

Decision Making and the Will of God

Session 1

Welcome...

Opening prayer. (*discernment emphasis*)

Introduction

To many Christians, guidance is a chronic problem. Why? Not because they doubt that divine guidance is a fact, but because they are sure it is. They know that God can guide, and has promised to guide, every Christian believer. Books and friends and public speakers tell them how guidance has worked in the lives of others. Their fear, therefore is not that no guidance should be available for them, but that they may miss the guidance which God provides through some fault of their own.¹

We are rightly concerned about discerning God's guidance for our lives. Many Christians have found themselves frustrated by people telling them "if you aren't hearing God speak, you aren't listening" or you aren't listening the right way, etc. We know that God has promised to guide us/direct our paths, and that God is faithful, why aren't we hearing Him more clearly?

In this course we will examine some of the important underlying questions. "What role does the Holy Spirit play in our decision making?" and "what is the nature of God's promised guidance?" To do this, we will need to lay a foundational understanding of **God's will** and **wisdom**. To lay this foundation, it will be necessary to do what we often have to do before laying a foundation, clear the lot.

To do so, we'll test the model of decision-making model that has become popular in the church in light of God's Word. During this part of the course it is likely that some of you will become upset with me because I am attacking some beliefs and practices you hold dearly. I ask that you be patient and weigh the biblical evidence. I am happy to interact with you by email (Tim@objectivegospel.org), through my interactive blog (solid-ground.blogspot.com), and through some limited Q&A time in class. Keep in mind there are a lot of us here, and I cannot explain you're your personal/individual experiences. We will lay a foundation understanding of "God's will" and "wisdom." Finally, we will construct a Biblical-wisdom model for decision-making. ***We have a lot to cover—I'll have to skim over some of it to stay within time constraints.***

Conventional View

I. Conventional view in a nutshell:

- A. **God has an individual will or blueprint for our lives that we are to be about figuring out.**

¹ Packer, J.I., *Knowing God*, InterVarsity Press, 1993 ed. p. 230.

- B. We use a variety of methods to figure out what that will is.** The bookshelves of the Christian bookstores overflow with the latest method for figuring out God’s will, how to read the signs that God is giving us, etc. Some of the methods:
1. looking for private messages in the Bible
 2. trying to “tune in” to the leading of the Holy Spirit through our thoughts and feelings—two-way prayer techniques, etc.
 3. depending on our feeling of “having a peace about it”
 4. looking for and depending upon “opened and closed doors”
 5. putting out unbiblical fleeces
 6. looking for “confirmations” in various forms
- C. Greg Koukl (of Stand to Reason) summarizes it this way²:
1. **First**, God has made the decisions in life for us. *–Not stated explicitly but implied.* These decisions constitute God’s will that we are to discover.
 2. **Second**, God doesn’t tell us His will directly. Instead he hides it in signs and codes that we have to decipher.
 3. **Third**, to be successful we have to learn to read the signs.
- II. We have developed a Christian lingo to go along with it:
- “I feel led...” “I think God is telling me ...” “God told me ...”
 - “I believe it is God’s will that I ...” “I feel God is calling me to ...”
 - “I have a peace about it” “I’ve received confirmations...”
 - “Don’t make a move until you hear from God” ... (examples to come)
- III. We have developed a perception of Christian maturity that includes the ability to “hear from God” by these various methods, and our ability to use the associated lingo.
- A. Creates frustration when we can’t “tune in” like others claim to. (*remember the frustration with tongues at The Door in late teens?*)
 - B. Leaves us constantly looking for the next technique to get to the “next level”
- IV. Makes it appear as though God’s will is lost. *Why else would we have to “look for it?”*
- A. God plays the cosmic “Easter Bunny” running around hiding little hints for us.
 - B. Are we interpreting the hints correctly?
 - C. We get very superstitious!
- V. Because we are always on such shaky ground, so uncertain, we often end up paralyzed and out of commission.

² Koukl, Greg, “Decision Making and the Will of God” message outline. I depended heavily on Greg’s materials for large sections of this study. It was Greg’s study, along with his other message “From Truth to Experience” that inspired me to prepare and offer this course. Visit the Stand to Reason web site at str.org.

- A. We are often told not to make a move until God tells us. I did a quick search on “hear from God” and here are a couple of nuggets from the first page (out of three pages of results). This all sounds very spiritual doesn’t it?

Going to God in prayer should not be your last resort. **Pray before you make a move on anything in every situation. Don't move until you hear from God on which direction to go.** Pray throughout and **until you receive what you're asking God for.** Then pray and give thanks for what God has done in your situation.

Do you remember the game called Simon Says? You didn't do anything until Simon told you to do it; if you did , it set you back. Think about that analogy for a minute.³

This is where you have to follow a few guidelines:

Let peace rule in your heart. When you have a decision to make, get quiet and **find out if you have peace about it.** If you don't, don't do it! **If you do have peace, go ahead. Make sure that you truly have peace otherwise you will make a mistake.**

Pray about it. You don't have to get on your knees or say "thee"s and "thou"s. All you have to do is talk to God. Tell Him the situation and then **wait for Him to answer. You may get a Scripture, a thought, an impression or you might actually hear God speak to your spirit. Don't do anything until you hear from God.**⁴

- B. Confusion--How do we know if we really have a peace about it? Is that God’s voice? What does “actually hear God speak *to your spirit*” mean?”
- C. Therefore we do nothing out of fear that we will make a mistake: If I marry Sue and she’s not the woman God planned for me, she also missed out on who she was supposed to marry, and each of our God-picked spouses married someone else... disrupting God’s world wide plan for marriage! No pressure there.
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VI. *What Does the Bible Teach About Reading the Signs?*

Sometimes it is easier to discern what the Bible teaches by what it doesn’t teach. Here are seven things the Bible does not teach that we get guidance from: “a verse [with a unique individual meaning] God gave me,” “feeling led [by the Spirit],” “having a peace about it,” “open doors,” “fleeces,” and “confirmations.”

- A. Ouija Bible—There is no Scriptural warrant for going to the text looking for or stumbling upon private, personal messages.

³ Dr. Randy Lee Simmonds, *True Light Evangelical Christian Ministries’ Message for the Day*, (<http://www.trultevangel.net/id19.html>) accessed by Internet on 2/1/08. **emphasis added**

⁴ Annagail Lynes, *If the Bible doesn't specify that something is wrong, does it mean it's okay*, (<http://www.helium.com/tm/511546/bible-doesnt-something-wrong>) accessed by Internet on 2/1/08. **emphasis added**

1. This is **not** mean that verses won't sometimes appropriately "leap out at you." If the (objective/author's intent) meaning of the verse enlightens you, give praise and thanks to the Holy Spirit for enlightening you!
2. If a verse takes on a unique (subjective) personal meaning just for you, then you are reading into the text what is not there and treating the Bible like an Ouija Board.

"The Holy Spirit gave me this verse"

^{ESV} **Acts 16:29** And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

When asked by someone "does that mean that my family will be saved too?" –No, God didn't give you that verse. –*Relativism!* (*true for me but not for you...*)

Ambassador's class might remember the examples:

- "put on the new man"
- "Grace be unto you"

There is neither warrant nor excuse for using the Bible this way. It is superstition and nothing more.

B. Feeling Led (by the Spirit)—There is no Scriptural precedent for divine direction by feeling led.

1. Elijah's "still, small voice"—was a **voice**, not a nudge not "speaking to your Spirit" ...a non-voice voice (1 Kings 19:9-13) – we'll speak more about hearing God's voice later
2. Romans 8:14

^{ESV} **Romans 8:9** You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

^{ESV} **Romans 8:12** So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ **For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.**

Has nothing to do with personal guidance, but empowerment for holy living, and the same goes for Galatians 5:16-21:

^{ESV} **Galatians 5:16-21** But I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if **you are led by the Spirit**, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

J.I. Packer agrees:

What does it mean to be ‘led by the Spirit’ in personal decision making? That phrase, found in Romans 8:14 and Galatians 5:18 speaks of resisting sinful impulses, not of decision making⁵

3. Jesus was “led by the Spirit” (Matt 4:1, Mark 1:12, Luke 4:1)

^{ESV} **Matthew 4:1** Then Jesus was **led up** by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

[GING] ἀνάγω

ἀνάγω—1. lead or bring up [Mt 4:1](#); [Ac 9:39](#); [Ro 10:7](#). Bring before [Ac 12:4](#). ἄ. θυσίαν bring an offering [7:41](#).—2. mid. or pass. put out to sea, set sail [Ac 13:13](#); [18:21](#). [anagogic] [pg 11]

^{NAS} **Acts 9:39** And Peter arose and went with them, ... they **brought** him **into** the upper room ...

^{ESV} **Acts 9:39** So Peter rose and went with them. ... they **took** him **to** the upper room ...

^{ESV} **Romans 10:7** or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to **bring** Christ **up** from the dead).

Some things to remember about this:

- This means “took” rather than some kind of internal/unclear prompting as it is used today.
- It is the only mention of such an occurrence –and it was to be tempted!
- It was Jesus the incarnate Son of God—perhaps His experience was unique?
- There is no teaching or suggestion that we should follow this as a model.

4. Dangers of “felt led” theology

- a. It makes God look capricious—constantly changing his mind from moment to moment as believers feel led in different directions.

“I thought God told you to go to Seminary” –“Now he’s telling me to go to law school”

- b. It sometimes causes Christians to do bizarre, extreme, even foolish things based on their feelings of what God wants, making their lives very unstable.

Packer describes it this way:

The consequences of this mistake among earnest Christians have been both comic and tragic. The idea of a life in which the inward voice of the Spirit decides and directs everything sounds most attractive, for it seems to exalt the Spirit’s ministry and to promise the closest intimacy with God; but in practice this quest for superspirituality leads only to frantic bewilderment and lunacy.⁶

After describing examples of women who would wake up and ask God if they should get up, ask God about whether to put on each individual article of clothing (often walking around with one shoe or one stocking because of the perceived responses), and others who were “led by the Spirit” to lie naked in bed together “to help my friends to receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit,” Packer concludes:

⁵ J. I. Packer, *Hot Tub Religion*, Tyndale, 1987, p123.

⁶ Packer, J.I., *Knowing God*, InterVarsity Press, 1993 ed. p. 235.

These pathetic stories are sadly typical of what ensues once the basic mistake about guidance has been made.⁷

Again, this does not mean that a burning desire for some sort of service in the Kingdom is to be ignored. (It is brought into wisdom model of decision-making.)

c. It gives divine authority to impulses or thoughts that drift through our minds.

Dr. Bruce Waltke, professor of OT at Reformed Theological Seminary:

False prophets were the bane of Israel. Professionally linked with Israel's organized worship, they said what people wanted to hear and spoke their own dreams and opinions rather than the words of God.⁸

- 1) “God told me” language places your thoughts/impulses at the same level of authority as Scripture
- 2) “God told me” language virtually ends debate. How are your God-appointed leaders supposed to contend with that? Think for a moment about the implications.
- 3) **This blasphemous practice must stop.** Not only must we stop doing it (*repent!*), we need to stop putting up with it. (Ambassador Training—“Columbo” questions)
 - a) What do you mean by “God told you”?
 - b) How did you come to that conclusion?
 - c) Have you considered how dangerous/offensive it is to God to put words in His mouth?

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 18:20** But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.¹

C. Having a Peace About It—The Bible does not teach that we get guidance from inner peace.
Constantly misused proof text:

^{ESV} **Colossians 3:15** And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

<1018> βραβεύω (brabeuo) ←

Meaning: to act as umpire

Origin: from the same as 1017

Usage: rule(1).

← Makes decisions... but based on what?

1. Peace is used in two different ways:
 - a. Lack of conflict (opposite of “war”) –context: between parties

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Walke, Bruce K., *Finding the Will of God a pagan notion?* Eerdmans, 1995, p. 43.

^{ESV} **Matthew 10:34** "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

^{ESV} **Romans 5:1** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

b. Sense of inner harmony, etc. –context: inward/personal

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 1:3** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

^{ESV} **James 2:16** and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

c. Which way is it used here? Let the context determine:

^{ESV} **Colossians 3:12** Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ **bearing with one another** and, if one has a complaint against another, **forgiving each other**, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in **your** hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

ὑμῶν ← pronoun personal genitive **plural** from οὐ

Koukl summarizes it this way:

"let your commitment to interpersonal harmony among the members of the church be the 'artiber,' 'judge,' or ruling principal."⁹

2. Dangers of "peace about it" theology

- a. PARALYSIS—Major decisions **are** stressful. There is no guarantee anywhere that our lives will be "stress free" when we are in the midst of the promised trials, tribulations, temptations, and persecutions.
- b. Doing the right thing is sometimes unsettling: Jesus in Gethsemane, Nathan before David...
- c. Sometimes people have "a peace about" something that is wrong.
 - 1) Dating a non-Christian
 - 2) Divorce—I had an elder in another church resign, divorce his wife and marry a girl from his company. Now he says with certainty that "he is forgiven." He's unrepentant, but he has a peace about it.
 - 3) **Basically anything we really want to do, we can eventually convince ourselves we have a peace about it (or feel led to it)**

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 17:9** The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

^{ESV} **Mark 7:21** For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

⁹ Koukl, Greg, "Decision Making and the Will of God"

Packer says it this way:

We can never distrust ourselves too much.¹⁰

^{ESV} **Psalm 139:23** Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

- d. Again—since people will claim: “God gave them a peace about it” the entire God-given church discipline and mutual accountability structure is undermined.

D. Open and Closed Doors—The Bible does not teach that we are to receive guidance from opened and closed doors.

1. Paul walked through some open doors:

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 16:8** But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost,⁹ for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

2. But Paul ignored other open doors:

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 2:12** When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord,¹³ my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.

-note the competing “guidance”: “spirit not at rest” (no peace about it) vs. opened doors

^{ESV} **Acts 16:26** and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."

3. Discerning the door closer/opener –how do you know if it is God or the devil? Do the faithful missionaries who don't see conversions discern God has closed the door? How easy would it be for today's soft Christians to discern closed doors (or not obviously open) as an excuse not to obey the Great Commission?
4. Conclusion:
 - a. Paul did not read even miraculous divine opportunities as if they were divine directives.
 - b. Paul viewed open doors (even open prison doors!) simply as opportunities that could be acted on or ignored depending on other factors.
 - c. The doors that God opened in Scripture were recognized *afterwards* (Acts 14:27; 2 Cor 2:12) as such.
 - d. The prayers for opened doors were not done with any implication of “waiting for it” or being deterred if it doesn't happen (Col 4:3).

¹⁰ Packer, *Knowing God*, p.238.

These were men in motion, not men sitting and looking for opened and closed doors.

E. Fleeces & Providential Signs—Though there are some examples of their use, the Bible does not teach that we are to use these techniques for divining the will of God.

1. Gideon's fleece (Judges 6-7)
 - a. Confirmed direction already supernaturally given (Judges 6:12-21)
 - b. Was supernatural
 - c. Was asked for out of doubt/unbelief
2. Essentially puts an ultimatum upon God

^{ESV} **Luke 4:12** And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

- a. "If these desires are not from you, take them away" *—they continue, it must be God's will that you divorce and marry the one you desire.*
 - b. "Stop me if you really don't want me to do this" *—same... God is gracious in not answering this one because what the sinner deserves is a lightning bolt ...*
3. Other examples of "loading the dice" —our pathetic attempts at self-justification
 - a. non-supernatural (how weak is your God?) "If she's home when I call, then she's the one"—"if he agrees to go to church with me, he's the one"
 - b. supernatural or extremely unlikely in the direction you don't want the decision to go (how far are you willing to go to disobey?) (like Gideon)
 4. How to put forth a biblical fleece (a la Gideon)
 - a. Receive a clear and undeniable supernatural directive and a supernatural miraculous sign from God to attest to its validity
 - b. Doubt anyway
 - c. Ask for a second supernatural sign—to make sure God is going to actually answer your fleece, it might be wise to ask for supernatural signs in both directions.
 5. Providential Signs in Scripture (Gen 24:12ff —picking a wife for Isaac)
 - a. No indication this is a standard way of making decisions
 - b. Taught nowhere in the New Testament as a method for decision making
 - c. Unclear/could be coincidence—shaky ground

F. Confirmations—The whole "confirmations" theology is a recent unbiblical creation.

1. Classic example of completely redefining a biblical term.
2. All "confirmations" in scripture serve a judicial function in the context of either the laws of Israel or in church discipline.

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:15** "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 13:1** This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ² I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them-

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 5:19** Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.

^{ESV} **Hebrews 10:28** Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

All based upon OT law:

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 19:15** "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 17:6** On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.

3. There is no evidence that a perceived convergence of “divine hints” (or chance events) are to be discerned as “confirmations” of God’s will.
4. This is *superstition*, nothing more.

VII. Conclusions

We’ve gone to a lot of effort to examine and refute many of the popular decision-making methods promoted today. Next week we’ll briefly take a broader view of the problem, then we’ll focus on defining the will of God and wisdom.

March 21, 2007

The Morning I Heard the Voice of God

By John Piper

Let me tell you about a most wonderful experience I had early Monday morning, March 19, 2007, a little after six o'clock. God actually spoke to me. There is no doubt that it was God. I heard the words in my head just as clearly as when a memory of a conversation passes across your consciousness. The words were in English, but they had about them an absolutely self-authenticating ring of truth. I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God still speaks today.

I couldn't sleep for some reason. I was at Shalom House in northern Minnesota on a staff couples' retreat. It was about five thirty in the morning. I lay there wondering if I should get up or wait till I got sleepy again. In his mercy, God moved me out of bed. It was mostly dark, but I managed to find my clothing, got dressed, grabbed my briefcase, and slipped out of the room without waking up Noël. In the main room below, it was totally quiet. No one else seemed to be up. So I sat down on a couch in the corner to pray.

As I prayed and mused, suddenly it happened. God said, *"Come and see what I have done."* There was not the slightest doubt in my mind that these were the very words of God. In this very moment. At this very place in the twenty-first century, 2007, God was speaking to me with absolute authority and self-evidencing reality. I paused to let this sink in. There was a sweetness about it. Time seemed to matter little. God was near. He had me in his sights. He had something to say to me. When God draws near, hurry ceases. Time slows down.

I wondered what he meant by "come and see." Would he take me somewhere, like he did Paul into heaven to see what can't be spoken? Did "see" mean that I would have a vision of some great deed of God that no one has seen? I am not sure how much time elapsed between God's initial word, "Come and see what I have done," and his next words. It doesn't matter. I was being enveloped in the love of his personal communication. The God of the universe was speaking to me.

Then he said, as clearly as any words have ever come into my mind, *"I am awesome in my deeds toward the children of man."* My heart leaped up, "Yes, Lord! You are awesome in your deeds. Yes, to all men whether they see it or not. Yes! Now what will you show me?"

The words came again. Just as clear as before, but increasingly specific: *"I turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There they rejoiced in me—who rules by my might forever."* Suddenly I realized God was taking me back several thousand years to the time when he dried up the Red Sea and the Jordan River. I was being transported by his word back into history to those great deeds. This is what he meant by "come and see." He was transporting me back by his words to those two glorious deeds before the children of men. These were the "awesome deeds" he referred to. God himself was narrating the mighty works of God. He was doing it for me. He was doing it with words that were resounding in my own mind.

There settled over me a wonderful reverence. A palpable peace came down. This was a holy moment and a holy corner of the world in northern Minnesota. God Almighty had come down and was giving me the stillness and the openness and the willingness to hear his very voice. As I marveled at his power to dry the sea and the river, he spoke again. *"I keep watch over the nations—let not the rebellious exalt themselves."*

This was breathtaking. It was very serious. It was almost a rebuke. At least a warning. He may as well have taken me by the collar of my shirt, lifted me off the ground with one hand, and said, with an incomparable mixture of fierceness and love, "Never, never, never exalt yourself. Never rebel against me."

I sat staring at nothing. My mind was full of the global glory of God. "*I keep watch over the nations.*" He had said this to me. It was not just that he had said it. Yes, that is glorious. But he had said this to me. The very words of God were in my head. They were there in my head just as much as the words that I am writing at this moment are in my head. They were heard as clearly as if at this moment I recalled that my wife said, "Come down for supper whenever you are ready." I know those are the words of my wife. And I know these are the words of God.

Think of it. Marvel at this. Stand in awe of this. The God who keeps watch over the nations, like some people keep watch over cattle or stock markets or construction sites—this God still speaks in the twenty-first century. I heard his very words. He spoke personally to me.

What effect did this have on me? It filled me with a fresh sense of God's reality. It assured me more deeply that he acts in history and in our time. It strengthened my faith that he is for me and cares about me and will use his global power to watch over me. Why else would he come and tell me these things?

It has increased my love for the Bible as God's very word, because it was through the Bible that I heard these divine words, and through the Bible I have experiences like this almost every day. The very God of the universe speaks on every page into my mind—and your mind. We hear his very words. God himself has multiplied his wondrous deeds and thoughts toward us; none can compare with him! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told (Psalm 40:5).

And best of all, they are available to all. If you would like to hear the very same words I heard on the couch in northern Minnesota, read Psalm 66:5-7. That is where I heard them. O how precious is the Bible. It is the very word of God. In it God speaks in the twenty-first century. This is the very voice of God. By this voice, he speaks with absolute truth and personal force. By this voice, he reveals his all-surpassing beauty. By this voice, he reveals the deepest secrets of our hearts. No voice anywhere anytime can reach as deep or lift as high or carry as far as the voice of God that we hear in the Bible.

It is a great wonder that God still speaks today through the Bible with greater force and greater glory and greater assurance and greater sweetness and greater hope and greater guidance and greater transforming power and greater Christ-exalting truth than can be heard through any voice in any human soul on the planet from outside the Bible.

This is why I found the article in this month's *Christianity Today*, "My Conversation with God," so sad. Written by an anonymous professor at a "well-known Christian University," it tells of his experience of hearing God. What God said was that he must give all his royalties from a new book toward the tuition of a needy student. What makes me sad about the article is not that it isn't true or didn't happen. What's sad is that it really does give the impression that extra-biblical communication with God is surpassingly wonderful and faith-deepening. All the while, the supremely-glorious communication of the living God which personally and powerfully and transformingly explodes in the receptive heart through the Bible everyday is passed over in silence.

I am sure this professor of theology did not mean it this way, but what he actually said was, "For years I've taught that God still speaks, *but I couldn't testify to it personally.* I can only do so now anonymously, for reasons I hope will be clear" (emphasis added). Surely he does not mean what he seems to imply—that only when one hears an extra-biblical voice like, "The money is not yours," can you testify *personally* that God still speaks. Surely he does not mean to belittle the voice of God in the Bible which speaks this very day with

power and truth and wisdom and glory and joy and hope and wonder and helpfulness ten thousand times more decisively than *anything* we can hear outside the Bible.

I grieve at what is being communicated here. The great need of our time is for people to experience the living reality of God by hearing his word personally and transformingly in Scripture. Something is incredibly wrong when the words we hear outside Scripture are more powerful and more affecting to us than the inspired word of God. Let us cry with the psalmist, "Incline my heart to your word" (Psalm 119:36). "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law" (Psalm 119:18). Grant that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened to know our hope and our inheritance and the love of Christ that passes knowledge and be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 1:18; 3:19). O God, don't let us be so deaf to your word and so unaffected with its ineffable, evidential excellency that we celebrate lesser things as more thrilling, and even consider this misplacement of amazement worthy of printing in a national magazine.

Still hearing his voice in the Bible,

Pastor John

By John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: desiringGod.org (reprinted by permission)

Reflections

After reading this ...

- Do you believe God still speaks to His people?

- Is His chosen means satisfactory? (self examination...)

- Can *you* testify *personally* that God still speaks?

- Do you think this article is helpful in alleviating the fears of some that we are advocating a lifeless and dry Christianity?