

The Unsettling Trend

Theological Confusion and Lack of Confidence in Scripture

“Every case of special guidance given to individuals in the Bible has to do with that person’s place in the outworking of God’s saving purposes. . . . [There are] no instances in the Bible where God gives special and specific guidance to the ordinary believing Israelite or Christian in the details of their personal existence.”¹

The Current Confusion

The area where we live in Southern California has a lot of ants. They like the weather as much as we do! Sometimes our kitchen has trails of ants hiking to that one bowl that someone left some food in. Yet when you start to clear them out, they scurry this way and that in total confusion. Watching ants go after food is a bit like watching people march after delicious-sounding claims that God speaks outside of Scripture and all Christians should expect the same. Books on hearing God’s voice in your head abound and, in their enthusiasm for the things of God, things get confused.

1 Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Wisdom* (Paternoster, 1987), 540.

Some “know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29). They say God can do anything so hearing a voice or getting an impression is in the realm of possibility. The Spirit wants them to open a Bible and see the true beauty of it in context, according to authorial intent, yet they run with their superstitious ideas like disoriented, confused ants—and many follow.

Within modern evangelicalism the widespread confusion and lack of confidence in Scripture is epidemic. Many Christians who have left their Bible behind like Bunyan’s Christian in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* left his scroll. They pray, “Lord, speak to me,” with no Bible in sight. Other consider God’s voice elusive, like the Bigfoot or Loch Ness Monster of the Christian life. They hear it exists but are unsure how to experience it.

When it comes to God’s voice, widely divergent views abound.

On one end of the spectrum—position yourself just right and it will be revealed to you miraculously, like early cellphone days, stand just right to get a signal. Try hard enough, or be good enough, or sit still long enough, and God will tell you clearly, the answer will literally drop out of the sky. That is how I used to think.

On the other end of the spectrum—no huge secret, simply open your Bible and read it. God is speaking to you. Trust what the Lord says in the objective written Word for wisdom and make wise decisions based on the Bible applied to life. God will not “tell” you exactly whom to marry, where to go to college, what car to buy. You need to trust God and make a choice.

Why the confusion? Many professing believers live with ongoing ignorance of the Word, misguided thoughts and feelings that can lead to idolatry and spiritual pride.

Ignorance of the Word

Many church members do not know what the Word of God says because they do not take the time to read the Bible. They

assume what the Bible says or just accept what they were taught, with little discernment. Some pay closer attention to the notes in their study Bible than the actual words of Scripture. It is the result of sin, worldliness, and churches dumbing down teaching and not expecting people to carry their Bibles. Everyone thinks I'm talking about someone else, not them, and someone else's church, not theirs. The Lord is grieved when His people neglect His Word and do not know what it says. "Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land. . . . My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge" (Hosea 4:1, 6).

The supremacy of Scripture, not your subjective ideas, is the singular reason we hear God's voice solely in the Word today. Scripture is supreme and it is sufficient. It is all you need. The Spirit will take what is Jesus' (John 16:14)—the written Word—and reveal it to you, helping you grasp and understand it. Claiming to have heard something from God, either a new revelation or a revealed message regarding what you should do in life, is to be suspected, not expected.

Misguided Thoughts and Feelings

Nowhere in Scripture does God promise "words" apart from His Word. Many well-meaning believers, who love the Lord Jesus, have slipped on the proverbial spiritual banana peel of expecting to hear God's voice apart from Scripture, living in a constant state of tension, craving microwave answers to life's pressing questions.

God is not the author of confusion. He corrected false prophets who led people astray. He is concerned with right handling of Scripture and sound doctrine. We must not rely on our own understanding. Our senses do not equate exactly with

reality. Our conclusions are not foolproof. You do not always read things right or hear things correctly. And often, when people say they heard from God, it's in their favor.

You may think God is leading you through your thoughts and feelings. The Lord cares about your heart; He does not use you like a robot. You did not believe, nor do you live, as a robot. Often those most adamantly against biblical doctrines clearly taught in Scripture—like the ideas that God knows whom He will save (predestination), and believers being chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (election)—say man's free will drives justification, and at the same time claim God tells them exactly what to do in their daily life.

I am not trying to upset anyone's sincere faith in Christ; I want to straighten out misconceptions about God that keep people from having deep fellowship with Him as He intends. The prevailing teaching sounds as if everyone is an independent contractor that gets to make up their own way of relating to God.

Our subjective feelings are imperfect; only God's objective Word is perfect. Many choose to go with their own mind, feeling disturbed when they hear things like this because it seems like something is being taken away from them or somehow God must be cold and distant. Not by a long shot. You should have deep personal fellowship with the Lord—on His terms.

Not a New Problem: Scripture Plus

I remember my first mission trip, to Irian Jaya, Indonesia, and hearing that the local people who turned to Christ from animism struggled with a tendency towards syncretism, mixing things from their old life into their newfound faith in Christ. How like us! We are more synchronistic than we will admit. Sometimes we are blind to it, adding into biblical Christianity superstitions, eastern mysticism, witchcraft, divination,

all sorts of evil oddities that do not align with the Bible rightly handled.

Our “idol-factory” hearts consistently fabricate false gods that are a figment of our imaginations, limited, man-made objects of idol worship.² We push our ideas onto an imagined god that is not righteous, holy, or all-knowing. God knows. He says, “You cast my words behind you” (Ps. 50:17). “These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you” (Ps. 50:21). He assures us His Word lasts: “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever” (Isa. 40:8). He tells us how foolish it is to presume we know better, saying, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD” (Isa. 55:8). The Scriptures remind us, “you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods” (Gal. 4:8).

Professing believers too often dabble in these ways. John MacArthur says, “We might as well have a sign in the midst of contemporary evangelicalism that says, ‘We are devoted to the unknown god,’ or ‘We are devoted to the god of our own devices, the god of our own imagination, the god of our own creation’ . . . He is a god who is limited in power . . . a god who is limited in knowledge . . . a god who is limited in wisdom . . . a god who is limited in holiness. . . . This is not the true God, and any manufacturing of a false god is a form of blasphemy that dishonors God.”³

I often liken beliefs we hold to carrying around a bucket of rocks. In that proverbial pail are many things you hold dear. Some are right, some shaky, and some simply untrue. As you encounter truths you must accept and believe (like those

2 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.11.45

3 John MacArthur, “A True Knowledge of the True God, Part 2,” *Grace to You*, May 23, 2010, www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-398.

beautiful doctrines of election and predestination), your heart revolts, wanting to hold on to precious gems like your supposed free will. Do not reject necessary truth and proceed in error.

A Crisis of Confidence

Some believers struggle to enjoy the Word and engage with it due to a low intake of Scripture and craving other things. We place a low value upon it, with resulting lack of confidence in it, so that when times get tough we go after something else or try to add things in because we do not trust that Scripture is truly enough.

Many Christians today doubt that it is truly what they need. They think they need another word, something tangible they can put their finger on, beyond a simple Bible. Many opt for the words of others or their own mind. The writer of Hebrews reminds us,

Since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. (Heb. 10:19-23)

Our confidence is in Christ, the Author and Perfector of our faith, and His authoritative voice, His perfect Word. Again, Scripture bolsters us, “Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised” (Heb. 10:35-36). Always present is a tempting tendency to drift from the Word into the realm of feelings, impressions, and preferences of man. By God’s grace, commit