

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 18

PROPHECY AND SPIRITUALITY

The fact that God is no longer directly speaking to believers in this age led to a discussion of spirituality last week. That seemed to be confusing for some people; therefore, I am going to summarize the main points I was making last week and discuss what spirituality looks like today. Bear in my mind these are my thoughts on the issue of spirituality and you may or may not agree, but I am going to present some things for your consideration.

No person is receiving new revelation from God in any form today; therefore, there are no apostles and prophets today and no one is hearing new revelatory words from God or receiving new revelation in any form.

The book of Revelation describes the end of history and the beginning of eternity but it seems to encompass the scope of church history as well. The warning at the end of the book concerning adding to or taking away from God's Words written in that book seem, then, to be applicable to the Word of God in total.

Revelation 22:18–19 ¹⁸I 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; ¹⁹and 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.

Chafer wrote this: "But no continued revelation is impending as the New Testament is terminated; rather the announcement is made that the Lord Himself will soon return and the natural conclusion is that there would be no further voice speaking from heaven before the trumpet heralds the second advent of Christ.

Of no small moment is the fact that since the canon of the Bible was divinely closed no attempts have been made to add to it.

His own inerrant Word was not only received and penned in incomparable writings, but was as inerrantly assembled into one volume and preserved from confusion, injury, and miscarriage of the divine purpose which either subtraction from or addition to the canon would impose." [Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1:93].

Walvoord wrote: "No one can dare add to the Word of God except in blatant unbelief and denial that the Word is indeed God's own message to man. ... What a solemn warning this is to critics in arrogant self-confidence that they are equipped intellectually

and spiritually to determine what is true and what is not true in the Word of God." [John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 338].

Scriptures that either definitely prohibit adding to or taking away from God's Word include Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; 1 Corinthians 4:6; and Revelation 22:18-19. Others that seem to reveal the same prohibitions include Ecclesiastes 3:14 and Jeremiah 23:36. Claiming to receive revelation from God today is to violate the prohibition against adding to the Word of God.

It is very dangerous to presume to speak for God when God has not spoken. That is an arrogant, defiant, rebellious, and extremely sinful thing to do. That truth was clearly expressed by both the Hebrew word דַּבַּר the Greek word ἀσεβέω. The Hebrew word makes it clear it is arrogant, defiant, and rebellious to speak in God's name when He has not spoken. The Greek word which the Septuagint used to translate it connects it to ungodly sinfulness.

God performs miracles at any time He so desires according to His will. What He is not doing today is using intermediary prophets and apostles to perform signs, miracles, and wonders to authenticate His message and His messengers in the presence of the world. He has spoken in the form of the written Word and it has been authenticated. Those who teach the Word properly exegeted validate that truth every time they teach.

I was asked last week whether or not I believed God can do miraculous healing today. The example used was a husband praying for his wife to be healed from cancer. The answer is, "Of course, He can," whenever He so desires to do so but, He is not using mediators in the form of faith healers or prophets or apostles to do it. The patient will probably not even realize something is happening; healing simply takes place. This is not to preclude pastors, elders, deacons, or Christian friends and family from praying for people, laying on hands, and so on, but they do not do the healing; it is not done through them as intermediaries between God and the one who is ill. They are simply asking God to do what God can do. For example, we knew a woman in a previous church who moved away and developed some cancerous tumors and asked those of us in her former church to pray for her, which we did and I'm sure many other people were praying for her as well. When she went in for her surgery, the medical staff took some x-rays to determine the exact location of the tumors for the surgeon and they were gone! She doesn't know when or how her cancer went away and we don't either. That sounds like an awesome God intervention in her life, but we can't say that for certain. The end result was no surgery at that time. Whether or not her cancer ever came back, I don't know. Whether or not that was a miraculous healing from God or something else, I don't know. The biblical purpose of signs, miracles, and wonders was the authentication of the messenger and his message. We have the divinely authenticated Word of God today, complete, inerrant, infallible, and that is sufficient.

Dr. McClain explains this situation very well. "This is not to say that there have been no miracles since that apostolic era; for the sovereign power of God is never limited by time or circumstance. But whatever miracles God may choose to work today are different in character. They are not great *public* exhibitions of divine power; not 'signs' and 'wonders,' designed by their nature to compel belief. When miracles take place during the present era of the Church, as I am sure they do, they are generally veiled by the providential devices of God, thus permitting the wilful [sic] skeptic to attribute the miracle to causes which are secondary, and often making it difficult, if not impossible, for the believer to 'prove' its supernatural character." [Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, pp. 413-413]. Dr. McClain is entirely correct in his doctrine of miracles today.

The Holy Spirit can lead us and guide us in accordance to the World of God through His illuminating ministry. He can engage our conscience to warn us away from sin or to encourage us to do what we know we should be doing in terms of our Christian walk. He can guide our words in accordance with the Word of God, assuming we know the Word of God well enough to be guided through it. When we know the Word, the Holy Spirit can also help us avoid false teachers. He can lead us as we walk in the Spirit in ways we aren't conscious of but none of that is properly termed "God spoke to me" as though we heard words spoken to us. We may not be aware of the Spirit led activities in our lives, but He is operative all the time in believers assuming we aren't quenching the Spirit by how we live our lives.

For example, some years back I went on a mission trip to Russia. A man I went with told me the first time he was asked to go overseas on a mission trip he said "No" because he had to be at work. He immediately felt convicted that he should have said "Yes" instead because he knows how important it is to preach the gospel and give people the opportunity to be saved. God didn't speak directly to him, but it seems likely he experienced a bit of a nudge from the Holy Spirit through the Word of God that proclaims preaching the gospel to the lost. Another man was in a church where some common but doctrinally incorrect teaching was being presented. He questioned the pastor and the answer he got was dismissive and contrary to the Scriptures. When he heard that answer, he was immediately convicted that he needed to leave that church and go elsewhere. Fortunately, he was able to find a good Bible teaching church. God didn't tell him to leave but he knows the Scriptures tell us to flee doctrinally false teaching and that is a function of the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Walking according to the Spirit is to live according to and in conformance with the Word of God. It is not according to experience, emotions, and mysticism. When I refer to emotions, I do not mean that having an emotional reaction to things is not Christian. Emotions are part of our makeup, our humanity. I simply mean that emotions neither validate nor invalidate our faith. Emotions are not faith. Faith is based on facts and justification results from believing the facts about the God-man. I've seen people sobbing uncontrollably when they come to faith because they realize the extent of

their sin. I've seen people sobbing in response to the relief and the joy they feel when they believe. Those are good things but the emotions themselves prove nothing. The extreme emotional reactions people exhibit in Charismatic and Pentecostal worship services at times are not found in the Bible and prove nothing concerning faith or the lack thereof. These emotions are mystical expressions of a false sense of worship. Examples of this are being "slain in the Spirit," roaring like a lion, barking like a dog, or falling to the floor and becoming stuck there by so-called "holy glue." These are not biblical expressions of Christianity. These things were discussed in depth during the Pneumatology series a couple of years ago.

There are proper ways to express our faith and there are improper ways to express our faith.

An improper expression of my faith is to say that God personally spoke to me as an individual person apart from Scripture in the sense that I heard a word directly from Him or received a vision or some other form of divine communication that God did, in fact, use with the prophets and the apostles. We can say in a figurative sense that God is speaking to us through the Scriptures. When we say that a particular Scripture spoke to us we are saying that we understand it doctrinally and it has meaning to us as individual Christians in terms of application. When we speak that way, it is understood that we are affirming the Bible and not some extra-biblical word. But when we say God revealed things to us apart from Scripture, we have crossed a line that should not be crossed for all the reasons we've already discussed. The canon is closed and no new revelation is being given to anyone.

It seems to me, three things can result from experiential, mystical teaching and none of them are good. One result is that people are fooled into thinking these things are normative Christianity and they are not. In other words, this kind of mystical teaching can lead people away from the truth of the Scriptures and into mysticism and into an emotional, experiential practice of what they think is Christianity but is not. Millions of people have been led astray this way today and the far-reaching influence of doctrinally aberrant Christian media and books has brought this behavior into even the most conservative, biblical congregations. The second result is people who know the Bible and understand true spirituality are completely turned off by such God talk. Some people have been unable to find a good church because of the prevalence of this activity in our churches today. The third result is that people can doubt their faith. People may think, "Wow! She is really a great Christian. God talks to her all the time. All these miracles happen to her all the time. But that doesn't happen to me. What's wrong with me? Why doesn't God speak to me like that? I must not be the Christian I think I am. I must not be as good a Christian as I want to be. I must not be nearly the Christian she is. Why can't I be a better Christian so God will speak to me and so I can experience these miraculous things?" The end result is that kind of teaching is anything but edifying; it is instead quite destructive. It doesn't honor God, it doesn't honor the

Word of God, it doesn't affirm the faith of those hearing these false doctrines, and it can discourage people from continuing in their Christian walk.

Words mean things and when we say, "God spoke to me" people understand us to be saying God actually spoke to us in some way so that we received some revelation from Him. People will disguise that by saying He spoke to my heart or I heard a still, small voice (which was a situation unique to Elijah), or some other way to minimize what they mean because they know God really didn't speak to them. The possibility exists that unbelievers can be turned off to Christians and to Christianity by such talk. For example, many years ago I knew a family that was searching for a home. They found a place and related something like this: "God is all over this. It's a miracle that this home was even on the market and that we found it. It's in perfect condition and the location is just perfect and the price is so good. God is really taking care of us in this. God just really made all this happen." A week or so later the house failed inspection, it had serious defects, and that made it far too expensive and the financing became questionable and the deal fell through. In terms of life and real estate transactions, that's all normal, but how does that square with their initial claim that God had miraculously brought them to this place and He had divinely laid it all out for them to have this house? If God was really in it, it should have been what they said it was from the beginning but it wasn't.

There are two lessons in this. First, be careful what you say; you don't know who's listening to you. If they related that scenario to unbelievers, and I don't know whether they did or not, can you imagine what unbelievers might think you and about God and about Christianity when the deal fell through? If I think this is all a bunch of holy baloney, what are unbelievers going to think? This kind of thing can make Christians, God, and Christianity look pretty silly or even crazy. Secondly, I don't think God cares one bit where you live. You can live in a perfect multimillion-dollar mansion or you can live in a rundown shack. You can live in Fredericksburg, Texas, or you can live in New York City or you can live in Shadrinsk, Russia, or anywhere else you want to live. In terms of living a spiritual life, the house and the location are unimportant. You can live wherever you want to live in whatever house in which you want to reside; that is completely your choice. What God cares about is what you are doing for Him no matter where you live and no matter the state of the house in which you live. That is the important issue and that is the proper spiritual orientation to where we live and what we do while we are there. Live in any house in any place you so desire but serve God while you are there. When, or if, you move on, serve Him in the new place equally well. And that same line of thinking applies to many other life situations as well such as employment and the choice of a spouse, and so on. Whatever your circumstances, the question is what are you doing for God? Are you walking in the Spirit and serving and glorifying Him? Even if God is personally superintending and placing these sorts of things in our lives, we aren't going to be aware of it. Attributing everything to God as though your life is divinely and personally guided second by second every day is to speak presumptuously. Within the parameters of the Word of God, we have been granted a tremendous amount of

freedom and liberty to make decisions concerning how we order our lives. God doesn't have to speak to us today or guide our every decision because He has taken care of these things in the Word of God. The Word is sufficient for directing and guiding our lives.

It is important for us to remember, that Peter said the Word of God is far more valuable than any mystical or emotional experience we may have. Peter had the very real experience of seeing the glorified Lord with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration yet he said the prophetic Word as recorded in the Word of God is far better.

2 Peter 1:16–21 ¹⁶For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. ¹⁷For 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”— ¹⁸and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. ²⁰But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, ²¹for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Paul warned Timothy to teach sound doctrine because people will eventually want to have their ears tickled by teachers who will cater to their desires rather than to their spiritual needs. This is the situation we have today with the claims that God is speaking directly to believers and still performing signs, wonders, and miracles in the presence of people as authenticating events.

2 Timothy 4:1–4 ¹I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

Concerning our spirituality in this dispensation, my conclusion is, if we walk according to biblical guidelines, we will be walking in the Spirit and doing God's will. Life will unfold, good and bad, and we will accordingly react and adjust to each situation as our faith and the Word of God guides and demands we do. Whether or not God is actually at work in any specific instance, we may or may not know. Our assignment is to walk in the Spirit according to the guidelines and doctrines taught in the Bible and we do that by living out a biblical worldview with a focus on the Millennial Kingdom and beyond and

by working to glorify Christ here and now with the purpose in mind that what we are doing now is preparing us for eternity. That is, in my opinion, what it means to be a spiritual Christian in this age. God is not providing new revelation; therefore, there are no prophets and apostles today and God is not speaking directly to people today. Being a spiritual Christian has nothing to do with experience, emotion, or mysticism. Ever.

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