

THE FASCINATION WITH PERSONAL REVELATION

Introduction to this Issue

- Many in evangelical circles have adopted the idea that God is speaking to them personally or is giving them a sign or is prompting them with an impression
- This idea is being promoted in many of today's "Christian books" authored not by liberal, fringe authors out on the outskirts of orthodox Christianity but by popular authors
- While most of these authors are probably well-intentioned, their intentions are misdirected...and many have been cast adrift in a sea of subjectivity as a result

Excerpt from a blog article entitled "Beware the Horrible "But"-Monster"¹:

To my mind, the central issue simultaneously affirmed and trashed today is **the sufficiency of Scripture**, the belief that (A) the Canon is full, and (B) the Bible contains everything for which we need a word from God. [Not 95%](#), not even 99%, but *everything*.

My point in this little essay is not to flesh out that truth Biblically; My point is simply to highlight that the most damaging threats (A) are within the church, (B) formally affirm either a "closed Canon" or "the sufficiency of Scripture" (or both), and then (C) in practice and redefinition eviscerate the truth, leaving Scripture drained of its God-given authority and Christians enslaved to forces and vagaries emanating either from their own glands or the mouths of their anointed leaders.

This is where the "But"-Monster rears his hideous grimacing head. Paul says, both retrospectively and proleptically, that Scripture is able both to lead us to saving wisdom, and fully to equip us to know and serve God ([2 Timothy 3:15-17](#)). The "But"-Monster may not argue with that statement, formally. But he reveals himself in such words as...

- "Of course I believe the Canon is closed. *But* God still speaks to His children!"
- "Of course I believe the Scripture is sufficient. *But* if you aren't listening for fresh revelations, you're a Deist!"
- "Of course I believe the Canon is closed. *But* once upon a time, as I was practicing 'listening prayer'..."
- "Of course I believe the Scripture is sufficient. But my cousin's hair-dresser's sister heard a guest on a TV show tell a story where
- "Of course I believe the Canon is closed. *But* the letter kills – the Spirit gives life!"
- "Of course I believe Scripture is sufficient. *But* people need more than lectures and information-downloads today."
- "Of course I believe the Canon is closed. *But* Pastor D'Zastre was waiting on God in stillness in the mountains after a 400-day fast, and God told him..."
- "Of course I believe the Scripture is sufficient. *But* we worship a Person, not a book!"

It is a measure of our times that, even among us, probably at least one item on that list singed someone's assumptions. That is, however, a measure of the degree to which – if you'll pardon one last enumeration – we have lost (A) our appreciation of what Scripture itself claims to do, and (B) our robust confidence in and enjoyment of the full benefits of Scripture.

This is, I say, the chief doctrine under fire today. That fact is reflected in weak and wandering preaching, unfocused worship, fad-driven/consumer-driven church movements, wrongheaded counseling, and a cottage-industry of books and speakers who regularly claim direct revelation without being admonished by their denominations or supporters, let alone excommunicated.

Satan's first recorded target in snaring the soul of the first man was the word of God that he, Adam, had. "Ah, so you have a word from God?" Satan in effect smiled. "*But*—" In what followed, Satan insinuated – rats, one more enumeration – (A) What Adam and Eve had from God was *insufficient*, (B) What Adam and Eve had from God was *unreliable*, and therefore (C) What Adam and Eve had from God was *not fully binding* on their consciences.

This ploy worked so well for our adversary then. It worked so well for him in the ages that followed. Why would we imagine that he'd leave his best lure in the tackle-box today?

¹<http://thecripplegate.com/beware-the-horrible-but-monster/>

Some Examples

1. Henry Blackaby

Does God really speak to His people in our day? Yes! Will He reveal to you where He is working when He wants to use you? Yes! God has not changed. He still speaks to His people. If you have trouble hearing God speak, you are in trouble at the very heart of your Christian experience... Knowing God's voice comes from an intimate love relationship with God... You are going to have to watch to see how God uniquely communicates with you. An intimate love relationship with God is the key to knowing God's voice, to hearing when God speaks. You come to know His voice as you experience Him in a love relationship. As God speaks and you respond, you will come to the point that you recognize His voice more and more clearly.
Experiencing God, 136-8.

- "When God reveals His work to you, that is His timing for you to begin to respond to Him" (p. 35).
- "When God reveals to you what He is doing, that is when you need to respond. He speaks when He is about to accomplish His purposes" (p. 81).
- "God reveals His purposes so you will know what He plans to do. If you are to join Him, you need to know what God is about to do. . . God speaks with a purpose in mind" (p. 99).
- "When God starts to do something in the world, He takes the initiative to come and talk to somebody" (p. 66).
- "When God speaks to you, you will be able to know He is the one speaking, and you will know clearly what He is saying to you" (p. 87).

- When he refers to God talking to him, he doesn't mean through Scripture alone
- He means directly, individually, specifically through a voice or impression
- He believes that God reveals Himself, His will, His truth, apart from the Bible

2. John Eldredge

- He has written a number of books for men including *Wild at Heart*; *Walking with God: Talk to Him. Hear from Him. Really*.

"I heard Jesus whisper a question to me: 'Will you let me initiate you?' Before my mind ever had a chance to process, dissect and doubt the whole exchange, my heart leaped up and said yes."
Wild at Heart, 103.

- In another incident he recount an alleged conversation he had with God

What of me, dear Lord? Are you pleased? What did you see? I am sorry that I have to ask, wishing I knew without asking. Fear, I suppose, makes me doubt. Still, I yearn to hear from you – a word, or image, a name or even just a glance from you. This is what I heard: *You are Henry V after Agincourt...the man in the arena, whose face is covered with blood and sweat and dust, who strove valiantly...a great warrior...yes, even Maximus...You are my friend*
Wild at Heart, 135.

- When he refers to God talking to him, he doesn't mean through Scripture...he means directly, individually, specifically through a voice or impression

3. Beth Moore

- She has written a number of books and DVD studies that have been viewed by millions

Referring to the writing of one of her books: "When the message for this book was complete (in His estimation – not mine), God compelled me to ink it to paper with a force of the Holy Spirit unparalleled in my experience. He whisked me to the mountains of Wyoming where I entered solitary confinement with Him, and in only a few short weeks, I wrote the last line."
When Godly People Do Ungodly Things, 53.

Elsewhere she maintains that in the course of compiling data for the book “God explicitly told me that I had plenty and to get busy writing this message.”

When Godly People Do Ungodly Things, 36.

She further asserts that not only was the book’s content from God, but the very title: “Oddly, the concept for this book came complete, God delivering the title to me in full. My Bible was open to these verses for the first time in a long while, and the instruction from the Lord came so unmistakably that I dated it in the margin: April 19, 2000. My pen still didn’t touch the paper until almost exactly a year later when I knew His Spirit was saying to me, ‘Now.’ I headed to the mountains, and within a few weeks it was done.”

When Godly People Do Ungodly Things, 220.

In the midst of writing the book during an April snow, God spoke to her and said: “Come and play.” This is what she writes: “So I did. I built a snowman. I used grapes for his eyes, and a half-moon-shaped sesame snack made the perfect smile. I didn’t give him a nose. I have enough for both of us...I laughed with God. He laughed with me.”

When Godly People Do Ungodly Things, 124.

- She frequently encourages her readers to:
 - “Hear His tender voice speak to you now” (ibid 75)
 - “Begin practicing an open dialogue with Him concerning your past, present and future” (ibid 159)

She describes another divine encounter she had with God: “Never in all my life had I entered the Holy of Holies with God in such a powerful and sustained way. For months I met with Him from the time my children went to school until they walked back through the door. I didn’t answer the phone. I didn’t go to lunch. I met with God day in and day out. He revealed treasures to me that I could never have articulated in words in a mere ten-week study. At times I literally moved to the floor to record His revelations because I was overwhelmed by His Holy Presence.”

Praying God’s Word, 252.

She believes she receives her teachings directly from God revealing them to her individually: “I am not content to keep to myself any hidden treasure I’ve discovered. What little I know, I want others to know. Before God tells me a secret, He knows up front I’m going to tell it! By and large, that’s our ‘deal.’”

Praying God’s Word, 2.

- She also advocates the practice of contemplative prayer which has its roots in ancient mystical practices
- This practice calls for a person to empty their mind, then fill it with imaginative experiences and allow Christ to be the source of their words and actions
- In its pure form, contemplative prayer is practiced by sitting still, quieting, and concentrating on your breathing and repeating a word of choice (maybe the name Jesus, for instance) over and over again
- You’re to concentrate on that word and your breathing, and work to eliminate all thoughts from your mind. Over a period of maybe 20 minutes — and with practice — you can enter into “the silence.” Your mind is blank. You have, in fact, hypnotized yourself. And it is in “the silence” where “God” allegedly speaks to you.

She states: “That is part of contemplative prayer. When we sit back and realize that it is not just that we have something to say to God, it’s that God has something He has to say to us”

- When she refers to God talking to him, she doesn’t mean through Scripture; She means directly, individually, specifically through a voice or impression

4. Sarah Young

- Author of *Jesus Calling*

During that same year I began reading *God Calling*, a devotional book written by two anonymous “listeners.” These women practiced waiting quietly in God’s Presence, pencils and paper in hand, recording the message they received from Him. The messages were written in first person, with “I” designating God...The following year, I began to wonder if I, too, could receive messages during my times of communing with God. I had been writing in prayer journals for years, but that was one-way communication: I did all the talking. I knew that God communicated with me through the Bible, but I yearned for more. Increasingly, I wanted to hear what God had to say to me personally on a given day. I decided to listen to God with pen in hand, writing down whatever I believed he was saying. I felt awkward the first time I tried this, but I received a message. It was short, biblical, and appropriate...My journaling has changed from monologue to dialogue. Soon, messages began to flow more freely, and I bought a special notebook to record these words. This new way of communicating with God became the high point of my day. I knew these writings were not inspired as Scripture is, but they were helping me grow closer to God.

Jesus Calling, xi-xii

I have continued to receive personal messages from God as I mediate on Him. The more difficult my life circumstances, the more I need these encouraging directives from my Creator. Sitting quietly in God’s Presence is just as important as the writings I glean from these meditative times. In fact, some days I simply sit with Him for a while and write nothing...This practice of listening to God has increased my intimacy with Him more than any other spiritual discipline, so I want to share some of the messages I have received. In many parts of the world, Christians seem to be searching for a deeper experience of Jesus’ Presence and Peace

Jesus Calling, xii-xiii

5. The Practice of LectioDivina/Contemplative Prayer/Centering Prayer

Question: "What is LectioDivina?"²

Answer: LectioDivina is Latin for "divine reading," "spiritual reading," or "holy reading" and represents a method of prayer and scriptural reading intended to promote communion with God and provide special spiritual insights. The principles of lectiodivina were expressed around the year 220 and later practiced by Catholic monks, especially the monastic rules of Sts. Pachomius, Augustine, Basil, and Benedict.

The practice of lectiodivina is currently very popular among Catholics and Gnostics, and is gaining acceptance as an integral part of the devotional practices of the Emerging Church. Pope Benedict XVI said in a 2005 speech, “I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of lectiodivina: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart.” Lectio is also said to be adaptable for people of other faiths in reading their scripture—whether that be the Bhagavad Gita, the Torah, or the Koran. Non-Christians may simply make suitable modifications of the method to accommodate secular traditions. Further, the four principles of lectiodivina can also be adapted to the four Jungian psychological principles of sensing, thinking, intuiting, and feeling.

The actual practice of lectiodivina begins with a time of relaxation, making oneself comfortable and clearing the mind of mundane thoughts and cares. Some lectio practitioners find it helpful to concentrate by beginning with deep, cleansing breaths and repeating a chosen phrase or word several times to help free the mind. Then they follow four steps:

Lectio - Reading the Bible passage gently and slowly several times. The passage itself is not as important as the savoring of each portion of the reading, constantly listening for the "still, small voice" of a word or phrase that somehow speaks to the practitioner.

Meditatio - Reflecting on the text of the passage and thinking about how it applies to one's own life. This is considered to be a very personal reading of the Scripture and very personal application.

² Taken from gotquestions.org

Oratio – Responding to the passage by opening the heart to God. This is not primarily an intellectual exercise, but is thought to be more of the beginning of a conversation with God.

Contemplatio - Listening to God. This is a freeing of oneself from one's own thoughts, both mundane and holy, and hearing God talk to us. Opening the mind, heart, and soul to the influence of God.

Naturally, the connection between Bible reading and prayer is one to be encouraged; they should always go together. However, the dangers inherent in this kind of practice, and its astonishing similarity to transcendental meditation and other dangerous rituals, should be carefully considered. It has the potential to become a pursuit of mystical experience where the goal is to free the mind and empower oneself. The Christian should use the Scriptures to pursue the knowledge of God, wisdom, and holiness through the objective meaning of the text with the aim of transforming the mind according to truth. God said His people are destroyed for lack of knowledge ([Hosea 4:6](#)), not for lack of mystical, personal encounters with Him.

Those who take a supernatural approach to the text tend to disconnect it from its context and natural meaning and use it in a subjective, individualistic, experiential way for which it was never intended. Here is where lectio and Gnosticism share a similarity. Christian Gnosticism is the belief that one must have a "gnosis" (from Greek Gnosko, "to know") or mystical, inner knowledge obtained only after one has been properly initiated. Only a few can possess this mystical knowledge. Naturally, the idea of having special knowledge is very appealing and makes the “knower” feel important and unique in that he/she has a special experience with God that no one else has. The “knower” believes that the masses are not in possession of spiritual knowledge and only the truly “enlightened” can experience God. Thus, the reintroduction of contemplative, or centering, prayer—a meditative practice that focuses on having a mystical experience with God—into the Church. Contemplative prayer is similar to the meditative exercises used in Eastern religions and New Age cults and has no basis whatsoever in the Bible, although the contemplative pray-ers do use the Bible as a starting point.

Further, the dangers inherent in opening our minds and listening for voices should be obvious. The contemplative pray-ers are so eager to hear something—anything—that they can lose the objectivity needed to discern between God’s voice, their own thoughts, and the infiltration of demons into their minds. Satan and his minions are always eager for inroads into the minds of the unsuspecting, and to open our minds in such ways is to invite disaster. We must never forget that Satan is ever on the prowl, seeking to devour our souls ([1 Peter 5:8](#)) and can appear as an angel of light ([2 Corinthians 11:14](#)), whispering his deception into our open and willing minds.

Finally, the attack on the sufficiency of Scripture is a clear distinctive of lectiodivina. Where the Bible claims to be all we need to live the Christian life ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)), lectio’s adherents deny that. Those who practice “conversational” prayers, seeking a special revelation from God, are asking Him to bypass what He has already revealed to mankind, as though He would now renege on all His promises concerning His eternal Word. [Psalm 19:7-14](#) contains the definitive statement about the sufficiency of Scripture. It is “perfect, reviving the soul”; it is “right, rejoicing the heart”; it is “pure, enlightening the eyes”; it is “true” and “righteous altogether”; and it is “more desirable than gold.” If God meant all that He said in this psalm, there is no need for additional revelation, and to ask Him for one is to deny what He has already revealed.

The Old and New Testaments are words from God to be studied, meditated upon, prayed over, and memorized for the knowledge and objective meaning they contain and the authority from God they carry, and not for the mystical experience or feeling of personal power and inner peace they may stimulate. Sound knowledge comes first; then the lasting kind of experience and peace comes as a byproduct of knowing and communing with God rightly. As long as a person takes this view of the Bible and prayer, he/she is engaging in the same kind of meditation and prayer that Bible-believing followers of Christ have always commended.

A Summary Evaluation

- At stake in this issue are the following contrasting concepts:

Objective truth vs. Subjective truth

External vs. Internal

Revelation vs. Illumination

Rational vs. mystical

The Danger of Subjectivism and Mysticism

- Subjectivism defined – reliance on personal experiences, feelings, impressions for validating truth
- Subjectivism views the source of truth or reality to be inside a person
- It involves the rejection of all objective standards such that truth or reality is not able to be verified by external validation
- It results in a “truth is what is true for me” mentality because all that matters is personal experience
- Subjectivism, when it is applied to the spiritual realm, is known as mysticism
- Mysticism is the pursuit of a subjective religious experience
- Mysticism defined – The belief that spiritual realities are verified by inward feelings, hunches, or experiences. It is also the belief that one has a special receiving line or method of communication from God.
- It looks for truth inside via feelings, intuition, imagination, personal visions, inner voices, etc. rather than outside via the objective Word of God
- The problem with mysticism is that there is no way to objectively verify whether it’s true or not
- Mystical experiences are unique only to the person who experiences them so they cannot be tested
- Arthur Johnson: a mystical experience is primarily an emotive event, rather than a cognitive one
- So, it generally results in a low view of God’s Word because their experiences and inner impressions come to have greater weight than the Scriptures
- That’s why Scripture condemns mysticism
- There were false teachers in Colossae teaching that Christ was not sufficient – needed more than Christ
 - Christ plus philosophy (2:8)
 - Christ plus legalism (2:16-17)
 - Christ plus mysticism (2:18-19) - False teachers claimed a mystical union with God
 - Christ plus asceticism (2:20-23)
- So Paul is saying Christ is sufficient and that they should not follow those false teachers
- Because they were claiming that you needed worship angels in order to really experience truth
- They pursued visions.....They sought revelation from God outside of Scripture
- They pursued a mystical union with God through inner experiences, feelings, hunches
- Paul writes Colossians to tell the believers there that they are complete in Christ: Col 2:10 ~ and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority

- Paul addresses mysticism in Col 2:18-19 ~ Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.
- That's the danger of mysticism – thinking that inner impressions, emotions, feelings, hunches, promptings are the marks of true spirituality and intimacy with the Lord

The Canon is Closed

- Revelation has ceased...the canon is closed...there is no more revelation being given today
- We have the full written revelation of God and there is nothing to add to that
- Yes, God spoke to ancient believers audibly and through visions, dreams, etc.
- That's because they did not have the full written revelation of God as we do
- But we have the completion of God's written revelation so there is no need for further revelation
- 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.
 - Yes, God spoke in many other ways prior to Christ (visions, dreams, directly, angels, a donkey, writing on a wall) – God can lead this way when He chooses
 - But that's not how He leads anymore...we live in a different era
 - Christ is superior to all other forms of revelation
 - God can speak to His people in many ways, but God has spoken to us by means of His supreme and superior revelation, Jesus Christ!!
 - His point is – why go back to an inferior method of revelation?
- Jude 3 ~ Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.
- Revelation 22:18-19 ~ I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.
- All special revelation has ceased because Christ and His Word is sufficient
- Now, normally people who claim that God told them to do something have no intention of putting that on the same level of divine revelation
- They believe the “subjective leading of the Lord” is something different than revelation that was given in Scripture
- They say it is not on the same plane as Scripture but that it is still God communicating His will personally to them
- They say that God speaks today but not with the same authority as he did in his Word
- Problem is that you can't say “God is speaking today but not on the same level as Scripture”
- Revelation is revelation...All revelation is authoritative...God doesn't speak non-authoritatively....When He speaks, it's authoritative

Apart from the Spirit working through Scripture, God does not promise to use any other means to guide us, nor should we expect Him to. When we read the Bible, we know we are hearing from God. We are not only reading what God has inspired by the Spirit, but what He continues to say by the same Spirit. By contrast, hearing from God outside the Bible in these last days is always more tenuous, less clear, and less authoritative. We have no promise in Scripture that God will speak to us apart from the Spirit speaking through His Word.

Kevin DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, 68-69.

The Holy Spirit *is* working mightily in the church today, but not in the way most charismatics think. The Holy Spirit's role is to empower us as we preach, teach, write, talk, witness, think, serve, and live. He *does* lead us into God's truth and direct us into God's will for our lives. But He does it *through* God's Word, never apart from it. To refer to the Holy Spirit's leading and empowering ministry as inspiration or revelation is a mistake. To use phrases such as "God spoke to me," or "This wasn't my idea; the Lord gave it to me," or "These aren't my words, but a message I received from the Lord" confuses the issue of the Spirit's direction in believers' lives today. Inviting that kind of confusion plays into the hands of the error that denies the uniqueness and absolute authority of Scripture. The terms and concepts of Eph 5:18-19 and 2 Pet 1:21 are not to be mixed. Being filled with the Spirit and speaking to one another in psalms and hymns is not the same as being moved by the Holy Spirit to write inspired Scripture.

John MacArthur, *Does God Still Give Revelation?* (A366)