

## The Sufficiency of Scripture and the Continuing Revelation of God

All Christians today believe that the general revelation of God continues to witness of the Creator's power and man's culpability through creation and man's conscience. However, when Christians speak of God's continuing revelation today, they usually mean that God is still revealing Himself to men using special words, visits, or miraculous signs outside of the spiritual illumination of the canon of Scripture. This extra-biblical revelation of God seems attractive when contrasted with the revelation of Scripture since it is fresh, dynamic, and intimately personal.

However it is important that this belief and its implications be carefully examined. First continuing revelation is contrary to the sufficiency of Scripture as a closed canon. If God, through the inspiration of Scripture, has already "*given us everything pertaining to life and godliness,*"<sup>1</sup> then what need do believers have for more extra-biblical revelation from God? Now that the canon is closed, the need for extra-biblical revelation undermines the very quality and practice of the Biblical record itself. According to the prophet Isaiah, the law and testimony of God is all that people should seek after when they desire to hear from God.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, if God is still revealing profitable truth about Himself and how to live for Him, what hinders this extra-biblical revelation from being added to the Holy Scriptures? Interestingly, most Christians who believe in the need for continuing special revelation today do agree that the canon of Scripture is closed<sup>3</sup> and do not advocate adding personal dreams, visions, or words to the Bible. So this inconsistency practically reveals the diminished authority of objective truth and the inflated authority practically given to feelings and experience. Rather than trusting in all "the things freely given to us by God"<sup>4</sup> in His Word, experiences and (often) highly emotional encounters with the Holy Spirit are given a higher authority to formulate the basis of Christianity and become the standard for spiritual achievement. However "the work of the Holy Spirit in personal experience cannot be disengaged from Scripture. The Spirit does not speak in ways that are independent of Scripture. Apart from Scripture we would never have known of God's grace in Christ. The biblical Word, rather than spiritual experience, is the test of truth."<sup>5</sup>

The Holy Spirit does in fact guide Christians; however He will reveal nothing more than Christ and His Word in this guidance.<sup>6</sup> He is the Spirit of Truth.<sup>7</sup> In this way, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is patterned after the ministry of Christ Himself, for neither Christ nor the Spirit speaks on His own initiative, but only those words which were given to Him by the Father.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore contrary to popular charismatic beliefs on pneumatology, "the work of the Holy Spirit in personal experience cannot be disengaged from Scripture. The Spirit does not speak in ways

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 1:3.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 8:19-20.

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Proverbs 30:5-6; Revelation 22:18-19.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:12.

<sup>5</sup> *The Cambridge Declaration of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals*, April 20, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> John 3:32-34, 16:13-15.

<sup>7</sup> John 14:16-17.

<sup>8</sup> John 12:49-50, 14:26.

that are independent of Scripture. Apart from Scripture [believers] would never have known of God's grace in Christ. The biblical Word, rather than spiritual experience, is the test of truth."<sup>9</sup> Since the Holy Spirit is the Scripture's divine Author, He both authenticates its message to believers by His inward witness, and His ministry of illumination which opens the believers' minds to understand the Scriptures.<sup>10</sup> The Holy Spirit leads and controls (or fills) believers with the Word of God. He causes the word of Christ to dwell "richly" within the hearts of believer.<sup>11</sup>

The Scriptures hence are the primary means the Holy Spirit employs in order to guide Christians. The guidance of the Holy Spirit cannot operate in isolation from or against Scripture. Certainly God is a God of wonders<sup>12</sup>, and He can do anything He desires in heaven and on earth.<sup>13</sup> Every born-again believer is proof that miracles still happen!<sup>14</sup> However when Christians hold to continuing special revelation they typically assert that the use of miracles and the supernatural sign gifts is still the normative means by which God reveals Himself to man. While not disputing that the miraculous and supernatural can still occur, a Biblical review of these matters negates their employment as a standard mode or authoritative vehicle of revelation.

Historically the spectacular works of God were typically given to authenticate His revelation and revelation bearer,<sup>15</sup> thus diminishing in need after the completion of the canon of the sufficient Scripture.<sup>16</sup> The Scriptures also witness to the following dangers of supernatural signs in the church: possible confusion or misinterpretation of the miracle,<sup>17</sup> the supernatural is not necessarily an indication of God's work or presence,<sup>18</sup> Satan's ability to deceive even believers through counterfeited miraculous gifts,<sup>19</sup> and the deceitful greed of man's heart to covet the power and prestige of an association with the supernatural.<sup>20</sup> While of course none of these dangers unequivocally invalidate God's ability to gloriously employ the miraculous in his present-day church, there are several Biblical truths which must always govern His use of miracles, prophecy, and tongues: (1) Spiritual sign gifts are never to be an indication of salvation, spiritual maturity, or a measure of comparison in the Body of Christ.<sup>21</sup> (2) Christian love is preeminent to sign gifts.<sup>22</sup> (3) Spiritual sign gifts are not intended to be divisive in the Body of Christ.<sup>23</sup> (4) The exercise of spiritual sign gifts is never a goal unto itself; rather the goal is always the edifying of the Body of Christ.<sup>24</sup> (5) Spiritual prophesy is defined by

---

<sup>9</sup> From the Cambridge Declaration of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, April 20, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Paraphrased from the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy.

<sup>11</sup> Colossians 3:16.

<sup>12</sup> Exodus 15:11.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel 4:35.

<sup>14</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17.

<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Timothy 3:16-17.

<sup>17</sup> John 12:27-29; Acts 14:11; 1 Corinthians 14:7-9.

<sup>18</sup> Deuteronomy 13:1-3; Matthew 7:22.

<sup>19</sup> Revelation 13:13-14.

<sup>20</sup> 2 Kings 5:20-27; Acts 8:18-23.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:15-18, 29-30.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:1-2.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:25-26.

<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:12.

edification, exhortation, and comfort.<sup>25</sup> (6) The practice of any spiritual gift should always give a certain and clear message.<sup>26</sup> (7) Public speaking in tongues (if done at all) must be done in a limited and orderly manner, and must have interpretation.<sup>27</sup> (8) Prophesying should be done orderly, one by one, in submission to God's Word.<sup>28</sup> (9) God does hear and answer the prayer of faith and will answer in accordance with His own perfect will for the sick, suffering, and afflicted.<sup>29</sup> (10) Miracles performed by God will never contradict His character or ways as revealed to man in the Scriptures.<sup>30</sup> Much practice of the 'supernatural' in today's church would have to stop if only they were submitted to these Biblical truths.

Essentially then, because of the sufficiency of the closed canon of Scripture, man no longer "needs" special miracles or the supernatural sign gifts, and they should not be sought after. If God according to His will determines to bring Himself glory through the miraculous, it will always be in conformance with His clear and authoritative Word. The Scriptures therefore are the sole rule of governing and authenticating the supernatural and miraculous.

---

<sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:3-4, 31.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:6-9, 19, 23-25.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:13, 27-28.

<sup>28</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:29-32.

<sup>29</sup> Luke 18:1-6; 2 Corinthians 12:6-10; James 5:13-16; 1 John 5:14-15.

<sup>30</sup> Numbers 23:19; Psalms 102:25-27; 2 Timothy 2:13; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17.