

The Doctrine of the Word of God
(Preliminary Draft, 1st Edition)

Part Three: The Nature of God's Word
God's Word as His Personal Presence

[John M. Frame](#)

Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy
Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, FL

In Memory of
Edmund P. Clowney
(1917-2005)

Table of Contents

Preface
Abbreviations of Frequently Cited Titles

Part One: Orientation

1. The Personal Word Model
2. Lordship and the Word

Part Two: God's Word in Modern Theology

3. Modern Views of Revelation
4. Revelation and Reason
5. Revelation and History
6. Revelation and Human Subjectivity
7. Revelation and God Himself

Part Three: The Nature of God's Word

8. What is the Word of God?
9. God's Word as His Controlling Power
10. God's Word as His Meaningful Authority
11. God's Word as His Personal Presence

Part Four: The Media of God's Word

12. The Media of God's Word
13. God's Revelation Through Events
14. God's Revelation Through Words: the Divine Voice
15. God's Revelation Through Words: Prophets and Apostles
16. The Permanence of God's Written Word
17. God's Written Words in the Old Testament
18. Respect for God's Written Words in the Old Testament
19. Jesus' View of the Old Testament
20. The Apostles' View of the Old Testament
21. The New Testament as God's Written Words
22. The Canon of Scripture
23. The Inspiration of Scripture
24. The Content of Scripture
25. Scripture's Authority, its Content and its Purpose
26. The Inerrancy of Scripture
27. The Phenomena of Scripture
28. Bible Problems
29. The Clarity of Scripture
30. The Necessity of Scripture
31. The Comprehensiveness of Scripture
32. The Sufficiency of Scripture
33. The Transmission of Scripture
34. Translations and Editions of Scripture
35. Teaching and Preaching
36. The Sacraments
37. Theology
38. Confessions, Creeds, Traditions
39. The Human Reception of Scripture
40. The Interpretation of Scripture
41. Assurance
42. Person-revelation: The Divine Witness
43. Human Beings as Revelation
44. Writing on the Heart
45. Summary and Organizational Reflections
46. Epilogue

11. God's Word as His Personal Presence

The third of the lordship attributes is the divine presence. Because God is lord, he lives in and with his creation. Indeed, he chooses people to encounter his presence in a special measure. So Israel is his special people, and he is their God. In the tabernacle and temple, he is literally "God with them." His Son is named *Immanuel*, "God with us" as he takes on human form and takes the place

of sinners before God's judgment. And his Spirit dwells with us and in us as his temple.

We have seen that in his word, God speaks as Lord. His word is his controlling power and his meaningful authority. Should we see the word also as God's personal presence? I believe so.

From a general theological perspective this conclusion is unavoidable. God's speech is, as we have seen, a necessary attribute, so that wherever God is, his word is. We have also seen that *Word* is a title of the second person of the Trinity, and whenever one divine person acts in the world, the other two persons act together with him. God *is* the word, and the word is God. So we conclude that wherever God is, the word is, and wherever the word is, God is. Whenever God speaks, he himself is there with us.

The same conclusion follows from God's attribute of omnipresence. Since God is everywhere, God and his word are always near to us.

But the presence of God in the word is not only a deduction from broader theological principles. Scripture is often very specific about it. Note:

1. *God's nearness to his people is the nearness of his words.* In Deut. 4:6-7, God says that he is especially near to Israel and connects that nearness with the rightness of his statutes.

For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? ⁸ And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

Deut. 30:11-14, then, speaks of the nearness of the word to Israel in the same terms as God's own nearness:

For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. ¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' ¹³ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' ¹⁴ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

In Romans, Paul quote this Deuteronomy passage, with some adjustments. Here, the nearness of the commandments in Deut. becomes the nearness of Christ, particularly in the Gospel message:

But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down)⁷ or "'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)... (Rom. 10:6-8)

2. *Where the word is, there is God's Spirit.* In many biblical texts we see the word accompanied by the Spirit, and vice versa. In Gen. 1:2, God's Spirit hovers over the waters as God prepares to create all things by his word. Ps. 33:6 couples God's "word" and "breath" as the sources of creation. God's breath is his Spirit.¹ Compare Isa. 34:16 and 59:21. Jesus says his words are both Spirit and life, John 6:63.

In John 16:13, Jesus says that the Spirit will "speak" to bring the disciples into all the truth. Throughout the book of Acts (note, e.g., 2:1-4), when the Spirit falls upon people, they often begin to speak of Jesus. In 1 Thess. 1:5, Paul couples word and Spirit as factors that are always equally present when people receive the Gospel in faith. Negatively: in 2 Thess. 2:2, Paul tells people to ignore either a false word or a false spirit, suggesting that Satan's counterfeit words also come with a counterfeit spirit.

Scripture also connects the written word of God to the Spirit. 2 Tim. 3:16 tells us that Scripture is *theopneustos*, God-breathed, again invoking God's Spirit-breath as the source of the word. Similarly, 2 Pet. 1:21 indicates that the written word has come about by the Spirit's direction of the human writers.

3. *God performs all of his actions through speech.* In Chapter 9, I noted that all of God's works could be summarized thus: his eternal plan, creation, providence, judgment, grace. In that context I indicated how all these actions reveal his controlling power. But of course where God's power is, his authority and presence are there too. We considered in Chapter 10 the inseparability of his power and authority. Now we should note the inseparability of both of these from his personal presence.

Since God is not a physical being, his presence with us is different from the presence of a physical object or person. With a physical being it is possible to measure its distance from us, but that is not possible with God. How, then, could we judge when a non-physical person is present with us? Such a person, evidently, is present wherever he can exercise his controlling power, and wherever he can enforce his authoritative commands. But God, of course,

¹ The Hebrew *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma* are both often translated "wind," or "breath."

exercises his power and authority throughout the universe; so he is present everywhere.²

So if God performs all his actions by powerful and authoritative speech, then his speech is never separated from his personal presence.

4. *God is distinguished from all other gods because he is the God who speaks.* Idols are “dumb” or “mute” (1 Cor. 12:2). Compare Ps. 115:5-7, 135:16, Hab. 2:18-20, In I Kings 18:24-35, the contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal concerns which God will “answer.” God’s answer, of course, is by fire. Speaking is unique to God, an attribute that distinguishes what he is from all other supposed gods.

5. *The persons of the Trinity are distinguished from one another in Scripture according to their role in the divine speech.* This is not the only scriptural way of representing the Trinitarian distinctions, but it is one significant way: The Father exerts his lordship through speech (Ps. 29, 147:4, Isa. 40:26, 43:1, 62:2, 65:15, Eph. 3:14-15). The Son is the Word spoken (John 1:1, I John 1:1-3, Rom. 10:6-8 (cf. Deut. 30:11-14), Heb. 1:1-3, Rev. 3:14, 19:13). The Spirit is the powerful breath that drives the word along to accomplish its purpose (Gen. 1:2, Ps. 33:6, 1 Thess. 1:5, 2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Pet. 1:21.) I will refer to this pattern later as the “linguistic model of the Trinity.” So in still another way we see that God’s speech is inseparable from his Trinitarian being.

6. *The speech of God has divine attributes:* righteousness (Ps. 119:7), faithfulness (Ps. 119:86), wonderfulness (119:129), uprightness (119: 137), purity (119: 140), truth (119:142, John 17: 17), eternity (Ps. 119:89, 160), omnipotence (Gen. 18:14, Luke 1:37, Isa. 55:11), perfection (Ps. 19:7ff). These attributes are not merely the attributes of something in creation, such as human faithfulness, righteousness or truth. Clearly in context these passages are saying that the words of God are different from merely human words, because they embody the unique qualities of God’s own nature.

7. *The word does things that only God can do.* In Heb. 4:12-13, the author says,

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

² By presence in this context, of course, I refer to God’s general omnipresence. Scripture also refers to other kinds of presence, in which God reveals himself to us more intensely: the burning bush, Mt. Sinai, the holiest place in the tabernacle and the temple. In these forms, too, his presence is not separated from his speech. My larger point is that even in the broadest kind of divine presence, general omnipresence, his word is there too.

Verse 12 speaks of the word of God discerning the most hidden aspects of our being. That clearly is something that only God can do. Verse 13 seems to mark a transition from talking about the word to talking about God. But there is no grammatical indication of a change to a new subject. In both verses, the author speaks of the powers of the word, and in both the powers of God. There is no distinction between one and the other. What the word does, God does, and vice versa. So the word not only has distinctively divine attributes; it also performs distinctively divine acts.

8. *The word of God is an object of worship:* The Psalmists view the words of God with religious reverence and awe, attitudes appropriate only to an encounter with God himself. The Psalmist trembles with godly fear (Ps. 119:120, Isa. 66:5), stands in awe of God's words (verse 161), rejoices in them (verse 162). He lifts his hands to God's commandments (Ps. 119:48). He exalts, praises, not only God himself, but also his "name" (Ps. 9:2, 34:3, 68:4). He gives thanks to God's name (Ps. 138:2). He praises God's word in Ps. 56:4, 10. This is extraordinary, since Scripture uniformly considers it idolatrous to worship anything other than God. But to praise or fear God's word is not idolatrous. To praise God's word is to praise God himself.

9. *Finally, the word is God.* John 1:1 comes right out and says this, together with other passages we have mentioned that correlate God's Word with Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-3, Heb. 1:1-3, Rev. 3:14, 19:13). We are inclined to focus on the Christology of John 1:1-14 and thus to take it as identifying Jesus Christ with the word of God and therefore with God. But we should also note the fact that this verse identifies God with the creative word of Gen. 1. We have seen that in Gen. 1, God creates all things by his word. When John's gospel starts "In the beginning," any Jewish reader would have caught the allusion back to Gen. 1:1. John 1:1-14 is about *that* word, the word that created all things. The allusion becomes more obvious in verse 3, "All things were made through him [i.e. through the word], and without him was not any thing made that was made." So when verse 1 says "the Word was God," it indicates not only the deity of Christ, but also the deity of the creative word. So the passage teaches not only an identity between God and Christ, but a threefold identity, between God, Christ, and the creative word.

So the word is God. When we encounter the word of God, we encounter God. When we encounter God, we encounter his word. We cannot encounter God without the word, or the word without God. God's word and his personal presence are inseparable. His word, indeed, is his personal presence. Whenever God's word is spoken, read, or heard, God himself is there.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*. If you would like to discuss this article in our online community, please visit our [RPM Forum](#).

Subscribe to RPM

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [RPM](#), please select this [link](#).