

## Doctrine of Scripture

Jonathan K. Dodson | October 22, 2017

With controversy raging in our society, it's easy to be caught and blown about by a cultural gust. Our emotions can soar high and plummet low. Taking regrettable action or being paralyzed. St. Paul is timely, "no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every *wind of doctrine*" (Eph 4:14). Doctrines blow all of us. A blog, a tweet, a news story. Everyone is shaped by the doctrinal winds. The question is which doctrine keeps our feet planted? Something strong, something deep, something true. We need *true* doctrine. Next six weeks we'll look at six doctrines that give wisdom & depth for the times. Today, Doctrine of Scripture: *What is it? What's it sound like? Difference it makes.*

### The Speech of God

In an age of activism and protest, it's easy to think words don't really matter. It's what we *do* that counts. But when we speak, we actually act. In marriage vows, the *words* of bride and groom move them from friend to spouse. Words can bring someone back from the brink of suicide and inflict pain that lingers for decades. Words are active, powerful even. This is why the Scriptures warn the tongue is like a tiny rudder which turns an entire ship, and can set the whole world on fire. The right words from our president could trigger a nuclear war, and the words, "I love you" spoken from a sincere heart can change the course of your life. If human words are *that* powerful, surely *God's* words are more vital. So where do we find God's words? In the Bible. *The Bible is God's personal **speech** to us.* Over and over again the Scriptures record, "Thus said the Lord" or "The word of the Lord came to..." The Bible claims to be the speech of God. When you hear someone's voice in another room, you can tell who it is without even seeing them. Why? Because their speech is uniquely personal; it reveals them and not somebody else. Similarly, God's words are uniquely personal; they reveal *him*. The Bible is God speaking, in space and time, *to us*. Now what is particularly unique about God's voice is that it comes through other **voices**. Male voices, female voices, voices of all kinds of experiences and ethnicities across cultures and in three different languages. His word is modulated through speakers. But just because it is modulated through people doesn't mean it *originated* with people, "[For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit](#)" (2 Pet 1:21). This passage is referring to Scripture, saying it is *from God* all of it, not some of it. So while the Bible is true to people's experience, it isn't dictated by experience; it is dictated, in a sense, by God's Spirit. Now, for some this can seem like a stretch. If we rule out this possibility, that God can speak to humanity through his Spirit and his Word, then we're left with two problems. *First*, we're saying if there is a God he is incapable of communicating with us, and preserving his meaning over time, which denies any god his god-ness. If he is God he should be able to do just about whatever he wants. *Second*, if we approach Scripture with the assumption God can't speak through people to reveal himself, we're judging his voice before we've even heard it. We're saying, without having heard his voice, what his voice is like—not the voice of Scripture. This would be like making up our mind that Morgan Freeman's voice is not his voice without ever having heard it. It's absurd. We have to hear it out. We cannot prejudge Freeman's uniqueness. That would place us over him, predetermining what he can and cannot sound like, when in reality his speech is just that *his* speech. We cannot change what *is*. God speaks, and it is

precisely because he possess this attribute—speech—that we speak. That we care about communication. In the beginning, God spoke. So, if he has chosen the Scriptures to communicate with us, and his words are the most potent of all, shouldn't we lean in to hear *God's personal speech to us?*

### The Sound of Jesus

What does his voice sound like? The word of God is not only his capacity to speak, an attribute, but it is also a person, *the Word*, “[In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God](#)” (Jn 1:1). Jesus is the Word. God sounds like *Jesus*; he *is* Jesus. As history unfolds, the use of prophets tapered off and the person of Christ took their place, “[Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son](#)” (Heb 1:1). So as the Word, what did Jesus do? He did not just stand on a mountain, like a heavenly attraction, for people to visit and marvel at. The Word *taught*, words. He taught parables, stories, sermons, and when he was on trial for words that upset the status quo, Pilate asked Jesus if he was a king. Jesus replied, “[For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth](#)” (Jn 19:37). *The truth* not a truth. We can't overwrite his words. His stated purpose was to bear witness to *the truth*. What truth? Everything that he said, including his cosmic royalty and redemption. My kingdom is not of this world; Father forgive them for they know not what they do. Though our sins are like scarlet, he dies to make them white as snow. *He gives his life to prove his royalty and accomplish redemption.* Isn't that the kind of person whose word you can trust? Cosmic royalty backs it up. He is raised from the dead three days later so we can thrive in the Fathers' love. Jesus insists on *true doctrine* because he must be true to himself. Speaking to a roman skeptic he says, “[Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.](#)” Are you listening? Bending your ear to take in the most important words in the world? He wants your redemption, but we have admit that we need it *to him*. The Word is God's personal speech, and his speech is *the Word*, made personal. The Word isn't just information to be believed; it is a Person to be trusted, worshiped even. The Word sounds like Jesus.

### Difference of the Word

What difference does the Word make? All the difference. *First*, we're told that when disciples heard Christ explain the Scriptures *their hearts burned within them*. It touched the deepest part of their being, with white-hot joy. After his resurrection, Jesus joined up with some of his disciples on a road to Emmaus, but they didn't realize it was him. They were grieving his death, lamenting he was not the promised Savior they thought he was. Then we're told Jesus, “[beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself](#)” (Lk 24:27). The Word interpreted the Word. You see, it's not enough to simply *see* Jesus; we have to *hear* his voice. The Word reveals *him*. Rom 10, “[Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ.](#)” Are you hearing this? If you have, are you still hearing it? Does it make your heart burn? When I was in Uganda, we crammed into an open-air brick building in a remote village to preach the gospel and teach the Scriptures. The building was packed. Seeing the need for more Bibles, we sent a team member by motorcycle to the closest city to get some in their dialect. After our team member returned, and the teaching time was done, we announced that we would be distributing Bibles in their language. Although we had formed a line to give them away,

*the entire room rushed to the front crying out for joy.* They were desperate for the Word, piling onto one another, smiles stretched as wide as their arms to receive the Scriptures. They, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, knew it is the Word that makes our hearts burn with eternal happiness. A second difference—what do you do when you hear really good news? You tell others. After the disciples realized Jesus had risen, they ran to tell others. So did our Ugandan friends. Joy is incomplete until it is expressed. When you take in the joy of a great win, you tell others! When we take in the Word, we can't keep it to ourselves. The world has to know *the Word*. A third difference, is the Word's ability to keep our feet grounded when the winds of doctrine blow. Simply checking Facebook, we are accosted by a tragedy half a world away, a tragedy we pile onto all to the other tragedies and horrors that we saw yesterday. We are not made to assimilate the torrent of information that comes streaming through our phones. Philosopher Alain de Botton comments, "*For most of history news was so hard to gather and so expensive to deliver, its hold on our inner lives was inevitably held in check.*" But now, he says, it has *seeped into our deepest selves*, generating anxiety, fear, and triumphalism. If the onslaught of headlines, and the stream of social chatter is what bookends and populates our day, is it any wonder that we lack the joy of the Word that matters most? When we wake up to news headlines, or devote our waking, day-setting moments to a social media feed, we replace the eternal words of Scripture with ephemeral chatter of what is here today and gone tomorrow. We expose our hearts to an onslaught of messages we are not ready to encounter. When this process repeats, we program ourselves to exist at a distance from God's speech. Glued to the headlines, overcome by the brokenness of the world, we cannot make out the difference of *the Word*. This leaves us with two decisions. One, spiral into *despair* at the evil in this world, then opt for a pint of distraction to wash it down. Or two, take up the mantle of *redemption*, hurling ourselves into self-righteous activism, subtly believing it's what we do that defines the world. Every injustice becomes something we must right. Those who fail to join our crusades suffer our judgment and scorn. When in fact, we will be dead in a matter of time. Is there a better alternative? When Jesus stood before Pilate to answer the question are you king of the Jews, he replied: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews" (Jn 19:36). Instead, Jesus delivered himself to the cross without a modicum of resistance. He did it so that his kingdom could change the world, not from the top down but from the inside out. What good would a just world be with unjust, unrighteous, unreconciled hearts? Jesus starts where it matters most. He dies to get true doctrine, the Word, himself into us, where he absorbs brokenness and sin and transmits forgiveness and salvation. And deals with the greatest injustice on earth, rebellion against God in the heart of man. His words calm and restore the heart, like no other. In *Fury*, soldiers win an Austrian town in WW II and take a reprieve. They start drinking, chasing women, and carousing. They're coping with overwhelming sense that the world is broken. Brad Pitt's character slips away to an apartment to have a proper meal, cutlery, napkins, table and chair, washes up and asks the Austrian women to cook him eggs, which he's been hiding but then is suddenly interrupted. He tries to impose a peace from outside. His *distraction* doesn't work. Peace has to come from inside. Boyd, Shia LeBeouf's character, nicknamed "the Bible" sits quietly in the town square, reading the Scriptures. He has something the others don't. Peace on the inside. The Word got inside of him. Is it getting inside of you? The Bible is God's speech to us, sounds like Jesus, and makes all the difference in world.