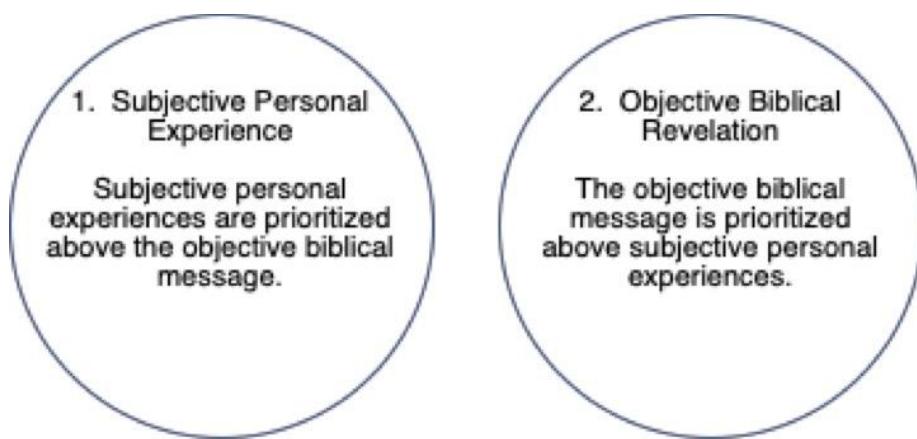


Discerning What God Is Saying To Us

One of the amazing aspects of God is that He cares about us and He communicates with us. Having a clear understanding what God communicates to us is the most important aspect of both our personal relationship with God, our corporate relationship with God as part of the universal church and our particular church family, Southwest Bible Church. God communicates to us in a variety of ways. He communicates to us through creation as well as through revelation. In all of this God's Holy Spirit enables us to understand and respond to what God communicates to us.

An amazing aspect of our relationship with God is His personal communication to us through the Holy Spirit. However, because of sin, we are easily deceived and we live in a world of counterfeits and lies. So, the ability to accurately discern what God is communicating to us is vital for both our personal relationship with God and our corporate relationship as a church family.

There are two predominant views of how Christians understand and assess the way that God communicates with us.



Both of these views hold that both the Bible as well as the subjective leading of the Holy Spirit are included in ways God communicates to Christians, but they differ over which is the most important and which has the ultimate authority in a Christian's relationship with God.

For those who prioritize subjective personal experiences, it is the personal impressions of the leading of the Holy Spirit that are the most important and have the ultimate authority in a Christian's relationship with God. In this view, the Bible is an important vehicle through which the Holy Spirit speaks to a person subjectively but the ultimate authority for a Christian is their inner sense of God's leading. This leading can come through a variety of means. Getting an impression of what the Bible says to me is the goal of reading the Bible.

Those who prioritize the objective biblical message, believe that the Bible is not the vehicle through which God communicates to us but is actually God's Word coming from the Father,

through the Son, revealed by the Holy Spirit, and therefore, is the complete and final authority for belief and behavior. This view holds that the words in the Bible were given by God as a particular message to a particular community at a particular place and time so that all people can know who God is and what it means to be in a relationship with Him. Therefore, ultimate authority is outside of our personal impressions. It is in the objective truth of the Bible as the ultimate standard by which all understanding, belief, experience, and actions are evaluated.

The position of Southwest Bible Church is that the objective biblical message is the ultimate standard by which all our understanding, belief, experiences, and actions are evaluated.

Some of the reasons we hold this view are:

1. There is no other form of revelation that is given the level of authority that the Bible is given.

While there are a variety of biblical examples of God communicating to people through dreams, visions, creation, miracles, etc. only the Bible is said to have ultimate authority over what we believe and how we live.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2. Believers who have the Holy Spirit and have been given new hearts that are able to love the things of God do not automatically think, act and love in ways that are consistent with the character of God.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

3. Subjective communication from the Holy Spirit is partial rather than complete.

Unlike the Bible that is complete in itself (*Galatians 1:8; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3-4; Jude 3:1; Psalm 19:7-14*), subjective communication from the Holy Spirit is partial rather than complete. *1 Corinthians 13:8-12* "...As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ... For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully..." Therefore, we do not place the same level of assurance and accountability on subjective leading from the Holy Spirit that we do on the objective communication from God in the Bible.

4. Since the Scriptures are authored by the Holy Spirit (*2 Peter 1:21*) they serve as the best record of revealing the will of that very same Holy Spirit and thus any subjective impression that a person thinks is coming from the Holy Spirit that is inconsistent with the Bible is not coming from the Holy Spirit.

The Bible shows us that God can and sometimes does give Christians subjective, personal guidance that applies to specific situations in their lives. The Bible also shows us that it is possible for us to be deceived and/or confused regarding our impression of God's communication to us. Therefore, Christians are instructed to evaluate all impressions of the leading of the Holy Spirit by testing them against the objective revelation of the word of God.

Ezekiel 13:6 They have seen false visions and lying divinations. They say, 'Declares the LORD,' when the LORD has not sent them, and yet they expect him to fulfill their word.

Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise prophecies, ²¹but test everything; hold fast what is good.

5. The primary work of the Holy Spirit is the creation of the body of Christ (the Church) that displays the glory of Jesus on the earth.

The work of the Holy Spirit is primarily a communal work rather than an individual work. Entering into the communal work of the Holy Spirit requires humility, submission, truthfulness, generosity, sacrifice, and other-centered love. No one can say that they are being led by the Holy Spirit if these characteristics are absent.

The Holy Spirit works personally but not individualistically. Prioritizing personal communication from the Holy Spirit over the ministry of the Body of Christ to us and the role the Holy Spirit has for us to play in the body of Christ, causes us to get out of step with the Holy Spirit.

Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

Proverbs 28:26 Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.

Galatians 5:22-25 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Ephesians 4:1-6 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

1 Peter 2:9 *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* ¹⁰*Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

5. Our conscious is not the same as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit purifies our conscience. **Hebrews 9:14** *how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*
6. The Holy Spirit is not the only spiritual reality there are angels as well as demons. The Bible shows us that evil spirits lead people away from God through deceptive spiritual experiences. Therefore, not every spiritual experience is from God and all spiritual experiences need to be evaluated on the basis of the Word of God.

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 *"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder,² and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,'³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

Ezekiel 13:1-7 *The word of the LORD came to me:² "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, who are prophesying, and say to those who prophesy from their own hearts: 'Hear the word of the LORD!'³ Thus says the Lord GOD, Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!⁴ Your prophets have been like jackals among ruins, O Israel.⁵ You have not gone up into the breaches, or built up a wall for the house of Israel, that it might stand in battle in the day of the LORD.⁶ They have seen false visions and lying divinations. They say, 'Declares the LORD,' when the LORD has not sent them, and yet they expect him to fulfill their word.⁷ Have you not seen a false vision and uttered a lying divination, whenever you have said, 'Declares the LORD,' although I have not spoken?"*

1 John 4:1 *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

The guide for loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, is not miracles – nor even emotions, but the revelation we have from God in the Bible. **Deuteronomy 13:4** *You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him.* The commandments and voice of God are the validated revelation from God that we have in the Bible.