

"God told me ..." Revelation or Blasphemy?

by Robert Griffith

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.

What I am about to say may constitute a hard word for many sincere believers and so I'm praying that you will receive this from God and not allow the enemy any room for personal offence, something that should exist less and less in those who are maturing 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 probably sums up my concern and the warning I want to give in this message. This issue is very sensitive, very personal and very confronting. Perhaps that is why I have only ever heard two people in my whole life even attempt to address it from the point of view of maturity.

So I do not join a mighty chorus of teachers around the world today, because what I have to say is not being said by too many. Partly because they may not see what I see and partly because they may not be brave enough to step this far out on the plank! I will therefore be taking some risks in this message and that is OK because, as always, I trust the Holy Spirit in you far more than I trust you and I trust the Holy Spirit in me far more than I trust my own ability to communicate the Word of God.

So let those who have ears to hear, listen to what God says to those maturing, teachable disciples who are ready for another very important lesson in Christian Maturity. Come Holy Spirit.

If I had a dollar for every time I have heard someone say "*God told me . . .*" (or words to that effect) 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 that had His name on them, then He would be the most twisted, confused being in the entire universe! For there have been many, 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 '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 end up being from God? This is partially a theological issue 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 message, I would like 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.

Millions of believers around the world right now are speaking on behalf of God and they do it all time. Some of them know they are doing it and they treat it seriously and do it appropriately and have been affirmed by their Church Leaders in the gifts of teaching or prophecy. However, I believe the vast majority of people do not realise how loose their tongue really is and how serious it is to claim to have heard from God and then speak it out. The line between prophecy and blasphemy is a very fine one 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 "*O my God*" or "*For Christ's sake*" in their speech and I would suggest that most Christians would also think of non-Christians as being the ones most guilty of this sin.

Brothers and sisters, I want to suggest to you today that the vast majority of real blasphemy, the kind that really offends the Lord and damages His cause enormously, comes 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 awesome respect - sincere, born-again believers are, I believe, the ones most guilty of the sin of blasphemy. The sad truth is that most of them have no idea they are doing it.

It has become cultural in many parts of the Church to use terms 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 too defensive or feel too 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. As I said before, this is not a theological issue for me. I am not addressing the fact that God speaks today in a myriad of ways to every believer who has ears to hear.

Theologies aside, I am talking about the issue of maturity and 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 far more caution, wisdom and discernment before they speak on the Lord's behalf.

When we were children we tended to say whatever came to mind whether it was helpful, accurate or edifying in any way. When we become adults, we are supposed to begin exercising discernment and wisdom. However, experience tells me that this is not happening with many people in the Church and I hope and pray that a lot of this is simply because nobody told them what I am telling you today.

That may be wishful thinking or even arrogance in the extreme, but I am hoping and praying that the blasphemy which flows so freely from the lips of believers is caused more by a lack of wise teaching than a lack of respect for the Word of the Lord.

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 ACTUALLY 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 more discerning and a lot more careful in how you report what you believe God has said to you or wants 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, "*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 all the time. But have you ever stopped to think of the implications of you speaking on behalf of the Creator of this universe?

More importantly, 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 and 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 misunderstood and misinterpreted 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 passed 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. 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. In fact it is that great news which triggered the Reformation 600 years 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.

Therefore we get it wrong sometimes and have to accept that whilst He guarantees to speak to us all the time there are no guarantees that we fallen creatures will hear Him accurately all the time. But there is more the hardest hit of all is coming. Are you ready?

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.** Hello? Are you with me? This is a hard word, but we must receive 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 overseen 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 falls into the category of prophecy, but it can be nothing less! The moment you apply any word, conviction, statement, vision, dream or revelation to God, by name, 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 you permission to hear His voice by the shed blood of Jesus Christ ... He did not give you the same permission to speak it out.

OK ... Let's take a breath here ...

That's a hard word but one we all need to hear if we are to truly grow up into 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 more 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. When God speaks, stuff happens and we need to trust in the power of His word. 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 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 WordOR ... 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 and 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 and read carefully 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 - it will carry God's anointing and bear fruit. That is guaranteed. 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 operated in the gift of teaching and prophecy for many years and when I was Pastoring churches, I had a responsibility before God, affirmed by the Church ... to proclaim His Word every day across that Church. And yet, I would suggest that I use have terms like "God told me .." or "The Lord says .." less than most people in the Church. Why? Because I have grown to 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, in that way, even though I have His blessing to do so as a Bible teacher.

But I also don't need to use His name, for I truly 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'.

However, I need to also say that I am sure some words here and there in my teaching are not Biblically sound. I am sure that a statement here and a loose comment there and a concept or two somewhere else, may in fact be my personal view which cannot be directly substantiated from the text of the Bible. So what? That's why the Apostle Paul called preaching 'foolishness' because in so many ways it is fundamentally flawed.

However, it's 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 the truth in my teaching and you will be blessed. I believe that I preach the unadulterated, perfect, life-changing word of God every time I preach, share or pray ... I don't have to use His name or quote a Bible reference every paragraph. If it is Truth ... it's Truth ... if it contains His Word ... He will anoint it and it will not return void.

The anointing is on God's Word not the person or the words of 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 God's Word*. That's why a fallen televangelist brother could be struggling with horrible stuff in his own personal life for 10 years and at the same time still lead thousands into the Kingdom of God ... because *the anointing is on God's Word*.

That's why I can deliver this teaching now with the sin and inconsistencies in my life and still be the mouthpiece of God which changes your life and turns your city on its head for Jesus, because *the anointing is on God's Word*.

That's why, after today, you can stop using terms like "God told me" or "The Lord gave me" or "God wants me to ..." because *the anointing is on God's Word* and if God speaks to you or leads you in some way and you feel led to share it just share it as your conviction. 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 as it is embodied in our words and our life and trust the Holy Spirit at work in the hearts of the listeners. Even if you are 150% sure it is God speaking, there is still no need to say so, because the anointing is on the Word of God, if what you say embodies God's Word in any way, He will empower it and make sure it bears fruit.

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 is you like .. just read it. You don't have to 'sell' God's Word. It carries it's own guarantee!

I had a sobering reminder of this very truth in the week leading up to writing this sermon. I was standing outside my local Post Office waiting to cross the street when I found myself being shouted at. This dear brother was proclaiming the Scriptures at top volume right in the middle of a very busy main street. People were crossing to the other side of the road to avoid him. Others were laughing at him. Some were even making rude comments and gestures at him as they passed by.

In fact I looked around and could see no one at that point who was really listening or giving this man any respect whatsoever. I crossed the road quickly, thinking less than positive thoughts to myself about this spectacle and the image it was projecting on behalf of the Church. I went into a shop up the road a little and inside the shop I could still here this man and I was 150 metres away ... inside a building.

Just as I was feeling even more embarrassed by this brother and his methods, I heard the Word of the Lord as it thundered across our main street ... as the man shouted with such clarity ... such authority ... *"The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus ... this gift is for you ... today ... and it's free."*

I forgot why I was in the shop and walked back out onto the street in a partial daze. As I looked across and saw the man sit down and rest. He had said all he needed to say for now. All I could hear at that point in my head, was the statement I have made many times now in this message ... *"The anointing is on God's Word."*

Whilst I do not personally support this man's methods, nor would I probably agree with all his theology should we sit and chat about God, the fact remained clear: the Word of God was spoken out over hundreds of people that day and God has promised that His word will not return void.

If only ... if only the millions of believers across the world who use the Lord's name carelessly every day would respect and trust the power of His Word more. We need to 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 easy sometimes, but God does want 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 respect for the Word of God.

This has not been an easy message to deliver, 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 it next.

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 if we were to grow up and be effective, responsible 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 message 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.

Perhaps you will even be brave enough to hold each other accountable in Home Groups and private conversations when the name of the Lord is used by those who have not been affirmed in the gifts of teaching or prophecy. I don't want you to be paranoid and picky, just respectful and responsible. I believe it will have a profound effect on the power and effectiveness of God's Word in the Body of Christ if we are more careful in how we handle it.

If you believe you may have the gift of teaching or prophecy, then I would encourage you to talk with your Pastor, Elders or church leadership before you operate in those gifts in the Church. They are precious and powerful gifts and we desperately need to see them operate more extensively and more effectively in the Church.

So if those are areas you feel God may be leading you into, your local Church needs to discern that and then affirm that and make sure those gifts operate with the blessing and pastoral oversight of the Church. That is the only way they can operate effectively. If you do not feel at this point in time that you are being released to operate in those areas of gifting, then please heed the warning and instruction in this vitally important message so that the integrity of the Word of God can be restored to the Church.

Remember the story of the boy who cried 'wolf' ? Well, I fear we are approaching that stage with the huge number of people across the Church who are crying 'God'. 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 your Church and your city and nation and that you will trust in the power of that Word to bear the fruit God intends and that you will choose this day to respect His Word and do all that you can to allow its clear passage into the hearts of those who are yet to trust God.

May we cry 'wolf' only when the 'wolf' is present and cry 'Thus says the Lord' only when we have the authority to do so but may we continue to speak, sing and pray the truth, which embodies the Word of God - day and night - trusting Him to speak through us, until every knee is bowed before the Lord of Glory.

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

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