

## Open letter on “God loves you and wants you to know...”

I’m glad you asked, “Are there other ‘words of God’ than the Bible?”

I am aware of some concern regarding my suggestion on October 9, 2011, that a Christian can say to another, “God loves you and wants you to know...” I am well aware of the potential dangers of this, nevertheless this, in itself, should not disallow the activity, since there are dangers of abuse on every page of the Bible. Still, I felt that some additional clarification might be helpful.

Be assured that the context of my comments on October 9 were entirely biblical. If I made a mistake, it might have been that I could have given greater emphasis to the Scriptures being the basis for everything we do and say as believers. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish...” (Colossians 3:16) This cannot be overstated.

I suggested that there are times when a believer may say to someone, “God loves you and wants you to know....” (This should not have come across as cavalier, but as serious.) The Scriptural support comes from the Holy Spirit’s gifts to the church, particularly the gifts of teaching, prophecy, knowledge and encouragement. These are “word-gifts”. (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 & 14, Ephesians 4) These gifts are actually the application of the Spirit’s words in the Bible.

Regarding the statement, “God loves you and wants you to know...”

- I’m assuming that no one is suggesting that it is unbiblical to tell someone that God loves them.
- I’m further assuming that none are saying that it is not biblical to speak God’s words to someone. This is, indeed, what the Bible is, God’s words to us. Therefore no one would object to someone saying, “God loves you and wants you to know that ‘God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son...’” or other quotes from the Bible.
- I do believe that there are also “words of God” which are non-canonical. (Canonical words are words that the Church has determined are “Scripture” in the strict sense of the word. These words are always true for everyone and in every situation. They deserve to be written down and treasured by all the churches.) One could, therefore say “God loves you and wants you to know that He sees the hassle you are dealing with.” (It is not a direct quote, but certainly true and consistent with the Scriptures.) When I or anyone else preaches/teaches consistent with the Scriptures, then these words are in some sense the words of God. They are not, however, Holy Scripture. These are words which must be tested and examined against canonical Scripture. (1 Thessalonians 5:21) Spiritual gifts of teaching, prophecy, knowledge or encouragement all must be tested. (1 Corinthians 12 & 14) Paul says that we should “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) and “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...” (Colossians 3:16) Let every Christian’s speech be so baptized and anointed with

Scripture that God's word permeates our words. I dare not preach or teach unless I preach with the conviction that my words are indeed words that God will bless and use, therefore "His words." Still, they are not, nor ever will be, canonical words.

- Timothy had prophetic words spoken over him (1 Timothy 1:18) which Paul notes are consistent with the instructions Paul gave Timothy. They were non-canonical words but God's words nonetheless. This may have been at the same occasion which Paul references in 4:14, "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you." We don't have those prophetic words because they were not intended to be part of the Bible. Still, they were God's words.
- I know that some believe all prophetic word ceased after the canon was closed. I have always disagreed with this position. The canon was closed, most would say, in A.D. 397 at the Third Council of Carthage. One might question whether the church at the time was in the place that God wanted it to be, still I accept this ruling. (See below.) We Protestants do, however, disagree about the books of the Apocrypha included by the Catholic Church. (The Catholics feared omitting any writings that might be inspired Scripture. Protestants, on the other hand feared including any writings that might not be inspired Scripture.)
- While I am not open to adding additional, canonical words to our Bible, the reference in Revelation 22 about "...adds anything to them..." or "...takes words away from..." does not apply to the canon, which was not even collected at the time when Revelation was written. Rather, this warning regards "the words of the prophecy of this book." (I.e., The last book of the Bible, Revelation; 22:18) We must find different argument than this for the canon being closed.
- We must also find different argument, for instance, in challenging the Book of Mormon and other writings. The test must be consistency with the already acknowledged canonical Scriptures. When they differ from Scripture we dismiss them.
- Finally we must not allow abuses by some in this area to press us into viewing God's word as static and stuck. It is "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12) and, I think, much more so than any of us imagine.

Thank you for listening.

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