

Spiritual Fruit

by Denis Lyle

The Bible is complete and sufficient for our spiritual growth and understanding, and we do not need additional revelations or special gifts.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:8, Ephesians 2:20, 2 Peter 1:20, Jude 1:3, Revelation 22:18

Topics: "Biblical Authority", "Spiritual Discernment"

Description

Denis Lyle addresses the issue of whether the Bible is enough or if more is needed, focusing on the dangers of seeking extra-biblical revelations and the undermining of the authority of Scripture. He highlights examples of individuals like Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, and various cults who claim to receive special revelations, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the Bible as the complete and final revelation from God. Lyle asserts that special revelations were continual in the past but are now unnecessary as the Bible is complete, efficacious, and authoritative, warning against the dangers of seeking new revelations that can lead to error and fanaticism.

Transcript

Reading: Ephesians 2:11-22

16. IS THE BIBLE ENOUGH OR DO WE NEED MORE

The words, "God told me", has become the anthem of the Charismatic movement. Strange private prophecies are proclaimed by all kinds of people who evidently believe God speaks to them. Probably the most infamous of all is Oral Roberts preposterous death-threat prophecy. Roberts told his nation wide audience

in 1987 that God had threatened to "call him home", if he couldn't raise eight million dollars by his creditors deadline. Whether and how that threat might have been carried out, the world will never know. Roberts received a last minute reprieve in the form of a large check from a Florida dog-tract owner. Even so when two years later Roberts was forced to close his multimillion-dollar Tulsa based City of Faith medical centre he asked God why.

Roberts maintains that God gave him an answer. "God said in my spirit. You and your partners have merged prayer and medicine for the entire world, for the church world and for all generations. I then asked, Is that why after eight years you're having us close the hospital, and after eleven years the medical school.

God said. Yes, the mission has been accomplished in the same way that after the three years of public ministry My Son said on the Cross, Father it is finished". Now we may gasp at Oral Roberts statements and behaviour but he is not the only charismatic who thinks he is receiving private revelation from God. Kenneth Hagin surely has the most unusual story of all. He says that when he was younger and still single, God led him to break off a relationship with a young woman by revealing to him she was morally unclean. How did that happen In a most unconventional way. Hagin claims God miraculously transported him out of church one Sunday right in the middle of the sermon. Worst of all, Hagin was the preacher delivering the message!

" Suddenly I was gone. Right in the middle of my sermon. I found myself standing along a street in a little town fifteen miles away... and I knew it was Saturday night. I was leaning against a building, and I saw this young lady come walking down the street. About the time she got to where I was standing, a car came down the street. The driver pulled up to the curb, sounded the horn and she got into his car. He backed out, turned the other direction, and started out of town... and suddenly I was sitting in the back seat. They went out in the country and committed adultery. And I watched them. I was still in the cloud. Suddenly I heard the sound of my voice, and the cloud lifted. I was standing behind my pulpit. I didn't know what to say, because I didn't know what I had been saying, so I just said, "Everybody bow your head, " and we prayed. I looked at my watch, and I'd been gone about fifteen minutes in the cloud.

When I was shaking hands with people as they went out the door, this young lady came by. I said, "We missed you last night". She said, "Yes, I was over in... and she named the little town. I said, " Yes, I know". Now on the basis of that questionable experience, Hagin determined that the woman was promiscuous and assumes to this day that she was guilty of adultery. He follows that report with a similar one, in which he was suddenly transported into a car where another young woman was supposedly engaged in moral compromise. Immediately after those two stories, Hagin writes,

" You've got to realise friends, that there is a fine line between fanaticism and reality. Many people get off into error seeking experiences". Hagin has never drawn a truer application from his anecdotes. Would God really transport Hagin miraculously into cars so he could witness acts of fornication Did God talk to Oral Roberts Did God threaten to "call him home" Well, most charismatics at one time or another feel that God speaks to them in some specific manner, either through an audible voice, an internal impression, a vision, or simply by using them as a vehicle to write a song, compose a poem, or utter a prophecy.

Now all of this strikes at the very foundation of the Scripture as a completed revelation. Many sincere believers in God's Word have been drawn into charismatic ideas without realising that this teaching undermines the total authority of Scripture. According to the Charismatic view prophecy is still going on. According to the Bible, all revelation was completed in the time of the apostles and no further direct revelation of authoritative truth is to be expected. My, we are living in a day when churches are being filled with people who are looking past the Scriptures for help and growth. Go into the average Christian bookstore and what do you find Well, you'll discover that the

overwhelming majority of books focus on feelings, and experience rather than a solid study of the Bible, doctrine, of theology. Many people do not really care what the Bible says, they are too busy looking for that elusive " something more", that they hope will solve all their problems.

So in the light of these things our question is this. What is the status of the Word of God Is it complete or not

Is it really "the faith which was once for all delivered, or is it still in the process of being revealed to us" Is the Bible enough or do we need more Now what I want to do this... is to make three assertions.

(1) SPECIAL REVELATIONS ARE CONTINUAL

Now perhaps I should say at this point that God has used three wonderful methods as He carefully carved out that most blessed of all books, the Bible. And these three "tools of the Trinity", are referred to as Revelation: Inspiration: Illumination. Think of these three tools like this:

Revelation: From God to Man: Man hears that which God wants written:

Inspiration: From Man to Paper: Man writes that which God wants written.

Illumination: From Paper to Heart: Man receives the light of that which God has written.

Now from the times of the apostles until the present, the true church has always believed that the Bible is complete. God has given His revelation and now Scripture is complete. God has spoken. What He gave is complete, efficacious, sufficient, inerrant, infallible, and authoritative. Attempts to add to the Bible, and claims of further revelation from God, have always been characteristic of heretics and cultists, not the true people of God. Now Bible scholars talk about the canon of Scripture. Do you know the word canon The word canon means "a rule, or standard, or measuring rod."

The canon of Scripture is the sixty six books in your Bible, it is the measuring rod of the Christian faith and it is complete. Yet down through the centuries many groups have claimed to receive new revelation, but all of them have fanatical, heretical, cultic or fraudulent. There was for example:

(a) MONTANISM:

Montanus was a second century heretic from Phrygia who believed he was a prophet sent by God to reform Christianity through asceticism, the practice of glossolalia (tongues), and continued prophetic teaching. He believed that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit in all his teaching, that he had a hot line to heaven. Not surprisingly, one so self-assured won followers. His two leading ones, were ladies, who to the scandalising of many left their husbands to join him. Priscilla and Maximilla were instrumental in the spread of Montanism. Now Montanus and his followers claimed to have received revelation from God that supplemented the Word communicated by Christ and the apostles. They believed the Holy Spirit spoke through the mouths of Montanus and his two prophetesses! Montanus believed that he was living in the last days before the return of Christ. He taught that God's kingdom would be set up in his own village

(Pepuza) in his lifetime, and that he would have a prominent role in it. Now Montanism is not the only group claiming to receive special revelations what about

(b) ROMAN CATHOLICISM:

For surely the Roman Catholic church has added to the Bible by trusting her own church traditions and leaders as authoritative. The Council of Trent (1545-63) which was convened to solidify Catholic opposition to the Protestant Reformation made this statement regarding the equality of Scripture and tradition. "This synod receives, and venerates with equal pious affection and reverence, all the books both of the New and Old Testaments ... together with the said traditions". According to this God has supposedly been giving revelation through the Roman Catholic church since the New Testament era. From these

"said traditions", it was a short step to the infallibility of the pope, who according to Roman Catholic dogma is successor to the apostle Peter. Roman Catholic theology teaches that when the pope speaks Ex Cathedra, that is as pastor and teacher of all Christians he does so with supreme apostolic authority and is infallible. You see, the Roman Catholic system allows for additional revelations equal to Scripture in authority.

Roman Catholicism has added to Scripture such traditions as penance, purgatory, papal infallibility prayers for the dead, and the entire sacramental system.

My, none of these things have Biblical support, but they are affirmed by the Roman Catholic faithful as truth revealed from God through the church. Could it be that charismatics are already building similar traditions of their own Like being slain in the spirit and so on.

There is another group that claims to be receiving special revelations:

(c) NEW EVANGELICALISM:

According to this view the Bible is inspired when it creates an experience for you! In their book "A General Introduction to the Bible", Norman Geisler and William Nix clearly define the neoorthodox view. They say, "The neoorthodox view is that the Bible is a fallible human book. In itself it is not the Word of God,

at best, the Bible only becomes the Word of God to the individual when he encounters Christ through it".

CH Dodd who reflects this position says, "If the Bible is indeed the Word of God, it is so not as the last word". Do you see what they're saying The Bible is not all there is. God is still giving revelation, still inspiring others in the same way He inspired the Bible writers. Now what are we saying Simply this, that down through the centuries, and into our present day, different individuals and groups have claimed to receive special revelations, and claimed their writings are equal to Scripture. What about:

(d) MORMONISM:

The Book of Mormon makes this claim, "Behold I say unto you these things are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me". The Mormons have put three works on par with Scripture. Doctrine and Covenants: Pearl of Great Price, and the Book of Mormon. What about Christian Science Here's another cult that bases its teaching on truth supposedly given by God in addition to Scripture. It calls Mary Baker Eddy, "The revelator of truth for this age". What about the Jehovah

Witnesses As they go from door to door spreading their doctrine of salvation by works. Do they believe they have new revelation Indeed they do. They have said so in their magazine Watchtower. "The Watchtower is a magazine without equal on earth... this is not giving any credit to the magazines publishers, but is due to the great author of the Bible, with its truths and prophecies, and who now interprets its prophecies."

What about the World-wide Church of God founded by Herbert Armstrong with the Plain Truth magazine Do you know Armstrong got his start Through new revelation from Mrs. Armstrong who had a vision in which an angel laid out an entire system for her. She told her husband and a new cult was born. Sun Myung Moon, self styled Messiah from Korea, claims he is a divine messenger from God. Moon says he has the ultimate truth... not from Scripture, not from literature, not from any persons brain. According to

Moon if "his truth", contradicts the Bible, and it does then the Bible is wrong. So we come from (a) (b) (c) (d) to:

(e) NEO-PENTECOSTALISM:

Now I have to distinguish here between Classical Pentecostals with whom many of us have fellowship, and New Pentecostals, which started in the Sixties when the Pentecostal experience invaded the major Protestant denominations. Charismatic author J. Rodman Williams writes in a manner which is typical of so many charismatic authors when he insists that God is still speaking through tongues and prophecies. In his book, "The Era of the Spirit", he writes. "In prophecy God speaks. It is as simple, and profound, and startling as that. What happens in the fellowship is that the word may suddenly be spoken by anyone present, and so variously as Thus saith the Lord breaks forth. Most of course were familiar with prophetic utterances such as recorded in the Bible, and willing to accept it as the Word of God. Isaiah's or Jeremiah's "Thus saith the Lord", we were accustomed to hear, but to hear a Tom or Mary today speak the same way. Many of us had convinced ourselves that prophecy ended with the NT until suddenly the dynamic thrust of the Holy Spirit prophecy comes alive again."

Now this is the position of the Charismatic Movement. My, the Protestant Reformers saved Christianity from extra-biblical errors with the cry, "Scripture Only". Now from charismatics we hear the cry, "Scripture plus the New Revelation". My ... if fundamentalism allows this view to gain a foothold, the uniqueness of Scripture will be sacrificed, and the basis for all we believe will be compromised. If revelation is still continuing the floodgates are open for anything. Kenneth Copeland one of the men associated with The Toronto Blessing claims Jesus gave him a message, during a three day victory campaign in Dallas, Texas. Judge for yourself whether this could be a message from the Christ of Scripture. "Don't be disturbed when people accuse you of thinking you're God. They spoke that way of me, should they not speak that way of you The more you get to be like me, the more they're going to think that way of you. They crucified me for claiming that I was God. But I didn't claim that I was God. I just claimed I walked with Him and that He was in me. Hallelujah. That's what you're doing."

My, Kenneth Copeland's prophecy is false. For the real Christ, the Christ of the New Testament did claim that He was God. Using the covenant name for God, He told the Jewish leaders, "Verily, verily I say unto you,

before Abraham was I am". (Jn 8:58 5:16-18 10:30) Is Copeland genuinely a prophet or is he not one of those whom Peter spoke of when he warned, "but there were false prophets also among the people." (2 Pet 2:1) My, Charismatics have abandoned the uniqueness of Scripture as the only Word of God, and the result is a spiritual free for all. (1) Even to this day!

(2) PARTIAL REVELATION WAS TEMPORAL

Now charismatics and such like speak about prophetic utterances. Now what does the NT have to say about such things Well, lets turn to (1 Cor 13:8-13)

Now its interesting in (13:8) the gifts are reduced to three: in (13:9) they are reduced to two: in (13:10)

" that which is perfect", stands in contrast to the gifts of

(13:9) Now in order to understand what Paul is saying here I want to underscore three things:

(a) A DISTINCTION WE OUGHT TO MARK:

Paul speaks of three gifts:

1. PROPHECY:

This was the speaking forth of the message of God by direct revelation. (Acts 13:1) This amazing spiritual gift was highly valued because the N.T. had not been completed and the early church needed to know God's Word. Paul summed it up when he wrote, "he that prophesieth edifieth the church". (1 Cor 14:4)

2. TONGUES:

This was a God given ability to speak in a known language one has not learned.

3. KNOWLEDGE:

Knowledge given directly by God to meet a given need at that time until the Scriptures were completed. This is revelatory knowledge, not knowledge gained by study.

Now Paul makes an interesting distinction here between these particular gifts. The passive verbs used after the words "prophecies and knowledge", are the same in the King James version although the wording is different. The verbs indicate that something will take place which will cause the gifts of prophecy and knowledge to be abolished. Now the verb which is used after the word

" tongues", is in the middle voice, which could be translated, " tongues shall cease in and of themselves."

So Paul is making a distinction between the gifts of prophecy and knowledge which will be abolished by the coming of "that which is perfect", and the gift of tongues which will cease in and of themselves because their function has ceased. Now in (14:21-22) Paul tells us that tongues were a sign to God's people Israel. They were condemnatory of an unbelieving nation. They were given to enunciate God's judgement and when Titus the Roman sacked the city of Jerusalem and dispersed the Jews over the world in (AD 70) the reason for tongues disappeared and the gift ceased in and of itself. So (a)

(b) A DEFINITION WE OUGHT TO MAKE:

Its crucial we understand the phrase, "when that which is perfect is come..." (13:10) What does Paul mean The word translated here means "to complete, fulfil, mature". Paul is saying that there will be a time when that which is complete will come and that which is partial will disappear. Now some refer this phrase,

" that which is perfect", to the Lord Jesus Himself. Still others say this is the Rapture. But we are not dealing here with the Second Coming but with the temporary nature of spiritual gifts. There is no need to tell us that gifts will cease when we reach heaven. The key thought is not that of Glorification, but that of Revelation.

So the phrase, "that which is perfect", refers to the perfect revelation of God the Bible. You see:

1. In (13:9) we have a Temporary and Partial Revelation:

Knowledge and Prophecy were given to the Early Church during the interim period when the NT was not yet completed. The phrase, "in part," means "piece by piece, little by little, imperfectly and incompletely". So we see from (13:9) that this revelation was partial and from (13:8) it was temporary. 1.

2. In (13:10) we have a Permanent and Complete Revelation:

" That which is perfect", means the final thing, the completed thing. When the complete canon of Scripture was fully revealed these temporary and partial gifts disappeared. My, if prophesying and knowledge continue until the Lord comes then the Bible is still being written. But back to (1 Cor 13) (a) (b)

(c) A DEVELOPMENT WE OUGHT TO MENTION:

In (13:11-12) two illustrations are brought before us.

1. In (13:11) the Thought is from Infancy to Maturity:

The development from child to man, from infancy to maturity is brought forward to illustrate the revelation of God moving on toward completion. In other words, Paul is saying that these gifts belonged to the childhood of the church. Now infancy is a wonderful period of time in the life of any human being. Its a thrilling day for Dad and Mum when the baby begins to talk. Incidentally, fathers teach your children to say Mummy first, then they know who to call in the middle of the night. But suppose 40 years later when you come down to the breakfast table and your 40 year old son looks across the table and says, "Da, Da, baby want some milk". Its not thrilling then. My, do you see what Paul's saying " Its time for you babies to grow up and start talking like men. Tongues and these other gifts belong to spiritual childhood. Grow up and quit acting like children". (14:20) Now what is Paul saying here is the very opposite to what is being taught today. Many teach today that these temporary gifts of the Holy Spirit are marks of spiritual maturity. Paul says they are marks of spiritual infancy. These gifts belonged to the childhood of the church. Today, the church's life and ministry are founded on the Word of God.

(Acts 20: 17-38) So in (13:11) 1. But:

2. In (13:12) the Thought is from Partial to Complete:

The word "glass, or mirror", is the Word of God as revealed up to the time the apostle was writing. The word " darkly", means in an enigma. The word enigma means a puzzling statement that needs further clarification. Something must be added to explain its meaning. Now does this not fit perfectly the idea of the partial state of revelation at the time when these gifts were operating, awaiting the full, clear revelation of the completed Scriptures.

" Face to face," is the full and clear revelation of the Scriptures. (Num Ch 12) Now lets gather in the threads. What is Paul saying here Partial revelation is Temporal! These gifts like prophecy and knowledge belonged to the childhood of the church and when the Canon of Scripture was fully revealed these temporary gifts disappeared. (1) (2)

(3) BIBLICAL REVELATION IS FINAL

My, God has said that there will be no more truth revealed by direct messages or voices on occasions when we need guidance, comfort or encouragement.

Why Because the Scriptures are complete. Now this was:

(a) AFFIRMED IN THE GOSPELS:

The Lord Jesus who put His Divine sanction on the OT

(Lk 24:44) has also put His Divine sanction on the NT Lets look at John's Gospel.

1. John 14:26: This refers to THE GOSPELS:

2. John 15:26-26: This refers to THE ACTS:

3. John 16:12-13: This refers to THE EPISTLES:

4. John 16:13-14 This refers to THE REVELATION:

So here are four passages in John's gospel in which the Lord Jesus emphasised that the disciples would be led by the Holy Spirit to deliver ALL the TRUTH, so as to give a Complete, Perfect, and Finished Revelation. My, the Scriptures are complete. This was (a) But it was:

(b) CONFIRMED IN THE EPISTLES:

Look at (Jude 3) Now here is a statement penned by Jude before the NT was complete which looks forward to the completion of the entire canon of Scripture. "The faith", points to the one and only faith. There is no other. Do you recall Paul's words to Timothy "In the latter times some shall depart from the faith".

(1 Tim 4:1) Greek scholar Henry Alford wrote that

" the faith", is objective here, the sum of that which Christians believe. "Which was once delivered", or

" which was once for all". The Greek word here

(hapax) refers to something done for all time, with lasting results, never needing repetition. My, nothing needs to be added to "the faith", that has been delivered, "once for all."

George Lawlor made the following comment. "The Christian faith is unchangeable, which is not to say that men and women of every generation do not need to find it, experience it, and live it, but it does mean that very new doctrine that arises, even though its legitimacy may be plausibly asserted is a false doctrine. All claims to convey some additional revelation to that which has been given by God in this body of truth are false claims and must be rejected."

Do you see that word "delivered" It indicates an act completed in the past with no continuing element. It means "the faith", was not discovered by men, but given to men by God. How did God do that Through His Word... the Bible.

So through the Scriptures God has given us a body of teaching that is final and complete. As the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 puts it, " Nothing at any time is to be added whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or by tradition of men". Do you know what this means It means we can rule out all so called prophets, prophecies and other forms of new revelation. (3) This was (a) (b) and:

(c) REAFFIRMED IN THE REVELATION:

Look at (Rev 22:18) The book of Proverbs says, "Add thou not unto His words lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar". (30:6) My, in an age of so called prophecies, tongues, interpretations, visions, experiences, and revelations, let me say there is no substitute for the Word of God. Don't seek energy for your walk with God in the empty " prophecies", of someone's imagination. Don't set your course by the

erroneous signpost of some self-deluded prophets exhortation. My, God has given us His Word which is "profitable", (2 Tim 3:16) This is ALL THE TRUTH WE NEED for every spiritual need in life.

Ponder the Bible: Preach the Bible: Prize the Bible for it is God's Completed Word!

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