

3 Common Ways God Speaks to You—and How He Wants You to Respond

Fairly often I encounter Christians who describe God “speaking to them.” It is as if the Almighty actually verbalizes His unique direction right into their eardrums. Frankly, I am skeptical. I do not hear voices nor do I see detached hands writing on the wall. Yet, the Bible is clear that Christ is living and active among His people and He has commanded the churches to “hear what the Spirit is saying” (Rev. 2-3).

The Bible is prolific about the importance of hearing God’s voice—in both Old and New Testaments. Yet, how do we understand God’s pledge to speak to us without slipping into some kind of extra-biblical, subjective mysticism? Let’s try to understand.

The Priority of Hearing God’s Voice

Throughout the Old Testament, the precursor to obedience was hearing God’s voice, most often through His commandments revealed in the divine Scripture. Dozens of times in Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Jeremiah we find references to the voice of the Lord in connection with His revealed commandments. “You have affirmed today that the Lord is your God and vowed to walk in His ways, and to keep His statutes, and His commandments, and His judgments, and to listen to His voice” (Deut. 26:17). In Daniel 9, the sins of God’s people are described as a failure to hear and obey God’s voice (9:10-11,14). The Psalms describe God’s voice speaking through His creation (18:13, 19:3, 29:3-9, 68:33, 77:18).

In the New Testament, Jesus announces that His sheep will hear and know His voice and follow Him (John 10:3-4, 16, 27). He

also declared that everyone who is of the truth hears His voice (John 18:37). He predicted that day when His voice will resurrect the dead from the grave (John 5:25, 28). In Revelation 3:2, He calls on those within the lukewarm, self-sufficient Laodicean church to hear His voice as He knocks on the door, offering restored fellowship. The book of Hebrews calls us to not harden our hearts when we hear His voice.

How Do We Hear God's Voice?

His voice is contained in and consistent with His revealed word: Throughout the Scripture, hearing God's voice is synonymous with obeying His commands. The Bible is "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3, ESV). In the closing verses of the New Testament we are warned not to add to or take away from the revealed word (Rev. 22:18-19). The sufficiency, authority, relevance and transformational power of the Scriptures trump any individual revelation of the voice of God.

His voice is apprehended and applied by His Spirit – 1 Corinthians 2:9-12 says it so completely (read it well):

But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, except the spirit of the man which is in him? Likewise, no one knows the things of God, except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, so that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God."

The indwelling, all-knowing life-tutor, the Holy Spirit, gives us understanding to hear and apply the voice of God in His word. Those who do not have the Holy Spirit do not hear or understand the instructive voice of the Holy Spirit. First

Corinthians 2:14 says, "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

His voice is comprehended and confirmed among His people: The assembled church and gathered leaders in the Book of Acts heard from God as He spoke to them by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2, 15:28) as they waited on the Lord and sought His will. The confirmation of a community of godly believers is a necessary dimension of the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Characteristics of the Voice of God

When the Lord's voice resounds, it is precise, powerful and penetrating. God's will is clear, not muddled or mysterious.

His voice brings the exactitude of His word to our hearts and minds in order to direct and confirm. His voice is powerful.

By His command all of creation emerged and by His voice he rules over creation (see Psalm 29). The voice of Christ was authoritative and powerful during His earthly ministry (Luke 4:26). In Revelation, His voice is depicted as the force of "many waters" (Rev. 1:15). God's voice is also penetrating, cutting deep into the heart and soul of man, where real change occurs (see Heb. 4:12). The mouth of the risen Christ is described as a "sharp two-edged sword" (Rev. 1:16).

Our Response to the Voice of God

We respond in obedience: The primary word associated with the idea of the voice of the Lord is "obey." (Even a casual search in a concordance will demonstrate this convincingly). As Mary said at the first miracle of Jesus, "Whatever He says to you, do it" (John 2:5). The defining characteristic of those who "hear from the Lord" is a life of Christ-honoring obedience, not some irregular state of emotion or braggadocio.

We respond in trust: Psalm 29 is a dramatic depiction of the many aspects of the power of the voice of the Lord. At the

end of this psalm, we find a powerful application of what it means to recognize and receive the voice of the Lord. "The LORD will give strength to His people; The LORD will bless His people with peace" (Ps. 29:11). When we hear His voice, we rely on and receive from Him as our source of strength and peace. The "peace, be still" (Mark 4:39) of Jesus' voice is evidenced through a life of trust.

We respond in intimate surrender: The living Christ, walking among the churches, says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me"(Revelation 3:20). This invitation to restored, intimate fellowship with Jesus requires our response of surrender as we open our hearts to His presence and Lordship.

Today . . . If You Will Hear His Voice

Our ultimate response to His voice is very clear (Ps. 95:7; Heb. 3:7, 15, 4:7). Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.

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