

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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What color are Jesus' words?

(Jerry Fite)

Those with “red letter” editions of the New Testament will see that Jesus' words are printed the color of red in their Bibles. While the color of ink in which your Bible is printed should not be a concern, to place emphasis upon the words in red, thinking they are more important than the words printed in black does contradict the truth taught in the Bible.

Being ignorant of the Bible's inspiration, some use the red-letter distinction to defend their agendas. For example, those who do not like the specific restrictions Paul placed upon women teaching, in I Timothy 2:9-15, appeal to people by saying we should follow only the words in red, for they are Jesus' words. Paul's words are authoritatively inferior, being not in red. In a discussion group over the web, one man sincerely requested that a blue-letter edition be combined with the red-letter edition. Blue, his color for life, would therefore indicate the very words of the Father.

Does this mean that Paul's words were not the words of God, the Father, and not the words of God, the Son?

Paul clearly reveals the source of his words: “...but we received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God, that we might know the things that were freely given us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth, combining spiritual things with spiritual words” (I Corinthians 2:12-13). Paul also makes it clear that the commandments he is writing to the Corinthians are not from himself but, “... they are the commandment of the Lord” (I Corinthians 14:37). Paul's spoken words were from the very Spirit of God, and the words he wrote were the very words the Lord Jesus commanded.

Jesus promised His apostles that they would be guided by the Holy Spirit into all the truth (John 16:13). He further emphasizes what the Holy Spirit will do: “He shall glorify me: for He shall speak of mine and shall declare it unto you. All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine: therefore, said I, that He taketh of mine, and shall declare it unto you” (John 16:14). According to Jesus, Paul, as an apostle, would receive the very things both Jesus and the Father want declared as the Holy Spirit guides him.

The “red letter” edition of the New Testament has its origin with Louis Klopsch, the first editor of the Christian Herald. He was finishing an editorial on June 19, 1899 when he glanced down at Luke 22:20, where Jesus says, “...this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (KJV). Since blood is red, he thought why not have a “red letter” Bible with the red words being the words the Lord spoke in person. The Herald's issue of November 1901 advertised “red letter” Bibles being available. Some 60,000 copies were printed and ready for the public to read.

The words Jesus spoke while He dwelt among man in the flesh certainly stand out on the page when colored in red. But when man proceeds from that man-made distinction to think the words written by the apostles were not God-inspired, then one is thinking erroneously, and contradicting clear New Testament doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16). Paul's words in black ink are the very authoritative words of Jesus and the Father. We will be judged by the words Jesus spoke in the flesh, or through His apostles. (cf. John 12:48). Do not ignore His words printed in red or black ink!