

Growing in Christ

Part 16: 'God Told Me'

I want to share from my heart on an issue that is vitally important in the Body of Christ and one that causes great tension and confusion because of the poor teaching which surrounds it. It's an issue which I believe separates the mature from the immature more than a lot of issues and I am praying that you will receive this from God and not allow the enemy to trigger personal offence in you, something that should exist less and less in those who are growing in Christ.

The issue I refer to could come under several headings - guidance, discerning God's will, hearing the voice of God, prophecy etc. The title I have given this sermon, 'God told me,' should really have a subtitle, "Revelation or Blasphemy?" That basically sums up the concern I want to speak about today. This issue is very sensitive, personal and confronting. Perhaps that's why I have only ever heard two people in my whole life even attempt to address it from the point of view of Christian maturity.

If I had a dollar for every time I have heard someone say "God told me ..." during my life, I would be a millionaire for sure. However, as you could well imagine, if God had in fact been the source of those countless statements which had His name on them, then He would be the most twisted, confused being in the universe! For there have been many contradictions within those "words from the Lord" - some of those conflicting statements even came through the same person at different times! So much is said on God's behalf which is clearly not God at all and that makes it really hard for many people to trust anyone when they share what they think is 'a word from the Lord.'

Herein lies our dilemma: how does a maturing believer negotiate their way through this jungle of revelations, messages, dreams, visions, prophecies, tongues and words of knowledge - only some of which will be from God? There is a theological aspect to this and time does not permit us to go into an in-depth study of how we might hear the voice of God. That is for another time. For the purposes of this sermon, I want to speak about a more serious aspect of this issue - and that is the wisdom and maturity required when intentionally or unintentionally speaking on the Lord's behalf.

I believe the line between prophecy and blasphemy is a very fine one indeed and millions of sincere believers cross it every day. I know that blasphemy is a strong word and I only use it because I cannot find a stronger word! This is a very serious issue. To share anything at all on behalf of the Lord, places the believer in a very dangerous position. Taking the Lord's name in vain refers to something far more serious than using His name as a curse or an exclamation.

When I mention the term 'blasphemy' to Christians, I guarantee that 98% of them will immediately think of people using the words "God" or "Christ" in their speech and I suggest that most Christians would also think of non-Christians as being the ones who are most guilty of blasphemy. I only wish that was true.

Brothers and sisters, I want to suggest to you today that the vast majority of cases of real blasphemy - the kind that really offends the Lord and damages His cause enormously - come from the lips of His own dear children. Christians, who are yet to fully mature and understand the importance of treating the Lord's name with respect; sincere, born-again believers are, I believe, the ones most guilty of the sin of blasphemy and the sad truth is that most of them have absolutely no idea they are doing it.

It has become cultural in many parts of the Church to make statements like, “*God told me*” or “*The Lord said to me ...*” or “*The Lord wants us to ...*” or the most common one of all, “*The Lord gave me (or led me to) this passage of Scripture.*” Now before you get defensive or feel threatened, let me say very clearly that the Lord does in fact speak to us today and the Lord most definitely can lead us directly to a passage of Scripture; and the gift of prophecy, though incredibly misunderstood and misused, is still alive and well in the Church today. I affirm all that. This is not a theological issue for me. I am not questioning the fact that God speaks today in a myriad of ways to believers who have ears to hear. I am talking here about the issue of maturity, responsibility and respect for the Word of God and quite frankly, I believe there are millions of Christians who simply need to hold their tongue and exercise caution, wisdom and discernment before they speak on the Lord’s behalf.

Friends, I want us to understand that the Word of the Lord is very, very precious and very sacred and very powerful and we need to handle it with the utmost care and respect. The reason I believe Churches are not more clearly and definitively guided by God on a day to day basis is because we have so many people speaking on behalf of the Lord that no one knows what He is really saying.

Let me get more personal and practical here. I am not discouraging you from listening to God in prayer and through sermons and as you study the Bible. I am not dissuading you from letting God speak to you through dreams and visions and other means. I am simply exhorting you to be discerning and very careful in how you report what you believe God has said to you or may want to say through you. You may be in a prayer meeting or a sharing time in a service or one-on-one with a brother or sister and you feel convicted and believe God is saying something to you which you want to share or you feel He is saying something to someone else through you. So you just go ahead and say something like, “*God just told me this*” If you are a little more subtle you might say, “*I think the Lord might be saying this*” Sounds harmless enough doesn’t it?

Millions of sincere believers do this often. But have you ever stopped to think of the implications of us speaking on behalf of the Creator of the universe? Have you had the gift of prophecy or the gift of teaching affirmed by your Church leadership? Do you speak on God’s behalf with the blessing of your Pastor or Church leaders?

If the answer is no, which it will be in most cases, then on what authority do you speak on God’s behalf? ‘*The Priesthood of all Believers,*’ I hear you say? O yes, the precious doctrine of the priesthood of all believers - upheld by good Baptists and all sincere Christians around the world ... and the most misquoted doctrine in all of Church history! The doctrine or belief of which I speak affirms that every believer, from Pope to pauper; from Senior Pastor to toilet cleaner; every man, woman and child who names Jesus as Saviour has the right and the privilege of direct access to God. Under the new covenant, sealed by the blood of Jesus, the curtain covering the 'holy of holies' of God’s presence which was only ever entered by a High Priest once a year, has been destroyed - opening the way for every one of us to enter the presence of God 24 hours a day. Hallelujah!

That means every believer can hear from God and communicate directly with God without any priest in between because Jesus Christ has opened that door to the throne room once and for all. That is what the doctrine of the Priesthood of all believers affirms (and that is ALL it affirms) and that is great news - the great news which triggered the Reformation centuries ago. So yes, you can hear from God and you are supposed to hear from God. But nowhere, absolutely nowhere does it say in reformation theology or in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers or anywhere in the Bible for that matter - nowhere does it say that because we have the ability to hear from God that we will always hear from God accurately. We are still fallen, fallible human beings and we get it wrong sometimes and have to accept that whilst God guarantees to speak to us all the time, there are no guarantees that we will hear Him accurately all the time.

The Bible affirms that every single believer has the right and privilege and even a responsibility to hear from God, but at no point does the right to hear from God give us the right to speak out what we hear and apply His name to it. It is the God-given right of every single believer, from the oldest to the youngest, to hear the voice of God. Through the Bible, or dreams and visions, or a host of other ways. That is our birth-right as believers - thanks to Jesus. However it is not our birthright as believers to speak on the Lord's behalf unless we have the gift of teaching and are expounding his clear, unambiguous Word from the Bible or we have the gift of prophecy. And in both cases, these gifts will be discerned, affirmed, blessed and monitored by the senior leadership of the local Church.

Now I know that before today, many of you will not have thought that sharing something you believe the Lord gave you personally came into the category of prophecy - but it can be nothing less! The moment you align any word, conviction, statement, vision, dream or revelation with God, you are using the Lord's name and when you use the Lord's name in that way you are operating in only one of three areas: teaching, prophecy or blasphemy. If you have not had the gift of teaching or the gift of prophecy affirmed by your Church leadership, then that leaves only the third area in which you can operate: blasphemy – using the Lord's name in vain. God gave us permission to hear His voice by the blood of Jesus Christ - He did not give us permission to speak it out whenever we feel like it.

OK let's take a breath here. This is a hard word for some, I know. But it's a word we all need to hear if we are to grow in Christ and if the Word of the Lord is to have any integrity in our midst, we need to respect it far more than we do. Now let me show you a way through this hard word without softening its impact at all. In fact, I actually want to wind up the heat in one sense in not only admonishing you to treat the Word of God with great respect, but to exhort you to trust the power of God's Word more. Let me explain.

The Bible affirms that the true Word of the Lord will never return void and it will always bear fruit - for when God speaks – stuff happens and we need to trust in the power of His word far more. So I have a theory. Do you want to hear it? Tough luck if you don't - here it is: I believe that the reason most Christians feel the need to tell people what they believe God said to them is because they don't trust God to anoint His word.

For example, when I get a conviction that God is saying something to me or through me and I want to share it with someone else - I have a choice at that point. I can trust God to bring fruit from the truth of His Word to me and just share it as something I believe, without any reference to God, trusting Him to anoint His Word. Alternatively, as most people do, I can supposedly add credibility to what I say by using the Lord's name and saying that God revealed this to me. If I really want to make it sound impressive, I can even say, *"God told me to tell you this ..."*

Now stay with me here - this is a difficult one because I believe there will be stuff that God gives you which will have an effect on others around you, even if He has not affirmed the gifts of prophecy or teaching in you. Yet I also believe He might want you to trust Him and the power of His word and just share it as a conviction or a thought or a passage of Scripture.

If it is truly God's word then it will carry God's anointing and it will bear fruit in God's time and God's way.

You do not need to add God's name to His word in order to give it credibility. Hello? Are you with me still? Let me share my own experience here. I have more right than most of you to say *"Gold told me ..."* I have a prophetic teaching ministry and gifting and I have a responsibility before God, affirmed by the Body of Christ, and my local congregation, to proclaim His Word every day across the Church and into the world.

And yet, I probably use terms like *"God told me .."* or *"The Lord said .."* less than most people in the Church. Why? Because I have an awesome respect for the Word of the Lord and I trust God to anoint His truth as I speak it. My respect for God's word causes me to be very careful that my comments come under my teaching and prophetic gifting and are not blasphemy. I am sure I have been guilty of the latter like many of you ... but less guilty than most because I rarely use the Lord's name other than in reference to what He has clearly said in Scripture.

I also don't *need* to use His name, for I believe what God said and know that He will anoint all truth and it will cut like a two-edged sword and I do not need to apply His name to it in order to give it more 'punch'. I go to a lot of trouble to make sure that all of my preaching is Biblically sound and can be supported from Scripture. But I also know that the Apostle Paul called preaching 'foolishness' because in so many ways it is fundamentally flawed. We are imperfect, fallen humans who can get so many things wrong and yet we preach the life-changing truth of God's word. Why? Because this is the way God set things up and I trust the Holy Spirit in you more than I trust you and He will guide you to His truth in my teaching and you will be blessed.

I sincerely believe that all my preaching and teaching embodies the unadulterated, perfect, life-changing word of God. I don't have to use His name or quote a Bible reference every paragraph. If it is truth, then it's truth. If my words contains His Word then He will anoint them and His Word will not return void. The anointing is on the Word - never the person. Did you hear that? The anointing is on the Word - not the person. That's why Paul could say that whether Christ was preached from good motives or bad - the fact that Christ was preached was the main point because the anointing is on the Word.

That's why I can stand here now with the sin and inconsistencies in my life and be the mouthpiece of God which changes your life and turns this nation in its head for Jesus - because the anointing is on the Word, not the person. Remember that next time you hear someone say a particular preacher is anointed. No they're not. They're a sinful, fallible human, called by God to preach and God will anoint His Word embodied in that preaching.

So we don't need to use terms like *"God told me"* or *"The Lord gave me"* or *"God wants me to ..."* because the anointing is on the Word and if God speaks to you or leads you in some way and you feel led to share it - just share it. If you need to, change your vocabulary and start saying things like, *"I would just like to share something that has been special for me ... trusting the Lord to speak to You if He chooses."*

We do not need to add credibility to our words by using the Lord's name. We need to trust in the power of His Word which may be embodied in our words and trust the Holy Spirit at work in the hearts of the listeners. Even if you are 100% sure it is God speaking, there is no need to say so. The anointing is on the Word of God. If what you say embodies God's Word - it will not return void - it will bear fruit - God will see to it.

If you feel God is leading you, as He most certainly will at times, to a Bible passage to read in a worship service or a Home Group meeting or one-to-one with someone - then go for it - just read it! Say nothing other than, *"I would like to read from the Scriptures, trusting God to anoint His Word to me or anyone else here at the moment."* Or say nothing at all. You don't have to 'sell' God's word. It carries its own power and its own guarantee! We must never lose sight of the fact that we are fallen flesh, sinful by nature and therefore a long way from being perfect. That means we make mistakes. (What a shock!) In fact, sometimes we make huge mistakes. Sometimes we make huge mistakes in the name of the Lord. We survive them - and so does God. That's how we learn and God is incredibly gracious. We just need to accept the fact that we get it wrong now and then and be very careful in how we use the name of the Lord.

We are surrounded by many voices every day which compete for our attention. The voice of the world, the voice of Satan and his demons, not to mention our own imperfect minds which are open to the influence of anyone and everyone. Then into the midst of that bombardment comes the voice of God. It sounds like an impossible task but we can learn to hear Him above all others - it takes time and it's not always easy. But God wants us to draw near to Him and hear Him speak to us and guide us and answer our many questions. So we need to persevere, but with caution and great respect for the Word of God.

This is not an easy sermon to preach, because the very last thing I want to do is discourage you from hearing from God. The opposite is my heart's desire. I want each and every one of you to know the joy of hearing from a personal; living God every day. I just want you to respect what you hear and be very careful what you do with what you hear from God.

As children growing into adulthood, there were some lessons in responsibility and maturity which we really didn't enjoy learning, but we knew we had to learn them if we were to grow up and be effective, responsible adult members of the community. So too in our spiritual journey. There are some really hard lessons we must learn as we mature in our relationship with God and I believe the one embodied in this sermon is one of the hardest, but also one of the most important lessons we will ever learn. So I encourage you to be brave enough to receive this word, and concerned enough about its implications, to take it on board and let it change the way you think and act in relation to God's word to you and to others through you.

Do you remember the story of the boy who cried "wolf"? My fear is that we are approaching that stage with the huge number of people across the Church who are crying "God said..." My fear is that when God does desire to speak a clear, powerful, urgent and unambiguous word to His people ... we may not hear it because we have lost the ability to clearly discern and separate His voice from the many fruitless and contradictory utterances which have masqueraded as God's Word.

The sooner we stop using the Lord's name in vain, the sooner His true Word will start to cut as the two-edged sword it really is. I pray that the Word of the Lord will be released right across the Church and this nation and that we will trust in the power of that Word to bear the fruit God intends. I pray that we will choose this day to respect His Word and do all that we can to allow its clear passage into the hearts of those who are yet to trust God.

Let those of you who have spiritual ears to hear - listen very carefully to what the Lord has said today and may His Spirit protect you from hearing anything other than His life-changing, nation-transforming Word. Amen.