



The Sword of the Spirit The Word of God
from the Pastor's heart

The relationship between the Word & spiritual encounters



It has been a long-standing question for many Christians as to what comes first, the Word or spiritual encounters. The reason this question is raised in the minds of many believers is,

they are unsure of spiritual encounters that do not seem to have a word backing. We know from the following verses that spiritual encounters and the word go together. *Mar 16:20 And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. Heb 2:4 God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?*

We also know, in the beginning was the Word. This Biblical statement describes to us the Son of the Living God as God. God's acts by the word when He created the worlds is another aspect of the word in action. It must have been spectacular to watch if anyone was around. I am sure the angels watched. However, subsequent to creation, words have not always been first before encounters or acts of God.

From a word concept, the first five books of the Old Testament were written by Moses who had not even been there at the time of the creation of the world by God but wrote about it. The words written in the Bible came after creation in that sense. Moses was able to write by divine inspiration. Likewise, his encounter with God at the burning bush came before he wrote the word about this encounter. Likewise, on the day of Pentecost, the confirmation word came after the spiritual encounter of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Peter was able to attribute the encounter to Joel's prophecy in the Bible. Since there is minimal understanding of this encounter in the word, many questioned the encounter at that time and still do today.

One aspect of spiritual encounters is that it has a way of deviating a person from the truth of the word through the encounter. This happens because the individual or even large groups of people want to believe what they experience rather than the truth of the word of God written down in the Bible. By virtue of the encounter being so supernatural it has a dazzling effect on people. As a result, they often mistake the encounter as being a finality of what God is trying to communicate. Oftentimes, the encounter is mistaken as the most important direction and purpose giver rather than the confirmation of the encounter by the word of God. For example, a vivid dream or even a vision can have this effect even if they are not from God. It is a common situation in Christianity whereby many pursue signs and

encounters rather than the word. *Mat 12:39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:*

All spiritual encounters should be validated by the word before or after the encounter. God often tells us of what is to come by supernatural methods such as dreams, visions, and encounters. This is so that, we are prepared for the realities of the message they bring. This also acts as a safeguard for us because it is grounded in the word. Every word is confirmed by two or three witnesses of God's own word. This was an age-old practice to avoid false situations and accusations in people's lives. *2Co 13:1 This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.*

Dreams and visions can also be very intimidating without the word associated with them thereby causing many to miss out on the purpose of the encounters. Apostle Peter nearly missed out on an instruction of God to be a forerunner in spreading the gospel to the Gentiles because he was still getting over the constraints of tradition and the law. Even after experiencing the Holy Spirit baptism, which was a spiritual encounter, he was unprepared for the spoken word that came during the vision. He had no reference point that came readily to mind. So, he rejected at first God's vision to him to go and preach to the Gentiles. He subsequently obeyed because he was instructed by the Holy Spirit. Had he enough time to reference the word he would have found that God had already prophesied this event in Abraham. That, God would be the God of the Gentiles as well and give them the promise of the Spirit. Abraham being a father of nations meant just that. Added to this was the promise of the Spirit to all who believe and that they too would be removed from the curse of the law.

This brings us to the kind of fears we can harbour regarding encounters which can make us legalistic thereby dismissing the excitement of spiritual encounters. Many in the Old Testament had spiritual encounters which were then written down that we pay credence to. Prophets like Isaiah, Daniel and Ezekiel are just three that come to mind who encountered the Lord before they had a written word to* reference.

I think it is extremely important for us to come to a place of trust in the Lord that will help us discern what is of God and what is not. When God encounters a person and dramatizes these encounters with various supernatural themes, one must decide if it is God or not by what the word says. Secondly, one can always ask God to confirm everything that one experiences before acting upon it. Not all encounters even confirmed by the word can be a substitute for a subsequent spiritual encounter that one may have. Each spiritual encounter must be confirmed by the word individually or else one can be fooled by the devil, who is capable of duplicating many things to make them look like it is from God.

I once heard the audible voice of God and knew it was from God as it was confirmed to me over and over again. Many

years later I was fooled into believing another encounter with the same audible voice which in this case was not God. In my urgency of need, I rushed to believe the voice because I needed to receive and answer in my desperate situation. Hearing that voice again that sounded like God fitted my need. Added to this was a vision with scripture attached that looked like it was from God, but it was not God at all. That is how cunning the devil is. He uses scripture against us like he did with Jesus in the wilderness.

I do not believe that having a spiritual encounter with God before receiving the word can be ignored and cast aside as not relevant. When the events of what one experiences spiritually begin to take place in the natural realm it is easier to be understood. For example, prophecy that comes to pass is easier to handle than prophecy alone. However, faith dictates that we receive what comes to us by faith as well. Faith in God's word that is confirmed by two witnesses of His word always restores the confidence that we have heard God. Abraham was a classic case of someone who encountered God without the written word. If he was then considered as the father of faith, why are we any different. Are we not considered his children because of faith?

Let us understand the balance between the word and spiritual encounters and know that in both cases, we must have faith. Secondly, when God does speak, it becomes His word. There is no precedence in the Bible that states that we must have a written word first in order to act by faith. Does not God speak because He is the word? So, if we then acknowledge that He is the word, He will always only speak and act according to His word both written and spoken. Though we have don't always have a written word to refer to immediately in a spiritual encounter, the spoken word is so powerful that it penetrates our very being to confirm to us that God has spoken. God can impress His word through the reading of the Bible and then speak on it during our daily routine. Furthermore, as stated before, trusting God is imperative.

I always remember the testimony of this friend, who said he never did anything he never heard the Holy Spirit tell him to do, even to the extent of cleaning out the garage. I was appalled at him. All he had to do was refer to the word that speaks of laziness and neglect in a person's life. The written word is also the spoken word. It was spoken before it was written. Therefore, one must pay heed to the written word. One does not have to hear God before acting on what one is responsible for. Isn't it strange that we do not understand how things work with God? I am sure that the legalistic nature of the word has been a tool for the human spirit to negate the existence of God. Humans by nature prefer the written word and imagery in idol form to base religious experiences on. This was exemplified by the Jews in the wilderness when they forced Aaron to make golden calves to worship in spite of daily supernatural encounters. They then added many laws over and above what God had written on tablets of stone and enforced them on the people when they could.

As a result, they were unable to identify the manifest word when He came amongst them. Jesus was

born amongst them and yet they failed to ratify scriptures concerning His presence. Even the supernatural encounters that Jesus did in miracles, signs and wonders in front of their eyes only served to make them jealous of Jesus. It did nothing to ratify written scriptures that spoke of Him doing such things. Yet, the poor people who were living in hopelessness embraced the miracles as a sign from God because of the scriptures which said that a Messiah was coming to them.

I also believe that the Bible warns us of false signs and miracles in the last days that will embody satanic activity. To distinguish what is of God and what is of satan we just need to understand that it is the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit living in us that will show us the difference. Though these two types of manifestations can be like twins we can know them by their fruit and because we have spent time in the presence of the Lord.

We need to constantly come to a place of understanding concerning our God and our personal walk with Him. We need to be praying for more understanding as we go deeper into time and the word. The times we live in now demand that. What was true many years ago is now being revealed in greater depths and we need to embrace new revelation. Many who attempt to discredit others on manifestations saying that they have no reference point are themselves often found crossing the line of unbelief into faith because they have had the same encounter. The realisation has not destroyed them but has opened their eyes to the truth of what lies beyond the written word.

I remember when two Jehovah's witnesses came to my home. I was about to send them away, but God told me to entertain them. So, I did. I did not know that God was going to encounter us with a shocking revelation. After they had been through their repertoire, I asked them a question that the Holy Spirit prompted me to ask. I said, "You know Jesus through the Bible you hold in your hands, don't you?" They replied, "yes". I said, "I know Jesus personally". As soon as I said this, the three of us were thrown a couple of steps backwards as this revelation came powerfully on us as a manifestation as well. In other words, the sheer realisation of the truth was manifest to us and we both encountered Jesus that day in a new way. They went away perplexed, but I remained sure and richer for the experience.

I am saying all this to say, do not discount supernatural encounters in whatever form they come. Rather, ask the Holy Spirit for confirmation. He always confirms because you are His child. He will never let you be deceived if you are listening to Him and go to Him for counsel. He may allow you to make a mistake in your understanding because of pride, self-esteem, religiosity, or sheer ignorance but He will never let you go astray for too long. He loves us and will do the utmost for us. Only a proud and disobedient person will lose their way because they do not listen to anyone.

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