

### **But I Experienced It!**

Question: Do you teach experiences or do you experience teaching? In the last 100 years, Christianity has experienced a major shift in its fundamental characteristics. The biblical way has always been to use the Word of God to define teaching which then controlled the religious experiences of God's people. Today religious experiences define the teachings, which are then read back into the Word of God. The pragmatism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has a full-blown harvest of heresy in the 21<sup>st</sup>. Such people say, "It's time to move forward, and stop asking questions about doctrine that divides. The Spirit is doing wonderful things, and by questioning, you are quenching the Spirit". In other words, they are saying "Don't you dare question our religious experiences with the Word of God, because if we experienced it, then it must be in the Word of God". Thus for them, experience becomes truth, rather than truth controlling experience. What does the Word say?

First, let's say some things about experience and teaching. Religious experience can be a good and necessary thing. God wants His people's heart, not just their mind. He does want us to be growing in joy and love for Him. God does not want a cold, dead, lifeless Christianity with perfect doctrine but like the Ephesian church, having left their first love. Also, emotion is a wonderful thing. Our emotional experiences in the Christian life may range from jubilation at God's grace, to awe and wonder at His majesty, extreme joy at His love, profound sadness at the lost and their coming judgement, self-aborrence and regret as we confront our own sin, to even righteous anger over sin. So there is a huge range of emotion in the Christian life, all of which God expects from a heart that is right with His. There is nothing wrong with experience and emotion. But here is the dividing line: True experience and emotion **grow out of truth**. Affections respond to what we know.

See, emotion is always a response. It does not exist by itself. Something stimulates it. You cannot create emotion out of nothing. But yet, some Christians think that it is legitimate to have joy for the sake of joy, to have weeping sessions simply to prove that their religious experience was deep and profound.

No, emotional experience must be based on truth. The mind discovers something true about God, believes it and then the emotions respond. To start off with, or to aim for the emotions themselves is to invert God's means of relating to us. Consider how prominent the mind, and Biblical knowledge is to the Christian:

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."  
(Romans 12:2)

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things"

"May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;" (Ephesians 3:18)

"And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:" (Colossians 3:10).

Listen to Paul speaking to the Corinthian church, which had run away with experience: “Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that *by my voice* I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an *unknown* tongue.” Paul wanted there to be understanding, cognitive and conscious thought, not wild experience.

God always approaches a man first through the mind. He wants a man's rational mind to consider His works, use his will to choose to believe and obey or not. He wants the man's mind to meditate on His Word, thinking about them, rolling them over in his mind as the Spirit illuminates them to him.

As the Spirit reveals Christ to a person through the Word, there will be a response to that truth. It may vary: profound awe or joyful praise. It may be deep humility like Peter's. But always, God begins with the mind.

Consider that Satan goes the opposite route. He knows that it is not wise to approach a man firstly through the mind, because a man may choose against sin. So Satan starts with the lust of the flesh: physical experiences. All that you can taste, touch, smell, see or hear. With Eve, her first temptation was that the fruit was ‘good for food’. With the Lord Jesus, the first temptation was for food after having fasted for 40 days. Satan's second route is the lust of the eyes: appearances, all that is skin deep and superficial. Eve's second temptation was that the fruit was ‘pleasant to the eyes’. Jesus' second temptation was the ‘kingdoms of this world and the glory thereof’. There is an emphasis here on enjoying things now, on disregarding consequences or the principles of reaping what you sow. Satan's last strategy is the pride of life. This is the thought that life revolves around me. For Eve this was when she felt it was ‘fruit desired to make one wise’. For Jesus this was the temptation to throw Himself off the Temple and receive immediate acclaim. All through these three, Satan avoids directly assaulting the rational mind, the gateway of moral decisions. He goes to the passions and appetites first, sensual and spiritual experiences.

That's why he uses the same strategy with destroying people. Have you ever considered the atmosphere of a nightclub? Take the music -- why must it be so loud? To discourage rational thought. Ever tried to think when the music is just about bursting your eardrums? Or what about the lighting? Why must it all be so dark, flashing, intermittent? To avoid a situation where you can see clearly and rationally scrutinize this ridiculous scene of people dancing for no reason except to dance, celebrating nothing except celebration. Why must drugs and alcohol be taken? To further dull and disengage the rational mind, so that emotions and experience take over.

The danger is clear. Satan's method for reaching people is to as far as possible disengage the rational mind and embrace experience. In ancient Israel, the worship of Baal was like this. The emphasis was on the ecstasy of feeling. It was to be interesting, relevant and exciting. It was all subjective. But ‘Yahweism’, or Old Testament faith, was a form of worship which centred on the proclamation of the Word of the covenant of God. Man's mind was involved as he was called respond rationally to the will of God. Words were said, which caused people to serve, love, obey, act responsibly and decide. The main difference between Baalism and O.T. religion was that one approached worship through

the will of God which could be understood and obeyed, while the other approached worship through what could be felt, absorbed or imitated.

There is a form of Christianity popular today that is closer to Baalism than the faith of the Bible in character. It exalts experience and ignores the Word. It is really Christian mysticism: whatever you experience can become your theology. The most outlandish stories are told by preachers about their trips to Heaven and back and we are expected to believe it because they say they experienced it. But Paul saw heaven in a vision and said he was forbidden to speak about it.

Weird and unbiblical paranormal manifestations appear in churches and it is said to be the Spirit. The thinking is, if it happened in church, it must be from God. Such a person will say, you can't tell me it is not of God, I experienced a tingling, a warmth, an electric-like shock, it was the Spirit. You can't tell me it's not the Spirit- you didn't experience it. What they are saying is, their experience validates itself. The experience has become its own authority. It cannot be weighed up objectively and judged in light of the Word. But what does the Word say? Listen to Peter in 2 Peter 1:16-21: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. <sup>17</sup>For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. <sup>18</sup>And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

<sup>19</sup>We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: <sup>20</sup>Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. <sup>21</sup>For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost." What is Peter saying? Peter is saying he had an experience. He describes in verses 16-18 his experience on the mount of Transfiguration. He had a spiritual experience that very few have ever experienced. He saw the Son of God in all His glory, accompanied by Moses and Elijah, and then he heard the literal, audible voice of God the Father. How's that for a supernatural experience?

Surely such a spiritual experience is greater than any written message?

Well, guess what , listen to Peter's words in verse 19.

"We have a more sure word" A more sure word! Can you believe that? Peter is saying that even his wonderful experience was not as sure as the Word of God v20-21.

Why? Peter knew he was a mere man. He was flesh and blood, had an imperfect mind that was subject to delusions, hallucinations, false memories etc. He knew that even his experience could not be validated in and of itself. He says the real test of authority is the objective Word of God. This Word of God is not of private interpretation. It is not filled with individual men's stories , but was inspired of the Holy Spirit. It is God's Word, recorded using holy men. It is the only objective standard for us to stick to. We must judge our experiences by the Bible, not the Bible by our experiences.

There really were three perfect revelations of God.

The first was Adam. Adam reflected God as long as he was sinless. However, he sinned, and that revelation was lost.

The second was Christ. The Son of God perfectly manifested the Father to us. However, He ascended, and in a sense, that revelation was gone.

The third one was the Word. The Word of God as finally given is the final and perfect revelation of God. Thus to gain a true experience of God, we must go to where He has revealed Himself. We don't go to our emotions, to Christian music, to supernatural experiences to find God. We go to the Word, we see God there, and then our experience grows out of seeing God there.

If the church continues to seek experience apart from the Word, we open ourselves up more and more to deception and to creations of our own heart.

Remember Christ's words in Matthew 7:21-23: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. <sup>22</sup>Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? <sup>23</sup>And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Please notice three things about that passage:

- 1) Firstly, Christ acknowledges that there were real experiences accompanied by real power. They were not fake, phony or tricks.
- 2) Secondly, those experiences were done in the name of Jesus. It was thought He had been the source of the power. It was not done using any other name.
- 3) Third, Christ claims no knowledge of them or their works. The conclusion is: there was power, but it was not of God. Remember what strategy Satan uses, experiences and emotion first. Those who open themselves up to this are inviting trouble. They are becoming self-fulfilling prophets, equating experience with truth, seeking experiences which God's enemies are happy to provide, and then calling that experience truth.

Let us go to the Word first. Examine every experience you have in the Christian life in light of the Word.