

“EXPERIENCING GOD” BY HENRY BLACKABY: HOW MYSTICISM MISLEADS CHRISTIANS

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Blackaby’s book, co-authored by Claude King, promises readers that they can come to know God by experience and come to know God’s will beyond what is revealed in Scripture, thereby living out a life full of adventure.[1] Blackaby promises his readers that they will, among other things, learn to hear God speaking to them and learn to identify God’s activities.[2] He promises to alleviate their problem of being frustrated with their Christian experience.

Experiencing God does start out with some basic facts about the gospel and has a place for people to check to indicate that they have made a “decision for Jesus.” I am glad he told his readers about such things as sin and repentance but am disappointed in the “make a decision for Jesus” approach. We have addressed that elsewhere.[3] But having checked the appropriate box, the reader is quickly ushered into the realm of subjectivity that permeates Blackaby’s approach from beginning to end. For example, we are urged to evaluate our “present experience with God.”[4]

However, I have known people who are totally deceived and in bondage to false doctrine who are very excited about their experience with God, so such evaluation doesn’t do much good. For example, I once met a pastor who just returned from the Toronto laughing revival and was so very excited because he had seen “God” cause people to bark like dogs and quack like ducks. That is just one example why what one thinks about his own “experience with God” is immaterial. What we need to know are the terms God has laid down for knowing Him and walking faithfully with Him.

In Blackaby’s theology, the importance of God’s self-revelation through the Scriptures is de-emphasized while personal experience is given priority. He writes, “We come to know God as we experience Him. God reveals Himself through our experience of Him at work in our lives.”[5] I am not disputing that God is at work in our lives if we have

truly been converted. But, like other subjectivists, Blackaby de-emphasizes specific revelation (Scripture) and puts unwarranted emphasis on general revelation (what can be observed in the created order). Our personal, spiritual experiences are unreliable. People observing general revelation and interpreting their own spiritual experiences in light of it have created the host of the world's false religions.

For example, Blackaby writes, "Find out what the Master is doing—then that is what you need to be doing.[6] Here he suggests that by observing what is around us and studying human history we can determine God's will. He further suggests that God reveals His will by some process in history—that He hasn't revealed it once for all. But this subjective approach cannot reveal God's moral law which is His revealed will. Someone's estimate of "what God is doing" is likely to be based on their own prejudices and inclinations. Let's look at another example.

Consider a person who believes the social gospel. If they see a situation where social services are being provided, they will conclude that they are witnessing "what God is doing." In the previous example of the laughing revival, that pastor was a charismatic. His thinking led him to believe that anything that appears to have a supernatural cause done in the context of a Christian meeting must be "what God is doing." So he saw people behaving oddly in such a context and joined it so as to participate in God's activities. Subjective evaluations can lead to falsely attributing things to God that in fact are not from God.

God's providence unfolding in history is what we actually observe. But providence contains good and evil. We cannot know what God's revealed will is by observing providence. We can only know His will through inerrant, infallible, special revelation—Scripture. Even our dreams and inner impressions are part of providence and they too are a mixture of good and evil (and indifferent). They do not reveal what God is doing or His will for our lives.

Blackaby fails to distinguish these categories, and thus uses stories of God revealing things to prophets and apostles in the Bible to suggest that these experiences should be normative for us. For example he

includes a section about Moses, not to prove that Moses was an authoritative spokesperson for God, but to prove that God expects all of us to gain revelation like Moses did. This is false, and we have shown it to be false in a recent article.[7] In the Moses section of his book Blackaby writes, “His desire is to get us from where we are to where He is working. When God reveals to you where He is working, that becomes His invitation to join Him.”[8]

Such a search for “where God is working” makes no sense. God is working always everywhere as He holds all things together by “the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3). Blackaby’s concept “where God is working” is vague. Is he talking about geography? God’s revealed will is to preach the gospel to all people everywhere. God works through the gospel to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment and to convert those who will be saved. There is no place off-limits, and this great work of God is not limited by geography. Blackaby’s kind of thinking causes people get on airplanes scurrying to the latest hot “revival.” But how do they know God wants them in Pensacola, for example, chasing a spiritual experience rather than preaching the gospel where they live? The simple answer: they don’t.

Blackaby’s book is filled with claims that we all need personal revelations from God, that these are binding upon us, and that if we do not gain these “words from God” we are going to fail God and live frustrated and empty lives. He claims that we are to obey these words seemingly without question: “When you do what He tells you, no matter how insensible it may seem, God accomplishes what He purposed through you. Not only do you experience God’s power and presence, but so do those who observe what you are doing.”[9] This is simply wrong and is a version of works righteousness.

All that I can possibly know as God’s binding, authoritative will is what God TOLD me (Scripture) not what God “tells” me (subjective ideas that may or may not be from God). It is abusive to bind people to non-authoritative, fallible words (even insensible ones) and tell them that obeying such words is the key to God’s presence in their lives. This, in my opinion, is an attack against the gospel. We have the promise of God’s presence because of what He did for us through the cross, not because we have become mystics following ideas that enter our minds

which we decided might be from Him. But Blackaby reiterates, “Obey whatever God tells you to do.”[10] So, on that point I think I’ll choose to follow his advice based on what I know God has told me in the Scriptures. I know God told me not to listen to people who teach false doctrine; I am going to obey that and not listen to Blackaby.

Beyond promoting these personal revelations as laws to be obeyed (as if they were God’s revealed moral law), he further claims they are also infallible: “When we come to God to know what He is about to do where we are, we also come with the assurance that what God indicates He is about to do is certain to come to pass.”[11] This is another problem, because the only things certain to come to pass are those God has predicted in Scripture. Personal revelations that we think might be from God are not certainly from God [we can’t be sure they are] and they will not “certainly come to pass.” Blackaby calls this type of word “revelation”: “When He opens your spiritual eyes to see where He is at work, that revelation is your invitation to join Him.”[12] Subjective impressions are now to be considered revelation? This approach could lead to every imaginable error.

Blackaby makes personal revelations not only binding (they must be obeyed) and infallible (certain), but he also declares that they are necessary for everyone’s spiritual well-being: “If the Christian does not know when God is speaking, he is in trouble at the heart of his Christian life!”[13] Furthermore, he says, “If you have been given a word from God, you must continue in that direction until it comes to pass (even twenty five years like Abraham).” That means that if someone should get one of these “words from God” and if it actually was not from God, he would be obligated to follow whatever foolhardy, insensible path the “word” led him down. Such teaching, in my opinion, is foolish and abusive to the flock.

God physically appeared to Abraham many times as “the angel of the Lord.” Abraham received special revelations. We don’t. We do not have the same certainty that our subjective impressions are “the word of the Lord.” Amazingly, Blackaby sees the problem with his approach but still presses on with it: “If you have not been given a word from God yet you say you have, you stand in judgment as a false prophet . . . [cites Deut. 18:21-22].”[14] EXACTLY! That is the very claim I made in the last issue

of CIC.[15] If these personal words from God are taken as binding, and we speak them to ourselves and they are not totally accurate, we have become false prophets to our own selves. Blackaby evidently agrees, yet he pushes on.

The flaws of Blackaby's subjectivism are rather obvious when you examine his claims objectively. God's revealed will is not found by subjective experiences, but in Scripture. Looking around in the world hoping to discover "where God is working" is impossible since God is always working everywhere as He providentially brings history along toward His ultimate purposes. We will be fooled by our own prejudices because we think "God working" must look something like whatever our religious inclinations tell us it will look like.

Furthermore, he has elevated fallible words that may or may not be from God to the level of infallible Scripture and elevated every believer to the status of Moses and Abraham as recipients of special revelation. Following his approach is not how we "experience God." We cannot not know if we are experiencing God in any way other than to come to Him on His own terms, by faith. When we do, we are assured that God is with us no matter what experiences we have. (source)

End notes:

Henry T. Blackaby & Claude V. King, *Experiencing God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994). For simplicity, I will refer to Blackaby as the author with no slight intended to King as the co-author.

Ibid. 4.

[HTTP://CICMINISTRY.ORG/COMMENTARY/ISSUE73.HTM](http://CICMINISTRY.ORG/COMMENTARY/ISSUE73.HTM)

Blackaby 5.

Ibid. 9.

Ibid. 48.

[HTTP://CICMINISTRY.ORG/COMMENTARY/ISSUE73.HTM](http://CICMINISTRY.ORG/COMMENTARY/ISSUE73.HTM)

Blackaby 55.

Ibid. 61.

Ibid. 63.

Ibid. 128.

Ibid. 129.

Ibid. 132.

Ibid. 140.

[HTTP://CICMINISTRY.ORG/COMMENTARY/ISSUE98.HTM](http://CICMINISTRY.ORG/COMMENTARY/ISSUE98.HTM)