

Entrust – 4/6/23 - Masculinity and Mysticism¹

- I. What does mysticism look like in the church today?
 - A. Evangelical fads

 - B. Adding to Scripture when it comes to things like counseling.

 - C. The idea of not needing the local church but “I can do church on my own.”

 - D. Saying that God told you something or that God gave you a vision to do something.

- II. What is mysticism?
 - A. “Mysticism is the idea that direct knowledge of God or ultimate reality is achieved through personal, subjective intuition or experience apart from, or even contrary to, historical fact or objective divine revelation.”² – John MacArthur

 - B. In Evangelical Christianity, mysticism is the belief that God communicates and guides believers apart from the Bible, usually through internal, subjective impressions, emotions, and inaudible “voices” in one’s mind. In things like counseling or discipling someone, including your family, mysticism leads to the practice of trying to discover God’s answers to life problems apart from or in addition to the Bible. This can be in either other “authoritative” writings or in methods and practices.

 - C. Self-authenticating
 - a. “Because I had a dream or a vision, you can’t tell me I’m wrong.”

 - b. “The vision I had came true so it must have been from God.”

 - c. “This book/theory must be biblical because it made me feel better and it fixed/changed my life.”

¹ Notes adapted from Keith Palmer, 2016

² John MacArthur, *Our Sufficiency in Christ* (Word), 181.

- d. “God told me...”
- e. “God impressed upon me...”
- f. “The Spirit spoke to my heart...”
- g. “It works for me...”
- h. The issue here is one of authority.

III. Clarity in terminology

A. Terminology is significant.

- 1. Audible, verbal speech is different from an internal, inaudible “voice”

- 2. A feeling, impression, or emotion is different from communication through language

IV. Biblical doctrines that bring clarity

A. Bible (Bibliology)

- 1. How does God communicate?
 - a. General revelation (Ps. 19:1-16, Rom. 1:18-20)
 - b. Special revelation (Ps. 19:7-11, 2 Tim. 3:16-17)
 - i. In the Old Testament (Heb. 1:1)
 - ii. In the New Testament (Heb. 1:2, John 14:26, 16:12-14, 2 Pet. 1:20-21)
 - c. What about impressions, feelings, and promptings?
 - i. Nowhere in Scripture are we told to wait for God to give us feelings or promptings.
- 2. The canon is closed

- a. God ultimately reveals Himself finally and climactically through His Son (Heb. 1:2)
 - b. The "faith" is handed down once and for all (Jude 3)
 - c. The book of Revelation (Jesus' final prophecy) warns not to add anything else to Scripture or take anything away (Rev. 22:18-19)
3. The Bible is sufficient (2 Tim. 3:16-17, 2 Pet. 1:3)
4. The Bible is authoritative
- a. Jesus viewed the Scriptures as authoritative and without error (Matt. 5:18; Luke 4:1-13), including His own teaching (Matt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44).
 - b. Other biblical writers considered the Scriptures authoritative (2 Pet. 3:14-16; Mark 15:28; Rom. 10:11; James 2:23).
5. Does God still communicate today?
Yes, but He does so through the Bible. The complete written Word is how God communicates with believers today

B. The Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)

1. He is a Person
 - a. He possess characteristics of personality such as life (2 Cor. 3:3, Rom. 8:2), intelligence (Is. 11:2, 40:13), freedom and purpose (1 Cor. 12:11), liberty (2 Cor. 3:17), love (Rom. 15:30), and knowledge (1 Cor. 2:11).
 - b. He displays actions of personality such as speaking, interceding, commanding, teaching, testifying, reproofing, guiding, and praying (Acts 8:29, 10:19, 13:2, Rom. 8:15, 26, 1 Cor. 2:13, John 15:26, 16:8). He can be obeyed, lied to, resisted, vexed, grieved, blasphemed, and outraged or insulted (Is. 63:10, Matt. 12:31, Acts 10:19-21, 5:3, 7:51, Eph. 4:30, Heb. 10:29).
 - c. As a person, He communicates using words and language, not impressions or feelings (Acts 8:29, 10:19, 13:2).
2. He is the author of Scripture (**2 Peter 1:20-21**, 2 Samuel 23:1-2, John 14:16-17, 26, 16:26-27, 16:13). His work is regularly linked to the Word of God in Scripture (for example, Eph. 5:17 and Col. 3:16, John 17:17 and Eph. 5:26 with 2 Thes. 2:13 and Rom. 15:16, etc.)

3. He is the illuminator of Scripture
 - a. Illumination refers to “the ministry of the Holy Spirit whereby He enlightens those who are in right relationship with Him [i.e., believers in Jesus Christ] to comprehend the written Word of God.”³ (1 Cor. 2:11-12)
 - b. “Even while applying proper hermeneutics and methodology, there is a divine element to understanding God’s truth. The believer is aided by the Holy Spirit’s ministry of illumination in guiding the believer to an understanding of divine truth (1 Cor. 2:11-13).”⁴ – Paul Enns
4. He is the agent of righteous living (Gal. 5:16-26, Rom. 8:1-17). This means that once the Holy Spirit has illuminated the text such that believers can understand it, He then gives the believer the ability to obey Scripture.
5. Being led by the Spirit? – The phrase “being led by the Spirit” is a statement of fact that describes a true believer. It is evidenced through the believer living righteously, being empowered by the Holy Spirit to walk in obedience to the Word of God (Gal. 5:18-24, Rom. 8:13-14). It does not mean that a believer experiences an inward impression or feeling that is designed to instruct the believer to act a certain way or make a certain decision apart from or in addition to the biblical text.
6. Summary: God's Holy Spirit works through God's Word such that it radically transforms believers as they renew their minds and apply what it says (Heb. 4:12, Rom. 8:13-14, 12:1-2, Gal. 5:16-25, Eph. 5:17 with Col. 3:16). The Scriptures reveal that the Holy Spirit works in the life of believers through the Bible, not apart from it. He communicates to believers through the Scriptures. The Bible does not give any examples of the Holy Spirit communicating directly to the hearts of believers apart from the Bible, nor does it command believers to seek such communication. “Jesus did not say that once we have spiritual life we live by direct mystical experience with God; rather, we ‘live... on every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4).’”⁵ – Donald Whitney

³ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, rev. ed. (Moody, 2014), 179.

⁴ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 154.

⁵ Donald Whitney, “Unity of Doctrine and Devotion” in *The Compromised Church*, ed. John Armstrong (Crossway, 1998), 246.

7. John Murray – “... we may fall into the error of thinking that while the Holy Spirit does not provide us with special revelations in the form of words or visions or dreams, yet he may and does provide us with some *direct* feeling or impression or conviction which we are to regard as the Holy Spirit's intimation to us of what his mind and will is in a particular situation. ...[W]e are, in such an event, conceiving of the Holy Spirit as giving us some special and direct communication, be it in the form of feeling, impression, or conviction, a communication or intimation or direction that is not mediated to us through those means which God has ordained for our direction and guidance. In the final analysis this construction or conception of the Holy Spirit's guidance is in the same category as that which holds to direct and special revelation, and that for the reason that it makes little difference whether the intimation is in the form of impression or feeling or conviction or in the form of a verbal communication, if we believe that the experience which we have is a direct and special intimation to us of what the will of God is. The essential point is that we regard the Holy Spirit as giving us guidance by some direct mode of operation and intimation. We are abstracting the operation of the Spirit, in respect of guidance, from the various factors which may properly be regarded as the means through which we are to be guided. Particularly, we abstract the operation of the Spirit from the infallible and sufficient rule of practice with which he has provided us.”⁶

C. Guidance and the Will of God

1. The will of God

- a. Providence – God works in every detail of life to accomplish His perfect, sovereign will (Is. 14:24, Eph. 1:11). The sovereign or “secret” will of God cannot be discovered (Deut. 29:29a)
- b. The Scriptures – God reveals His moral will to people through the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Eph. 5:17, 1 Thes. 4:3). The moral will of God, completely revealed in Scripture, should be learned and obeyed by God’s people (Deut. 29:29b).
 - i. God guides believers through the Bible when believers read, accurately interpret, and appropriately apply biblical principles to life.

⁶ John Murray, “The Guidance of the Holy Spirit” in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Banner of Truth, 1982), 1:187.

- ii. The Bible is not intended to be used in alternative ways which supposedly unlock or reveal God's will (Bible roulette, looking for hidden messages or codes, ignoring the historical context, etc.)

2. Guidance beyond the Bible

- a. The Scriptures do not teach that believers should seek guidance beyond the Word of God through means such as impressions, signs, fleeces, inner peace, open/closed doors, etc.⁷
- b. Impressions and subjective promptings are real, but not authoritative

3. The role of wisdom –

D. Communion with God

Believers fellowship and commune with God through the means of grace.

- 1. Scriptures - Regular reading, study, memorization, meditation, and application of God's Word
- 2. Prayer
 - a. In the Bible, prayer is defined as a believer speaking to God (praise, thanksgiving, confession, and supplication) – Matt. 6:9-13
 - b. Prayer is not a means to receive communication from God⁸
- 3. Corporate worship (including participation in ordinances)

V. Conclusion

- A. Mysticism and its influence in much of modern Christianity presents a unique challenge to the church in that members may be seeking guidance from God through unbiblical means. Often, people put more credibility in mystical communication with God than in the clear teaching of God's Word.
- B. In seeking to minister the Word of God to others, someone who is shepherding/counseling/discipling others may find that he is “competing” with these mystical experiences resulting in ineffective counseling and discipleship.

⁷ See Dave Swavely, *Decisions Decisions* (P&R, 2003), 17-96.

⁸ Dave Swavely, *Decisions Decisions*, 92-5.

- C. Men must be vigilant to detect and then wisely and graciously correct those in our families and churches who practice such mystical forms of communication with God. Since mystical practices are self-authenticating and often constitute the primary way a person relates to the Lord, we should also expect that mystical views and practices are not easily changed.
- VI. Resources
- A. Dave Swavely, *Decisions, Decisions*. P&R, 2003.
 - B. Jay Adams, *A Christian's Guide to Guidance*. Timeless Texts, 1998.
 - C. John MacArthur, *Our Sufficiency in Christ*. Word, 1991.
 - D. Keith Palmer, *God's Will and Impressions*. Grace Bible Church Perspective Series. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/zt7mkjo>
 - E. John Murray, "The Guidance of the Holy Spirit" in *Collected Writings of John Murray*. Volume 1. Banner of Truth, 1982, 186-9.
 - F. Stuart Scott, "Decision Making" in *Biblical Manhood*. Focus Publishing, 2009, 59-76.
- VII. Appendix: What about the Enneagram?
- A.