how we can rightly respond to the issues which we are facing today.

### INTRODUCTION

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- This morning we are going to discuss the topic of hearing from God.
- If God is speaking to us, how can we know that it is Him. How has God communicated in the past to people and is He communicating in that same way today?
- This really comes back to how is God revealing Himself to us today. How does He expect us to know Him and what He expects from us?
- If God does speak today, is it authoritative for everyone, inspired for all or is it on a personal level? Do the words that we potentially hear from God need to be told to everyone like the Bible?
- Are the words of God inspired *outside* of the Biblical context?

## HOW HAS GOD REVEALED HIMSELF TO US?

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- In the Bible there are two forms of revelation from God. Firstly, there is general revelation. General revelation is how God has revealed Himself to all people through their conscience (Rom. 2:14-15), nature (Psa. 8:3-4) and throughout history (Heb. 1:1-2).
- Then there is special revelation from God. Special revelation is how God has revealed Himself to us through miraculous means.
  - In the Old Testament, God spoke through dreams (Gen. 28:12; 1 Kin. 3:5), visions (Gen. 15:1; Dan. 7) and even audibly speaking at times (Gen. 15:18).
  - In the New Testament, while we do read of audible communication (Acts 9:15) and dreams (Acts 10:13), the frequency is much less.
- God ultimately spoke to mankind in the form of His Son, Jesus Christ.
- **Hebrews 1:1-2** “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”
- The author of Hebrews says that God spoke *in many portions and in many ways*.
  - The word *portions* means God spoke through visions, miracles, dreams, etc. God was not only speaking using one way of communication.
  - The word *ways* means the various forms of communication that are all throughout the Old Testament. We read poetry, prose, narrative, etc. God used the law, prophecy and even doctrinal writings to communicate to us.
- All of this was incomplete, not insufficient, but incomplete. We know there were Old Testament saints, so what God gave them was sufficient for their salvation at their time.
- But we also know that it was just a promise, not a fulfillment. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:17** “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”
- There was a promise in the OT of the coming Messiah, and the fulfillment was Jesus in the NT.
- In theological terms, this is called progressive revelation. God’s full revelation was not realized until Christ came, but that same revelation started to progress from **Genesis 3:15**.
- The OT saints were waiting with expectation for the promise to be revealed. **Hebrews 11:39** “And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised...”
- We are also told in **2 Peter 1:21** “...for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”
- When we think of prophecy, we usually only think of foretelling of the future.

- That is one aspect, but not the full definition. In the context above, Peter is talking about the whole OT.
- By this verse (and others like **2 Tim 3:16-17**; **Mark 12:36**; **Psalm 51:11**), we know that the purpose of God speaking was to communicate to us about Him, who we are, what His expectations are and how we are to be in light of that truth.
- Circling back to **Hebrews 1:1-2**, God has now spoken to us in His Son. This means that Jesus is the final word from God. He is the full revelation which all those people waited to see.
- While God spoke in many ways and portions before, He has only spoken in one way now, through the fullness of the revelation of Jesus Christ.
- The gospels tell of His life and death, the epistles comment on who He was and how we are to be in this present day, Revelation then tells us that He is coming back for judgment.
- The Bible is now complete with the revelation of Jesus to mankind.

## CAN GOD SPEAK AUDIBLY TODAY?

- I would answer, of course He can! He did not “lose His voice” after Christ was crucified and resurrected.
- So that’s not the right question. **The right question is *does He speak audibly today*.**
- The Bible records God speaking audibly to people many times ([Exodus 3:14](#); [Joshua 1:1](#); [Judges 6:18](#); [1 Samuel 3:11](#); [2 Samuel 2:1](#); [Job 40:1](#); [Isaiah 7:3](#); [Jeremiah 1:7](#); [Acts 8:26](#); [9:15](#)—this is just a small sampling). There is no biblical reason why God could not speak to a person audibly today. With the hundreds of times the Bible records God speaking, we have to remember that they occur over the course of 4,000 years of human history. **God speaking audibly is the exception, not the rule.** Even in the biblically recorded instances of God speaking, it is not always clear whether it was an audible voice, an inner voice, or a mental impression.<sup>1</sup>
- When we take **Hebrews 1:1-2** and break it down a bit more, there is a finality to what the author is saying.
- **“The point is that God, in his final revelation, has spoken to us...”<sup>2</sup>**
- The point that Wallace is making is that by the specific inspired language used, God was telling us that it was through Christ that His final and complete revelation came.
- God has not promised to speak to anyone in any other way than through His Son. When we have a desire to hear the voice of the Lord in any other way, there is no guarantee that God is even going to do that for us.
- **He has promised that through Christ He spoke His complete revelation.** This means that we need nothing more to be able to know God, know ourselves and know what God desires for us.

<sup>1</sup> [www.gotquestions.org/God-still-speak.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/God-still-speak.html)

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (1996), 245.

## How Does God Speak Through His Son?

- **Hebrews 3:7** “Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, ‘today, if you hear His voice...’”
- The author then quotes **Psalm 95**, attributing its inspiration to the Holy Spirit. Notice that the author uses the present tense language...says...not said.
- This means that the Holy Spirit is speaking through the Scriptures, even today.
- This aligns with **Hebrews 4:12** “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
- God’s Word is alive, it is active and it is how God speaks to us today. God’s Word is not stagnant but it cuts to the heart of people so that they know where they are going to be on judgment day.
- The Bible is not what God has said, in as much as it is what God is saying.

## DANGERS OF “HEARING GOD’S VOICE”

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- Many believe 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?

### Do we need more than the written Word?

- 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 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?**
- “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>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

- **Realize what Jack Deere (and others from all other denominations) is saying, you cannot fulfill God's highest purpose for your life if you are not hearing from Him in an audible voice.**
- This tells us the **first** issue we should have with this doctrine of God needing to speak to us is the **sufficiency of Scripture.**
- Simply put, the sufficiency of Scripture states that the Bible, as we have it today, is all we need to equip us for a life of faith and service.
- It also means that it is sufficient, for all that it talks about, to reveal God and to lead sinful man to repentance and eternal life.
- **This doctrine does not mean that the Bible specifically speaks to all matters in life.** But it does mean that the matters it does directly address, it addresses them sufficiently. Other matters that are not addressed specifically, the Bible gives principles to inform our decisions.
- **Psalm 19:7-14** gives us a right view of the power of the Word of God.
  - It is perfect, restoring the soul and making wise the simple.
  - It is right, pure and enlightening the eyes.
  - It is true and righteous altogether.
  - More desirable than gold, even fine gold and sweeter than honey.
  - They bring a warning and when kept, they have a great reward.
  - It can discern errors, keep one from presumptuous sins, make a man blameless and acquitted.
  - It will make your mouth and heart acceptable before the Lord.
- **When reading through all of that...why would you look elsewhere for something else?**
- **What is the purpose of trying to "hear" God's voice?**
  - **Realize what is being promoted here...you need to hear God's voice because it is all about you! Your life, your purpose, your fulfillment, etc. There is nothing about God in Deere's statement other than God can't always do it because Satan is powerful.**
- Over and above all the other doctrines, sufficiency of Scripture is under the greatest attack today, both overtly and covertly.
- The church now uses corporate management techniques, worldly methods of drawing crowds and seeks to find ways of entertainment rather than exposition.
- **The need and desire for extra-biblical revelations is in the current language of most conservative churches. We now accept some forms mysticism (dreams, visions, etc.), and psychological counseling beliefs and techniques which declare that the Bible and its precepts are not adequate for the Christian life.**
- **When we abandon the sufficiency of Scripture, we have now stepped into a realm where anything goes. There are no guidelines except for what we think is good and right.**

- More churches would proclaim that they do believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, but their normal practices betray their words.
- We must be careful to not just listen to what people are saying but then to see what they are doing. People's actions are always going to show where their belief system operates.
- The **second** main issue is that when Deere says that for our highest purposes to be fulfilled, we need to hear from God's own voice and a freshly spoken word, he is promoting Gnosticism.
- **To be clear, you can't be a Christian and a Gnostic; they are mutually exclusive...incompatible together.**
- **Old school Gnosticism believed two key elements**<sup>4</sup>: **one**, it embraces a dualism regarding spirit and matter.
  - Gnostics assert that matter is inherently evil and spirit is good. As a result of this presupposition, Gnostics believe anything done in the body, even the grossest sin, has no meaning because real life exists in the spirit realm only.
  - This is one of the reasons why we see more sexual immorality withing the specific groups who hold to these extreme experiences as being truth.
- **Two**, Gnostics claim to possess an elevated knowledge, a "higher truth" known only to a certain few.
  - Gnostics claim to possess a higher knowledge, not from the Bible, but acquired on some mystical higher plane of existence. Gnostics see themselves as a privileged class elevated above everybody else by their higher, deeper knowledge of God.
- This language "I had a word from the Lord" or "In my prayer and study time, the Lord really spoke to me" or "I just have a peace about it."
- How do we know where this "word" is coming from? How do we know what we are to do with the "word" that we have received?
  - When we go outside the dependable messages and objective truth found in the Scriptures, we have left ourselves open for anything to influence us in any direction.
  - **Our hearts should not be the deciding factor in anything that we do; especially discerning if something is from God.**

### **What the church is lacking.**

- This is a real problem because those who do not want to cause "division" in the church do not call out these imposters for their heresy.
- If someone is claiming to get more revelation or different revelation from God, we must question if they even are born again.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-gnosticism.html>

- Therefore, you are not causing division in the church, because they are likely not part of the church.
- Speaking of the pastor's role in **Titus 1:9**, Paul says that he must be “**holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.**” Then he goes on to say in **verses 10-11** “**For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.**”
- The pastor must be able to teach what is right, according to the Bible, and refute false doctrine which is against what the Bible says.
- **Pastors are leading people (although willing people) astray by telling them they need to seek out more or different knowledge from what is revealed in Scripture.**
- They are sending them to places and people that are only led by their own thoughts and desires.
- **We need to tell people the truth, not some esoteric meaningless empty platitude.**
- We only need to look to **John 17:17** “**Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.**”
- Where do we find truth? It is in the Word of God. One who thinks God still speaks today would say they are looking for a Word from the Lord, but it is the spoken word they desire, not the revealed Word of God.
- **Matthew 12:38-39** “**Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet...’**”
- **God is not in the business of bending to unrighteous people and their whims for a sign. Look at how Jesus describes those who are asking for a sign from Him.**
- **He calls them evil and adulterous. Evil speaks of someone of a bad nature, they are wicked. He calls them adulterous, meaning they are lacking faith in God and putting it somewhere else.**
- This is similar to **James 4:4** “**You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**”
- The adulteress here in James is the one who is a friend of the world, hostile towards God.
- When we seek signs and the world's wisdom, we are turning our backs on the true God. We are essentially telling God that what He has provided for us is not enough; we need something more.
- **When we look outside of His Word for answers that He has already provided, we make that second source the ruler in our hearts and minds and not the Lord.**
- **This is why it is called adultery.** This is why it pains the Lord to see His people look for answers in places that he has not directed them.
- **He knows that there is nothing but heartache and lies outside of His inspired and sufficient Word.**

## DISCERNING KNOWLEDGE FROM THE LORD

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- James 3:13-18 “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. **But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”**
- I believe that this is the most underrated and overlooked passage in the Bible when it comes to making decisions and having wisdom.
- Everyone one is quick to want to hear the voice of God, to have a feeling that they are doing something right, and they neglect the very grace they need and are provided.
- How can we know that we are receiving God’s instructions for what we are doing?
- **That wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering and without hypocrisy. This describes the wisdom which comes from God.**
- That wisdom is not given in dreams, visions, feelings, etc. but from the objective Word of God. As you are reading the Bible and His Word is sinking deep into your heart, your actions are going to align with what you have been putting into yourself.
- If you are constantly looking for a sign or a voice, you are going to be led by **anything** that you think is from the Lord.
- God does not leave us helplessly looking for some “thing” to happen so that we can try and discern what it means. He gives us the Scriptures to read, meditate on and then put into practice in our daily lives.
- A really good question is *are we following the commands in the Bible that we know to be true, or looking for something more because we are not satisfied with what we read?*