

A Biblical People

Colossians 1:25

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- I. The Ministry of the Word
- II. The Stewardship of the Word
- III. The Knowing of the Word

According to Google's advanced algorithm, there are 129,864,880 books that have been written in human history. Once you start counting the multiple duplicates and copies the number escalates into that trillions category. That's a lot of ideas from a lot of different people.

The largest library in the world is The Library of Congress with just over 34 million books that take up over 800 miles of bookshelves. At that rate, it means there are enough books to put on one long shelf stretching one after another all the way from San Diego to the northeastern tip of Maine, which is over 3,000 miles. It's a lot of books.

Yet in all the books there is one book, one of the oldest books which is the most quoted, most published, most translated, most purchased and most influential book in the entirety of the human race, The Bible. The Book of all books.

I grew up around the Bible, with Bible's in our home and hearing stuff from the Bible, but to my memory I never really sat down to read and consider the Bible for myself until I was eighteen years old, in college, living out on my own miles and miles away from home. Up until that point I had thought of the Bible as just a book with a bunch of rules with a God who was always either angry or disappointed with me.

I will never forget the night in my college dorm room laying in bed when I picked up a Bible and began reading it for the very first time. It quite literally changed my life.

Today we're continuing in our study through the letter written to the ancient church in Colossae and by proxy written to us as God's Word in the Bible. The verse we're dealing with today pulls back the curtain enabling us to see how the Bible came to us and how it's supposed to affect us.

Why don't stand with me for a minute as we read our passage for today as a way of honoring these holy words sent from God to us?

Colossians 1:25

"I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known."

So I've got three points I want to work through today, The Ministry of the Word, The Stewardship of the Word and The Knowing of the Word and the theme for today is this simple phrase, "The Word of God Does The Work of God." Let's jump into this first point.

I. The Ministry of the Word

Our verse for today starts off with the personal pronoun "I" which is a signal referring to the immediate person who first put these words onto paper. In the very first verse, he tells us who he is, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God (1:1)."

He's spent the bulk of the first chapter telling us about Jesus and now here at the end of the chapter he tells us some specifics of the unique role of an apostle that he undertook at the direction of God and His will. Paul spent the first half of his life not being a Christian until he encountered the risen Jesus while on a road trip and Jesus' words to him pierced his soul changing the entire direction of his life.

In verse 25 of our passage from Colossians today he tells us how he saw what God did in his life and the way he saw his role. He "became a minister." "Became" addresses the work of God in his life, God changed him from one thing and then shaped him into another. A metamorphosis took place.

Before this change, Paul tells us in another one of his books, in Philippians chapter three, how he had previously seen his life in the same way that many of us still so easily see our lives today. He saw his life as being all about pursuing success in his career, trying to climb up the social ladder and making a life for himself.

But, after he encountered the word of Jesus a radical shift happened so that he ended up seeing himself as a minister. Now, I know that today when we hear the word "minister" we often think of someone who serves as a pastor or a preacher in some sort of official or paid capacity. The funny thing is that's not what this word means, at least not here.

The word "minister" actually just means servant, it's one who serves and everyone who becomes a follower of Jesus Christ is supposed to have this kind of paradigm shift where they see themselves as a servant minister too. He explains this in another one of his books, in 2 Corinthians 3. He writes,

"You yourselves are our letter...written on hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ...written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts...God made us competent to be ministers." - 2 Corinthians 3:2-3,6

So what this is saying is part of what it means to believe in, know and follow Jesus Christ as a Christian is to become and see yourself and your life as a minister, serving others by administering God's life-giving spirit to others. When it comes down to it we can really only look at our lives in one of two ways, we can either look at the goal of life with the goal of serving ourselves or with the goal of serving others.

How do you see your life? Do you see your life as being all about you, what you need, want and desire? Or do you see your life as being all about others and their needs? This isn't easy at all. It's hard. It's hard for me.

But it's so very close to the heart of God. God consistently and continually pours out His life for others. Jesus summarized His entire time on earth by saying he came, "Not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45)."

Here's the funny ironic thing about it though. There's something so unsatisfying that takes place when you just serve yourself. For example, a few weeks ago it was my day off and I was just tired and didn't feel like doing anything. My wife was out and about, the kids were at school and I just decided to lay on the couch and watch TV all day. Literally, I think I watched TV for like six straight hours.

Now don't get me wrong, I don't think it's a sin to just binge watch TV shows every now and then, sometimes you need that. But the other day when I did that, by the end of the day I just felt gross. I never even showered and got dressed for the day, I just laid there occasionally eating and drinking, just feeding my self. When my kids got home from school they were like, "Dad, you seriously haven't moved all day!" And they just shook their heads at me.

Now, on the other hand, there is something about just pouring yourself for others that is so satisfying and feels so good, even when you're wiped out by it at the end of the day. A few years ago a book came out titled, "The Paradox of Generosity." It's not a Christian book. Not written by a Christian or anything like that. The book is the product of a national study done by the University of Notre Dame.

Overwhelming they discovered that people who were more generous, who give more are happier, have better bodily health, feel more purpose in living and avoid depression. Here's what Christian Smith and Hilary Davidson say based on the results of their findings,

"Generosity is paradoxical. Those who give, receive back in turn. By spending ourselves for others' well-being, we enhance our own standing. This is not only philosophical or religious teaching; it is a sociological fact based on empirical scientific research. It is no coincidence that the word 'miser' is etymologically related to the word, 'miserable.'

It might seem obvious that generously giving away money or time always involves a loss - of the money itself, of course, and of the good, experiences, or savings that the money might have provided the giver had it not been given away. It also seems evident that donating one's own limited time, energy and attention to someone else's concerns similarly represents a loss...But more often and importantly, generous people tend to receive back goods that are even more valuable than those they gave: happiness, health, a sense of purpose in life and personal growth."

Charles Thomas Studd was a professional cricket player who became a Christian missionary and he wrote this great little poem, which speaks so beautifully to this.

*Two little lines I heard one day,
Traveling along life's busy way;
Bringing conviction to my heart,*

*And from my mind would not depart;
Only one life, twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

*Only one life, the still small voice,
Gently pleads for a better choice
Bidding me selfish aims to leave,
And to God's holy will to cleave;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

Can I make a suggestion? Become a minister. Look at your life as something given to you by God that will be happiest when it follows Jesus Christ in giving your life away for others. Paul became a minister of the word for the sake of others and we can too and it's really what God all about. The word of God does the work of God. If we open up ourselves to be used by God, He will use us to minister to others in ways we never dreamed possible.

If you need some ideas of how to do that, here's five great ideas: 1) Get involved in serving in the R I Kids ministry. 2) Get involved in serving on one of the Connect Teams. 3) Get involved in serving in one of the bands or the A/V crew. 4) Get involved in serving our homeless friends here on Tuesday nights. Or 5) Just go out of your way to do something nice for someone else.

Think about it. It's not only a great way to serve others but a great way to get to know new people, by working together and we'd love to have you on the team.

Well, let's transition and move onto our next point, "The Stewardship of the Word."

II. The Stewardship of the Word

This point comes from the word "stewardship" in our verse. Stewardship is a word that means entrusted caretaker of another's house, property, money or estate. It's a sacred trust that's given to another person.

In our verse, Paul talks about his particular and unique stewardship, which he says was to "make the word of God fully known." Now, this definitely included Paul's teaching, preaching and church planting ministry but what he's actually referring to with this phrase is writing books of the Bible, under God's direction, for us.

If we look at the next verse, verse 26 he expands on this stewardship of the word as a revealing what was previously a mystery. The reason we know he's specifically talking about writing books of the Bible is because he uses this exact same language in another one of his books where he spells this out for us.

It's Ephesians 3:1-5 and it says,

“1 I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus...2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. 4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”

Do you see it? His unique apostle stewardship was writing down things revealed to him by God's Spirit. So I want to spend a few minutes talking about the Bible as the Word of God and the nature of revelation.

We as human beings are the most sophisticated species on the planet with all kinds of ways of communicating, body language, art, gifts, tears, hugs, emojis and most of all words. Words have always been and remain to be the primary way we interact.

Words have initiated all kinds of debates, wars and destroyed countless relationships. At the same time, words have brought about solutions, peace to nations and love to relationships. Words are such magical phenomena they've been the source of study for high-level philosophers like Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein and yet the words are something even babies can understand. It is within this audience of the mystery of the human word that the Word of God makes Itself known for anyone who opens their ears to hear it, opens their eyes to read it, and opens their hearts to meet it.

The “word of God”, the phrase from our verse is the thing which unites the entirety of the Bible and its story. The first reference to the word of God in the Bible is oratorical. It's in Genesis 1:3 where God first speaks saying, “Let there be light.” God is introduced on the first page of the Bible as one who has something to say to mankind. From that point on there are nearly 400 references to the Word of God in the Old Testament.

God's Word is conveyed in and through dreams, visions, voices out of clouds, encounters with strangers, directly through the human mind, dictation and sometimes through that which could be considered a form of physical or bodily possession of God's Spirit. The mediation or mediator is called a prophet in the Old Testament. The Word of God comes directly to the prophet who in turn speaks it to the people.

These prophets cared very much about whether or not what they were saying was really from God. So for example,

In Numbers 22:38 Balaam says, “I must speak only what God puts in my mouth.”

In Deuteronomy 18:18 God says through Moses, “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.”

Through Jeremiah the prophet in Jeremiah 23:20-21 God rails against those who would say, “God told me” when He actually didn't. He says, “The anger of the LORD will not turn back...I did not I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied.”

Central to the Old Testament understanding God is that He is a God who speaks His Word to His people and saves them through His Word, which is vastly different to false gods who do not speak and cannot save (Ps 115:5, 135:16, Jer 10:5).

The period between the last prophetic writing in the Old Testament, the book of Malachi and the writings of the New Testament beginning with Matthew is known as the 400 years of silence. The preaching of John the Baptist and the coming of Jesus marked a new dawn in which the Word of God once again became active after an era of approximately 400 years when there was no prophetic voice, only interaction with the Word of the Jewish Scriptures, which is part of the reason why we say there is an "Old" and "New" Testament.

The other reason is both the Old and New Testaments are bodies of writings that are ultimately all about Jesus. As Jesus Himself said in Matthew 5:17 and Luke 24:27, all of the Scriptures are about Him. Jesus is the one who consummates and culminates the Word of the Old Testament making known the Word of God in the New Testament, so much so that Jesus Himself is called The Word. Here are just two passages of many:

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." - John 1:14

"He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is the Word of God." - Revelation 19:13

Likewise, the Word of God is not only the title of Christ but also includes all the words of Jesus He spoke. Once Jesus of Nazareth was recognized as the divine figure of the Word, then anything Jesus said and did becomes the Word of God. Jesus says His words provide a firm foundation for faith (Mt 7:24) and will never pass away (Mt 5:17-18, Mk 13:31, Lk 21:33). Even natural elements of creation recognize and obey the Word of Jesus. One time Jesus was on a boat and there was a storm and Jesus got up and spoke to the wind and the waves saying, "peace be still" and the men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him! (Matthew 8:26-27)"

When Jesus' words are encountered, people are called to a point of decision, so that they either accept or reject them resulting in either eternal salvation or damnation (Mt 15:12, Mk 10:21). Check it out:

In John 5:24 Jesus says, "Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in him who sent me, has eternal life."

Luke 5:1 says, "One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesarete, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God."

Then Jesus says in John 14:24 "These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me."

Jesus' words very clearly are the Word of God. When it comes to Paul and the thirteen books God had him write, he wrote very clearly with an understanding that he was writing special words from God that

we're all about who Jesus was and what He had accomplished and says that salvation is all wrapped up in hearing and believing in the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).

Now, if you're like me I've always wondered how did this work. I mean I understand Jesus and what He said and did being the Word of God because He was God but what about the prophets and guys like Paul? How did they get this word from God? Was it like they got in some sort of tantric possessed state and just started writing and when they came out of it they were like "Oh, the Word of God!"

I don't think so, because you see and hear each of the forty different authors of the Bible using their own vocabulary, writing style and they all seem to be very conscious of what they were doing. Whether it was in their mind or through verbal words or dreams, what seems to have taken place was God communicating a message to them, which they in turn recorded in their own words, which God oversaw making sure what they recorded perfectly represented what He wanted to be said.

Paul speaks to this in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 when he says,

"We thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers."

What I think is being communicated is the nature of revelation. Both in Colossians and Ephesians Paul says God's Word was revealed to him, which he wrote down. Which is one of the reasons why I've never thought it's smart to say, "God revealed to me" because apparently, that means God is giving words to be written down and added to the Bible? But in the last book of the Bible, Revelation, God said no more words were going to come until Jesus returns and that nothing should be added (Revelation 22:18).

So why this word "revealed" and why is that significant? This is Charles Octavious Boothe.

February is Black History Month, which we feel is significant in light of the history of our country and the call and vision of Jesus Christ for his churches to be communities of mixed ethnicities. So this year for Black History Month I started reading Charles Booth's book, "Plain Theology For Plain People." Charles Booth was born as a slave in Alabama who was freed after the Civil War. He became a Christian shortly after and ended up becoming a pastor and starting two churches. His book is quite good. In it, he has a chapter on the Bible and this is what he says,

"We are all aware that no book on earth is clothed with such claims as the Bible, and none deals with subjects of such deep interest. Hence, it is man's plain duty to inform himself as to its authenticity and mission. The Bible is a gracious revelation from God.

A finite man is not able to search the heart of another man; how much less is a finite man able to know all the mind of the Infinite Jehovah? Hence, it follows that God must reveal himself to his creatures, or remain forever unknown to them."

This is what it is all about and what separates the Bible from the other 129,864,879 books that have been written. Through human words God condescends to us, speaking to us in a way that we can understand so we might know how good, great and gracious He is.

If it was Paul's stewardship to record those words for us and if it's not for us to have any more revealed and recorded, what then is our stewardship? It's simple, to read and receive them. Paul's stewardship was to write the Word of God and our stewardship is to read and receive the Word of God.

It's the Word of God that does the work of God, so if we want God to work in our lives we need His Word. There's so much more that could be said and that we could talk about in regards to the Bible actually being God's Word. If you want more I highly encourage you to take our Theo 101 class, where we dedicate one whole week to investigating how we can know or trust that the Bible is actually true and reveals God's Word to us.

I'll simply conclude this point today by asking one simple question. Would you rather have a clear and perfect guide for your life and salvation from God or would you rather the pressure of trying to figure out everything on your own picking and choosing what you think is right or true, in essence creating your own personal Bible of beliefs that will undoubtedly fail you?

God's Word is the only thing that can truly guide us and fill us with life. To try and see and understand that I've got one last point for us today, "The Knowing of the Word."

III. The Knowing of the Word

Okay, I know I've been throwing a ton of Bible at you today but one last time let's go back to our primary verse for today that has launched us into everything we've been talking about. The end of the sentence in Colossians 1:25 says the goal is for the Word of God to be fully known. What's that mean?

It could mean letting as many people as possible know about Jesus and His life-saving word, it could mean knowing the second half of the story, not just the Old Testament but the New Testament in how Jesus is for everyone, not just Jews. It could mean Paul's completion of writing down everything God wanted Him to. Or it could coming into and experiencing an increasing knowledge and experience of the full goodness of God. Or it could be all those things.

I think there's an element of truth to all of them but in light some of the things that are said in verses 27 and 28, like the riches of the glory of this mystery and how the word matures us I tend to think this full knowing of God's Word is an ever increasing experience of God's goodness and dependency on Him that happens through taking in His Word. Fully knowing the word cannot mean just reading the entire thing once through, or even memorizing, it's a deeper and more profound experiential thing.

In December I started doing something I've never done before in the near fourteen-year history of our church. I started doing pastoral house visits, where I'll visit a member's home, just to be with them, talk about life, pray and administer a house blessing. This last week I went to see the Hopkins.

This is Lynn and Molly Hopkins. They've been members of our church for about three years now. Molly actually interned for us a couple years ago but couldn't continue because she's been battling

POTS disease for the past five years and things just took a really rough turn. POTS is an autoimmune disease that all of a sudden causes a change in the blood flow which makes a person pass out, which can actually be pretty dangerous if you fall and hit your head.

I've personally caught Molly several times when she passed out. Right now she can only be active for about 30-45 minutes before she gets really weak, so she can very rarely come to Sunday service anymore and if she does she's usually in a wheelchair or you'll see her incredible husband Lynn just carrying her. Lynn is an incredible husband. When I grow up I hope I can be as good of a husband as he is.

So I was hanging out with Lynn and Molly the other day was asking her how she was doing? I asked her later if I could share her answer which she said was fine. Here's what she said, "I couldn't make it without God's Word. Each morning I wake up and I don't know how I'm going to face another day but I open God's Word and it fills me with God's love and courage and peace. God is so good to me and I'm so grateful for Him." Pretty incredible.

I think fully knowing God's Word is something like that. Being filled and given life by God, like Jesus Himself said when He said that man isn't to live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. That may be reading the Bible every morning, that may be listening to it on audio while running, that may be taking one day a week to really ingest and meditate on something from it or it just may be calling a passage to mind to turn to God, thank Him or receive direction and help for the day.

I think what it means to be a biblical people is to be a group of people who together have come to see and know that we need God and His word and we rely on it for our life. More and more I'm thinking and dreaming about what it means for us as the Resolved to see ourselves in the story of the Bible and to be formed and shaped by it. And I'm convinced that happens through us turning to God's Words so that we might know Him and receive from Him.

I'll conclude this point with just a sampling of all the things God promises for us that come in and through His Word.

The Word of God is an "incomparable" Word (Jn. 7:46). There is no other Word like it.

The Word of God is an "imperishable" Word (I Pe. 1:24-25). It is not subject to decay from frequent and continual use, it will endure.

The Word of God is the "dependable" Word (Is. 40:8, 55:11, 1 Pet 1:25, John 10:35). It can always be counted on that the Word will come true.

The Word of God is the "protecting" Word (Ps. 119:9-11).

The Word of God is the "guiding" Word (Ps. 119:105).

The Word of God is the "freeing" Word (Jn. 8:31-32).

The Word of God is the "cleansing" Word (Eph. 5:26).

The Word of God is the "prospering" Word (Josh. 1:8).

The Word of God is the "living and judging" Word (Heb. 4:12).

The Word of God is the "strengthening" Word (Ps. 119:28b).

The Word of God is the "teaching and training" Word (II Tim. 3:16-17).

The Word of God is the "flawless" Word (2 Sam. 22:31, Ps. 18:30, Ps 33:4, Prov 30:5).

The Word of God is the Word "of Truth" (Ps. 119:43, Jn. 17:17, Eph 1:13, Col 1:5, 2 Tim 2:13, Jam 1:18).

The Word of God is a "powerful" Word (Lk 24:19, Heb 1:3).

The Word of God is an honorable Word (Ex 9:20, Acts 13:48).

The Word of God is the "saving" Word (Rom 10:17, 1 Cor 1:18, Jam 1:21).

The Word of God is the "life-giving" Word (Jn. 6:63, Phil 2:16, 1 Jn 1:1).

What do you need from God's Word today? Whatever it is, the answer is in God's Word and in full supply.

The human word has migrated far from its original habitat in the oratory preliterate cultures to the seemingly limitless new forms of writing, print, books, newspapers, music, radio, television, computers, e-mail and the internet. Thanks be to God who gives us His Word in the midst of the fragility and mortality of the human world.

The Word of God does the work of God and the Word of God can be directly encountered in the written Word of the Bible. The Word of God is the only hope for every person and all of creation. Anyone who opens their ears opens their eyes and opens their hearts can receive the divine Word. All human words will pass away but the Word of God will stand forever.

Conclusion

Well, I pray that today has been helpful for your soul. We started out today talking about all the books in the world and the largest library in the word. In all the books there stands one above all the rest, the Holy Bible, God's Word.

We're going to conclude as we do each week here at The Resolved, with a time of response. We'll take a minute and respond by writing some things down, then we'll respond with some verbal words of confession and assurance and then we'll respond by coming to God's table where we receive some physical elements of God's Word in bread and wine as Jesus' body and blood.

One of the ways the Bible summarizes its message is by calling it the “word of the cross.” That’s because in the cross God shows the extent of His love for us by sending His son to die on it for all our sins, fears, guilt and shame. Even if you just take only the words Jesus spoke on the cross we hear the full gamut of God’s great love for us. He is a good and loving Father who sent His Son and His Word to save us and heal us.