

Hearing the Voice of God

Part 2: Is The Bible Enough?



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“Because it is God’s Book!” she used to say. She had two very important, never to be broken rules regarding the Bible.

Number One: It was never ever to touch the floor (or the ground).

Number Two: It was never ever to have anything else placed on top of it.

That was my great grandmother. She had more Bibles lying around her house than you could find in any Christian bookstore in the country.

I spent a considerable amount of time and many nights at her house as a child. I had an attention span slightly shorter than my nose and I violated those two rules on more than one occasion. I would move a stack of Bibles off the end table so I could color or play with my Lego. Grandma would come into the room and see a Bible on the floor and would respond with a gasp that would drain all the oxygen out of the room. Candles would go out, windows would bow in, and any open doors would slam shut. She would then remind me of Rule Number One. “You NEVER, EVER put a Bible on the floor!” I suspected that there was some chemical in the carpet that would damage the leather cover.

Well, if I can’t put them on the floor, then I will lay my coloring book on top. In case you haven’t guessed, that was a violation of Rule Number Two. Gasp! As soon as the doors had finished slamming she would say, “NEVER, EVER put anything on top of the Bible!”

I had to ask the most profound question that a child can ask. “Why, Grandma?”

“Because it is God’s Book!” she would explain. “We must show respect for it and treat it different than we do any other book.”

As a five- or six-year-old, I never quite understood this. It seemed that God had plenty of copies lying around Grandma’s house and if one got damaged, God could always read one of the other copies. Besides, I was beginning to have a growing suspicion that Grandma’s house was not the only one in which God stored copies of

His Book.

Nevertheless, from a very young age I had instilled in me a profound respect for the Bible as a book. If there is one thing I learned from my great grandmother it was that the Bible was different than any other book and was to be treated as such.

The Central Issue

My grandmother viewed the Bible as an icon, an object to be revered. However, the Bible was not given simply to be revered and idolized, but to be read and internalized.

It is not a sin issue to let your Bible touch the floor, or to put a piece of paper on top of it. It is not what we do to the Book that is sin, but what we think of the revelation it contains. You see, a person may ensure that their Bible never touches the floor and that it never touches their heart.

I have to say that there is perhaps no more foundational issue in all of your life than your view of Scripture. A low view of Scripture is an indication of a low view of God. A low view of God is idolatry.

In his book, *Scripture Alone*, James White writes, “*How one views Scripture will determine the rest of one’s theology. There is no more basic issue: Every system of thought that takes seriously the claims of the Bible to be the inspired, authoritative Word of God will share a commitment to particular central truths, and that without compromise. Those systems that do not begin with this belief in Scripture will exhibit a wide range of beliefs that will shift over time in light of the ever-changing whims and views of culture. Almost every single collapse involving denominations and churches in regard to historic Christian beliefs can be traced back to a degradation in that group’s view of the Bible as the inspired and inerrant revelation of God’s truth. Once this foundation is lost, the house that was built upon it cannot stand.*”¹

¹ James R. White, *Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible’s Accuracy, Authority, and Authenticity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House), 43.

Why State the Obvious?

The historic, orthodox church has always affirmed the inerrancy, infallibility, accuracy, authority, and sufficiency of the 66 books of the Bible. Modern western evangelicalism seems more and more prone to abandon this position and trade this high view of Scripture for a much lower, much weaker counterpart.

The liberalism of the early 20th century and relativism of the end of the 20th century have ushered in an era in which a high view of Scripture is not just rare among those who call themselves believers, but in some sectors, such as in the Emergent Church, vilified.

What is troubling is that even among those who claim to love the Bible, cherish the Bible, read, study, and memorize the Bible, who would readily affirm the **sufficiency** of Scripture, there is a growing trend to seek communication with God, apart from the Bible. Christians are quick to give lip service to Scripture as being completely sufficient for life and godliness, then assert that God has led them through some means *other than Scripture*.

This series of articles² is designed to address the common practice in Christian circles of seeking divine guidance through dreams, visions, nudgings, inner impressions, feelings, and the like. I will address some of these specific practices and some of the passages used to support them in future articles but first, we have to deal with **the** foundational issue: the sufficiency of Scripture. The foundational question is a simple one: ***Do you believe that Scripture is completely sufficient for all that you need? Is the Bible completely sufficient or is it deficient in some way?***

The Bible on the Bible

Our belief in the sufficiency, authority, and inspiration of the Bible is not based on church tradition, creedal statements, denominational preferences, or personal predilections. Rather, we base this belief on the Bible's own claims concerning itself.

Take for instance, a passage familiar to most believers, **2 Timothy 3:16-17**, “**All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.**”

When we say the Bible is the Word of God, and the **only** Word of God (and that is the claim of orthodox Christianity) we are not asserting anything concerning Scripture that Scripture does not assert of itself. The Bible makes the claim

² You can read previous articles in this series on *Hearing The Voice of God* posted on our website at www.kootenaichurch.org.

on its own behalf to be the inspired Word of God.

The word “inspired” is a translation of the Greek word, *theopneustos*. It comes from two words, *Theos* meaning “God” and *pneuma* meaning “breath.” Scripture is “God-breathed.” God, Who cannot lie, breathed out His Word through the human author. Inscribed by the pen of Jeremiah, Daniel, or Paul, the Spirit of God was the Author behind the author who superintended every word, every stroke, and every detail to be His product in the end.

When we speak of the Bible being the “inspired Word of God” we **do not** mean that it is a human product into which God breathed a supernatural quality. We **do not** mean that God robotically controlled the process and thereby destroyed the individuality, personality, or contribution of the human author. Rather we mean that God, by His providence, so moved upon the human authors in the writing of the books of the Bible that they were used by God to pen His Words.

The Bible is, then, the very words of God Himself. They were delivered through human instruments but without any admixture of human error, fallibility, or imperfection of any kind. Once again, this is the Bible's claim for itself.

It is this inspired Word which is “**able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus**” (**2 Timothy 3:15**).

Paul then lists four things which Scripture is beneficial for: teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. Those four things are all that a believer could possibly ever need.

When a believer is taught, reproofed, corrected, and trained by the Scriptures, he or she will be “equipped for every good work.” To be equipped means to be complete or capable, proficient in everything one is called to do.³

Now, back to our foundational question: Do you believe that Scripture is sufficient to teach you, train you, correct you, reprove you and equip you for every good work? Or do you think that Scripture is good **as far as it goes** and **something else is needed**?

Better Than A Voice

The Apostle Peter could not have stated it any more clearly than he did in **2 Peter 1:3-4**, “. . . seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become

³ John F. MacArthur Jr. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 2 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press), 162.

partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."

God has granted to us **"everything pertaining to life and godliness"** through the **"precious and magnificent promises."** Both are **"granted"** to us by God's divine power. These precious promises are everything we need for life and godliness. These precious promises are contained in the **"prophetic word to which we do well to pay attention"** (2 Peter 1:19).

Peter offers a description of the value and power of these **"precious and magnificent promises"** contained in the **"prophetic word."** He begins by reminding his readers that he was an **"eyewitness of His majesty."** Peter had a specific instance in mind, namely that of the Transfiguration of Christ recorded in **Matthew 17:1-13**. Peter writes, **"For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased' - and we ourselves heard this utterance made from Heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain"** (2 Peter 1:17-18).

What an experience that must have been! To be selected as one of only three people present to witness this event and to hear those words uttered by the Father toward His Son, had to rank as one of the most thrilling, exhilarating, mountaintop experiences that Peter could imagine. He heard the audible voice of God. He heard the testimony - audibly - of the Father!

In proving that the message of Christ and the message of the gospel are not **"cleverly devised tales"** (v. 16), Peter **could** have pointed back to those words which he personally heard. He could have rested his testimony on that experience. **But he does not!** Instead, he points his readers not to his testimony, not to his experience, not to an audible voice in which he heard God speak from Heaven, but to the **"prophetic word"** which is **"more sure."**

More sure. The written Word of God is **"more sure."** More sure than even an audible voice from Heaven! Peter points his readers to the *written Word!*

Yet many Christians place their confidence not in the written Word, nor in even an audible voice from Heaven spoken in the presence of two or three witnesses, but in an impression, a still small voice, a feeling, or a nudging of some sort. Unthinkable!

Peter would say that the written prophetic Word is more sure than an audible Word. Why? Because the written Word is not a matter of any one person's interpretation. The written Word is the product of holy men of God moved on by the Holy Spirit. Those men spoke from God.

To put it another way, if you want to hear God speak, don't wait for an audible voice (much less a still small one) and turn your attention to the more sure revelation of God - the written Word.

Once again our foundational question: Do you believe that Scripture is all you need for life and godliness? Do you believe that the prophetic Word is more sure because men of God moved by the Holy Spirit have spoken from God? Do you believe that Scripture is only one place that God speaks?

What Else Could I Possibly Need?

Apart from being the inspired, authoritative, and all sufficient provision for life and godliness, consider what else we know to be true of God's Word. It is the means by which the Spirit of God brings us to faith in Christ (**Rom. 10:17**). By it we have been born again to a living hope (**1 Peter 1:23**). Not only is it the means and tool that the Spirit uses to save us, but also to sanctify us. We are to long for the pure milk of the Word in order that we may grow in respect to salvation (**1 Peter 2:1-3**). Every word of God is pure (**Prov. 30:5-6**). We should hunger for His Word more than our necessary food (**Job 23:12**).

David tells us in **Psalms 19** that the law of the Lord is **"perfect"** and **"sure"** (v. 7), **"right"** and **"pure"** (v. 8), **"true and righteous altogether"** (v. 9), **"more desirable than gold,"** and **"sweeter than the honey and the drippings of the honeycomb"** (v. 10). David also tells us that God's Word **"restores the soul,"** **"makes wise the simple,"** **"rejoices the heart,"** **"enlightens the eyes,"** and **"endures forever."** Moreover, by them we are warned, rewarded, sanctified, kept from sin, and acquitted of great transgression (**vv. 7-14**).

Psalms 119 tells us that the Word of God preserves us from sin (v. 11), is forever settled in heaven (v. 89), makes us wiser than our enemies (v. 98), gives us more insight than all our teachers (v. 99), gives us more understanding than the aged (v. 100), is sweet to our mouths (v. 103), a light (v. 105), and gives understanding to the simple (v. 130). We have only scratched the surface!

In other words, SCRIPTURE IS SUFFICIENT! No wonder Peter considered it **"more sure"** than an audible voice from Heaven. What else could I possibly need? A vision? A dream? A nudging? An impression? A still small voice? **I have the Word!** I need nothing else. As Martin Luther said, **"Let him who would hear God speak read Holy Scripture."**

It is an insult to the Word to suggest that Scripture is good as far as it goes and to rely instead upon our feelings, impressions or **any** other subjective means for divine

guidance and communication. It is an insult to God to add our own experiences, impressions and feelings to the mix as if God is not able to communicate adequately through His Word all that we need to live life. It is an insult to divine knowledge, wisdom and provision.

Either we believe and live as if the Scripture is sufficient or we confess our own belief in its insufficiency, deficiency and inadequacy by turning our back and relying upon something else to supplement it. This is precisely what Christians do when they seek divine guidance through these unreliable and subjective means.

Some Christians view the Bible as a good source for general principles which need to be confirmed through feelings, impressions, or a “check in the spirit.” For them, it is inadequate for moment-by-moment or day-by-day guidance. For decision-making they need something more, the Bible is not enough. This is not their spoken confession, but rather the implicit theology behind their pursuit of divine guidance through subjective means. The assumption is: the Bible is not sufficient.

Reformation Restoration

The Protestant Reformation restored to the Church the belief in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. The Roman Catholic church taught that God spoke in Scripture but equally as authoritative and binding were the councils, popes, traditions, and teachings of the Church.

Luther, Calvin, and others who led the reformation brought the Church back to the sole source of authority - the Word of God. We may call it the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone) or the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. Simply stated: *God has spoken in a Book*. That Book is binding on all men and sufficient for all of life and practice. That Book is authoritative, holy, inspired, accurate, and sufficient.

Every cult, every non-Christian religion, and every “ism” in the world has one thing in common: all of them deny that God speaks through Scripture alone. The Jehovah’s Witnesses believe God speaks through the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. The Mormon’s believe that God speaks through *The Doctrines and Covenants*, *The Pearl of Great Price* and the *Book of Mormon* and that He currently speaks through the Mormon Prophet. The Catholic Church believes that God currently directs his people through the Pope and church councils. Other cultic groups assign such prophetic and revelatory functions to their leaders who lead them into false doctrine (e.g., Jim Jones).

Only the orthodox historic Christian faith has rightly believed that God speaks in one place and one place only,

Holy Scripture. For over 1800 years Christians believed that God gave His revelation through His written Word where the faith has been “**once for all delivered to the saints**” (**Jude 3**). Only recently has there been a mega-shift in the Church’s perspective on how God communicates to His people.

The Great Divide

We are on one side of this doctrine or the other. Either God *has spoken* or He *is speaking*. Either Scripture is *sufficient* for all of life and godliness, or it is *insufficient* and I need a personal word from the Lord, some sign, some direction, some voice, or prompting. Either the Bible is *adequate* to equip me for every good work, or it is *inadequate* and I need some nudging or impression to help me make decisions. Sufficient or deficient - which is it?

We can’t have it both ways! We can’t on the one hand say that the Bible is sufficient for me, for all of life and godliness, and on the other hand believe that I need to listen for the voice of God to tell me who to marry, where to live, or where to work. It is one or the other, it can’t be both.

The degree to which you believe God still speaks through your thoughts, impressions, and feelings, is the degree to which you *deny that Scripture is adequate, sufficient, and the only authoritative Word of God*. It is the degree to which you find yourself in the same theological boat (regarding the sufficiency of Scripture) as every cult, every “ism”, and every non-Christian religion in the world.

Here is where we get down to the heart of the issue. If the Bible is everything it claims to be, if it does everything it says it does, then I *don’t need anything else*. Nothing.

What the Bible Never Says

Stated another way, the Bible *never* says that God speaks to me through my feelings. The Bible *never* says that God directs me through impressions. The Bible *never* says that God reveals things to me through the still, small voice or personal revelation. The Bible never directs us to look to our experiences, our feelings, our thoughts, or our circumstances for guidance. We are *never* told to seek a word from God. **Never.**

In Scripture we are never directed anywhere but to the Word of God in order that we might hear God speak. Nothing but the written Word of God is ever given a place of authority and supremacy.

We are told to look to Scripture. We are told that the Word of God is “more sure,” “adequate” and sufficient for everything we need.

It is instructive to note that the two cardinal texts on the

inspiration of Scripture appear in the final epistles authored by the two most prominent apostles. When Paul knew he was nearing the end of his life (**2 Timothy 4:6**), he did not direct Timothy to look to personalized revelations, to tradition, to an apostolic successor, or to any subjective means of knowing God's will, but to the Word of God and to preach that Word (**2 Timothy 3:14-4:5**). Likewise, when Peter knew he was nearing the end of his life (**2 Peter 1:12-15**), he did not direct his readers to the authority of an apostolic successor or to some subjective means of knowing God's will, but to the Word of God, the more sure written Word (**2 Peter 1:12-21**).

Do I believe that God speaks to us today? Of course I do! God speaks to me through His Word. Do you want to hear the voice of God? Read the Bible. Do you want to hear God's counsel for your circumstances? Read Scripture. Do you want direction? What else can you possibly need other than the Word which is adequate to equip you for every good work? Do you desire to know God's mind on a subject? Read Holy Scripture!

We are a people of the Book! Hear it and you hear God. Read it and you read the words of God.

Leaving Scripture

We live in an age that is characterized by biblical illiteracy. Christians don't read Scripture. In our age, churches have purposely designed their ministry around the absence of Biblical content. Biblical preaching has all but vanished from the American pulpit. Consequently, your average professing believer knows more about the latest blockbuster coming out of Hollywood than they do about how the Children of Israel came out of Egypt. They are more astute to the latest political scandal, celebrity breakup, or pop-culture reference than they are to anything which might resemble a Biblical worldview.

One of the sad symptoms of this Biblical illiteracy must be the widespread belief that God can and does speak to His people *apart from Scripture*. Conversely, the belief that God directs His people apart from Scripture encourages a lazy approach to Bible study and fuels the fire of apathy toward the Word.

Let me illustrate. If God speaks to me personally today apart from Scripture through personalized revelations, then why should I be concerned with what God said to Paul, David, Moses, or Isaiah? After all, I need to hear Him speak to *me*. So I fine-tune my spiritual receiver and wait to hear the voice of God speaking something fresh, something new, for *me* and *my* situation.

Why should I be diligent to study a 2,000+ year old

revelation originally given to someone I have never met, from a different country, in a different culture, facing an entirely different situation, if God is going to give me the direction I need through some sign, impression or voice? Why study what God told others, when I can have God speak to me directly.

Can you see how Scripture inevitably takes a back seat? Why should I spend time in intense Bible study, memorization, and meditation if God is just waiting to impress me with a fresh Word for Today? Why should I search the Scripture for guidance on a decision I am facing if God wants to communicate directly to me on the matter?

I have known people who profess belief in the sufficiency of the Scripture *and* believe they receive personalized divine guidance, answer by saying, "You have to know the Bible because we can be deceived by the inner voice, a feeling, or a thought. We have to know what the Bible says so we can test our personal word against the Scripture." May I suggest that if we can be deceived or misled through our impressions, *we ought not to trust them at all but instead rely solely upon the written Word which is more sure than a voice from Heaven?* If I know enough of what the Bible says to test a personal word, then I already know enough and don't need a personal word from God on the matter to begin with.

At the heart of this subjective approach to hearing from God is a low view of Scripture. Christians today have embraced a belief that was considered heretical for 1800 years of church history. Consequently, the Church has departed from Scripture as the only guideline for faith and practice.

You see, if you teach someone that God speaks to them *apart from Scripture* it is only a matter of time before they *depart from Scripture*.

May God bring correction to the church or individual that does not love, obey, and cherish His Word for all that it is and all that it does. May He forgive us for looking anywhere else!

Without Wax -

