

Some of the greatest Trinitarian texts in the Bible are found John 14-16. On the same night that Jesus was arrested, He shared a meal with His disciples and spoke about the deep things of God.

When Jesus told His disciples that He would be leaving them, understandably, most of them were upset. But Philip, being a pragmatist, took the news in stride saying, I'm paraphrasing now, "*Well Jesus, if you've got to go, you've got to go, but before you do, can you show us the Father?*"

To which Jesus replied, "*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father...Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.*"¹

The Father and the Son are distinct, but inseparable. And just moments later, Jesus speaks of another Person—the Holy Spirit—who He refers to as "the Spirit of Truth" and as "the Advocate." Throughout the centuries, theologians have used the term "perichoresis" to describe the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—One God (inseparable), but Three distinct Persons. The Triune relationship is characterized by love, joy, and a mutual abiding in one another.

In John 15, Jesus applied the language of this Triune relationship

¹ John 14:9-10.

² John 15:5.

³ Each of the three answers presuppose the centrality of the cross—apart from the death and resurrection of Christ, and the forgiveness of sins, we cannot be united to God.

to the relationship He desires to have with us. Jesus said, "*I am the Vine; you are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit*"² God is the source of life and fruitfulness; God is the source of meaning and identity. Through Jesus, we are drawn into the Trinitarian life—*Abide in me, as I abide in you.*

The analogy Jesus uses is clear; if you cut a branch off of a vine it will not produce fruit—fruitfulness is a function of connectedness. If the same is true for us, *how do we cultivate communion with God?*

Throughout the history of the church, three classic—and often competing—responses have been given: **(a) We commune with God through the Word;** **(b) We commune with God through the Spirit**—in prayer, worship, and ecstatic experiences; or, **(c) We commune with God through the Sacraments.**³ Not surprisingly, each tradition uses the Scriptures to make its case.

a. The Word: The Evangelical Tradition emphasizes the primacy of God's Word as the means through which we commune with God. Throughout the Gospels Jesus is seen as a Rabbi—a teacher—and He stressed the importance of putting His words into practice. In Matthew 7:24-26 Jesus said, "*everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it*

had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

In John 15:7 we discover that abiding in Jesus includes allowing His words to dwell in us. Before the Ascension, Jesus' final words to His disciples highlights the importance of the Scriptures, "*go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*".⁴

2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that "*All Scripture is God-breathed*" and is essential to life in Christ. In Colossians 3:16, Paul writes, "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*".

In fact, evangelicals are so convinced of the importance of the Scriptures that they even wrote children's songs about it. Here are a few of the songs I learned when I was young:

- Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so...
- Read your Bible pray every day and you'll grow, grow...
- The B.I.B.L.E, yes that's the book for me, I stand alone on the word of God, the B.I.B.L.E

How do we cultivate communion with God? We commune with God through the Word.

(b) The Holy Spirit: The Charismatic Tradition emphasizes the

primacy of the Holy Spirit in cultivating communion with God. After all, John the Baptist described Jesus as the One who will baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit. In John 3, we read that we need to be born from above—born of the Spirit. John 14 and 16 emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit: He will come to live in us, to connect us to Jesus, and remind us of all that Jesus said. Following the Resurrection we're told that Jesus breathed on His disciples saying, "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*"⁵

How do we cultivate communion with God? We commune with God through the Holy Spirit.

(c) Sacramental: The Sacramental Tradition emphasizes the primacy of the sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper—as the means through which we commune with God. The gaps between heaven and earth was bridged when God the Son became flesh and blood; He became human so that we could participate in the life of God.

In John 3, Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to be born from above but He also said that he needed to be born of water—the water is a reference to baptism. In the Great Commission, Jesus said "*go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*". In Romans 6, Paul writes that through baptism, mystically, we commune with Christ in His death and resurrection.

⁴ Matthew 28:19-20.

⁵ John 20:22.

The Sacramental Tradition emphasizes the celebration of the Lord's Supper as the central place for ongoing communion with Christ. In John 6, speaking metaphorically of this Meal, Jesus said, "Unless you eat my flesh"—the Bread—"and drink my blood"—the Cup—"you have no part of me." In 1 Corinthians 10:16, the Apostle Paul writes, "*Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in [a communion with] the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in [a communion with] the body of Christ?*"

Each of these traditions prescribe a path for communion with God—which is the right path?

From my perspective, the error in each tradition is in embracing an either/or kind of thinking: *either we emphasize God's Word, or, we seek the Holy Spirit; either we prioritize the celebration of the Lord's Supper, or we lift up the Word.* Why do we have to choose between them? Didn't Jesus intend His Church to say "yes" to all three? As we keep in step with the Holy Spirit, we participate in the life of the Father and the Son. Both the Word and the Sacraments are means through which we encounter the Living God.⁶

Beginning next Sunday, I'm going to launch a 6 week series on the meaning of the Lord's Supper, but as I wrap up our series on the

Bible this morning **I want to talk about listening to the God who speaks, and the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.**

1. Listening To The God who speaks: In John 1 we read, "*In the beginning the Word [God the Son] already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God...the Word became human and made his home among us.* (John 1:1-2, 14)"

Words are the basic building block of communication; we use words to express our thoughts to the people around us. What does it mean, then, to have this term—Word—applied to God the Son? It communicates something essential about God—He is a God who speaks. A.W. Tozer writes, "The whole Bible supports the idea. God is speaking. Not God spoke [past tense], but God *is* speaking...He fills the world with His speaking voice."⁷

The Bible is the Word of God, but God's Voice predates the Scriptures. Long before the Bible came to be, God spoke words that had creative force. Commenting on Genesis 1, Tozer writes, "In the beginning [God] spoke to nothing, and it became something. Chaos heard [His Voice] and became order; darkness heard [His Voice] and became light."⁸

⁶ Much of what I've said so far come from the teaching of Gordon Smith; Gordon is the President of Ambrose University and Seminary in Calgary, AB.

⁷ Aiden Wilson Tozer, *The Pursuit of God (Kindle Edition)*, 53.

⁸ Tozer, 55.

It's not as though God was silent, then suddenly found His voice, and authored the Bible, before lapsing back into silence. It's in God's nature to reach out to us, to speak to us, and reveal Himself to us.⁹

So what is the relationship between God's Voice, and the Bible?
What makes this book different from every other book?

illus: I want to draw upon an analogy that I once heard used by Nicky Gumbel, the creator of the Alpha program. I have on the screen behind me a picture of a 2003 Saturn Ion; Naomi and I purchased a car like this one in 2005. At the time it had 26,000 km on it, and 13 years later it's still going strong. Every time we need to renew our annual insurance, Naomi and I pray, "*Lord, please, one more year!*" It's been a good, reliable, car for us.

When we bought the car, it came with a manual that highlights its safety features, its controls, and how to troubleshoot a variety of problems that could arise. From time to time I've found it useful, but I relate to this manual in a very different way than I relate to the Bible.

What would you think if I became so enthused with my car, and this book, that I began to set aside daily quiet time to meditate on what it says? What would you say if you discovered that I was memorizing my favourite section from this book? How would you respond if I

invited you to gather weekly, with a small group of friends, in my home, so that we could discuss how this book applies to our lives?

What if I built a large auditorium, organized a weekly Sunday gathering, had someone lead us in songs taken from the text of this book, and brought in Saturn engineering experts to explore the depths of this manual's teaching?

I don't expect any of you would come—I know I wouldn't. It's a ridiculous thought; this is a car manual, and while helpful for understanding and maintaining my car, it doesn't warrant individual study, memorization, or a weekly, communal, gathering.

What makes the Bible different is God's Speaking Voice. Two weeks ago, we looked at 2 Timothy 3:16 which says, "All Scripture is *God-breathed*". Hebrews 4:12 says, "*the word of God is living and active.*" It's not as though God spoke these words once, to a people long ago; God continues to speak through the Bible today.

Tozer writes, "a word of God, once spoken, continues to be spoken, as a child once born continues to be alive, or a world once created continues to exist. And those are but imperfect illustrations, for children die and worlds burn out, but the Word of our God [endures] forever."¹⁰ Jesus once said, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*"¹¹

⁹ Tozer, 60-61.

¹⁰ Tozer, 61.

¹¹ Matthew 24:35.

In talking about the God who speaks, I've said two things so far:

(a) First, God was speaking to humanity before the Bible was written. When God spoke to Abraham and Sarah, to Moses and Miriam, He did so through Voice—at that time, the Scriptures as we know them had not been written. God's Voice was not limited to a written word.

(b) Second, the Scriptures are God-breathed, they are living and active, and He continues to speak through His written Word today.

I want to add one final thought before I move on: (c) When God speaks apart from the Scriptures, He never contradicts the Scriptures. In fact, as we read through the Scriptures, we find this to be true.

When Jesus told Saul to stop persecuting Christians, it wasn't a Scripture that set Saul straight; Jesus appeared in a blinding light and spoke to Saul directly.¹² When God spoke to Peter, revealing His plan to welcome Gentiles into the family of God, He didn't speak through Peter's daily Bible reading. Instead, God spoke to Peter in a dream, and then followed up with specific directions from the Holy Spirit.¹³

Back in the Fall I shared a number of stories from my recent trip to Senegal and Iraq; I met numerous people who God visited, and spoke to in dreams and visions—people who had never seen a Bible, let alone read one. God still speaks apart from the Bible, but when He does, His words are aligned with what the Scripture says—He doesn't contradict Himself.

illus: A number of years ago, I was struggling in my role as a pastor; things were difficult and I was frustrated, and discouraged. More than once I wondered “*Am I accomplishing anything?*” More than once I wondered if it was time for me to leave. I went for a long run one rainy November morning—the weather that day reflected my mood: I was miserable.

As I ran, I poured out my complaint to God—*it's too hard, things aren't going the way I planned, maybe it's time to quit*. But in the middle of my complaint, the Lord interrupted me; I didn't hear a voice, but unprompted a thought—a question—scrolled through my mind. Just as an aside, I've found this is one of the most frequent ways that God speaks to me; my thoughts are running in a particular direction, when a new thought comes out of the blue—often something I would have never considered.

Mid-complaint, the Lord placed the following question in my mind: “*Mark, do you want to be a shepherd to My people?*” The question startled me; I wasn't expecting God to interrupt my complaint. “*Yes, Lord,*” I replied, “*You know that I want to be a shepherd.*” The first question was followed quickly by a second, “*Well then, what kind of shepherd do you want to be? Do you want to run away because things are difficult and discouraging?*”

In John 10, Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd. When trouble comes, when the wolf attacks, the Shepherd stays with the sheep, laying His life down if necessary. The Lord spoke to me that

¹² Acts 9:1-6.

¹³ Acts 10:9-20.

day apart from the Scripture, but His words were in alignment with what the Scriptures say. God speaks today, and when we sense that God might be saying something to us, we test the word. Is this the kind of thing that God would say? Does this word align with what God has already spoken in His word?

At this time I want to briefly look at...

2. The Relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Word

I said earlier that we aren't meant to choose between being people of the Spirit, or, being people of the Word. The Scriptures are God's Word, the Holy Spirit's Word, to humanity. Think again about 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is *God-breathed*". In Hebrew, the word for "breath" is "**ruach**," which can be alternatively translated as "wind" or "spirit;" the corresponding word in Greek is "pneuma." The words "ruach" and "pneuma" are regularly used to refer to the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:21 says, "*For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*" The Holy Spirit is the author of the Scriptures.

And not only has the Holy Spirit authored the Scriptures, He illuminates the Scriptures as we read them today. In John 14:26, Jesus said, "*the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*" John 16:13-14 says, "*when he, the Spirit of truth,*

comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you."¹⁴

A part of the Holy Spirit's work is to illuminate—to shed light on—the Scriptures so that we understand and experience the very truth God is speaking.

If you have ever read the Scriptures, and it seemed like something leapt off the page at you, then you have experienced the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit loves to take this ancient word, making it living and active, so that it continues to speak.

A number of you responded to my request to share your favourite Bible verse, and why. I have no doubt that these "favourite" verses are your favourites because God has spoken and continues to speak to you through them.

One of our High Students named Ephesians 2:8-9 as his favourite verses, "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.*" He writes, "*Although I love the entire Bible... these verses in particular have made an impact in my life...It puts emphasis on the...fact that is by grace, and grace only, that we're saved...there's nothing I can, or anyone can do...to save themselves ...except to put ALL of their faith and trust in the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Amen! The Holy Spirit took these words and made them a personal word to this student.

¹⁴ C.f. 1 Corinthians 2:14.

Another person named Isaiah 41:13 as her favourite verse, “*For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, ‘Do not fear; I will help you.’*” She continues, “This verse has always reassured me and got me through difficult times; I love how it seems He is talking directly to me!” This is the Holy Spirit at work... He is talking to her, and to us when we read the Scripture.

Conclusion: I’m convinced that the Bible remains *A Word For Today*. It’s much more than an ancient, historical, document—it is the Word of God to us, a Word about God, *and*, about us. God isn’t silent, He has spoken, and He continues to speak—the Bible contains the story of God revealing Himself to the world.

Pray

Worship

Benediction