

USE THE WORD - REVEAL

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, February 20, 2011

The Bible was not created to be great literature. It has many fine literary qualities, but it is not these that have made it the best-selling book, year after year, since the printing press was invented. It has been the world's best seller because it answers our longing to know God and tells us what He has done for us and what He expects from us.

The Bible is full of dramatic stories, but it is not a storybook. It is full of historical records, but it is not a history book. The Bible offers wisdom for the human experience, but it is not a philosopher's guide, nor a counselor's reference book.

The Bible is a compendium of letters from God, and books about His interactions with people and nations. It includes histories, prophecies, poetry, allegory, and advice. Above all it is honest story-telling and practical advice.

The Bible is such a product of divine activity that Apostle Paul called it "God-breathed." The same Scriptures are so practical in nature and purpose that Paul called them "useful."

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (MSG)

Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.

When we first open the Bible, we don't really know what to expect from it. It is unlike other books. We may have had some idea of its content, or some desire that drove us to it, but it never turns out like we expected. That's because the Bible is more like a conduit than a book.

A book is a repository of information; the flurry and activity of life and relationships *captured* in printed words on paper. Every time you open its covers, you'll find the same information on its pages.

But a conduit is a channel of information or material *flowing* between two points. The printed words of the Bible are the same each time you look at them, but depending on where you are in your life's journey, their message is tailored by the Holy Spirit to meet your need. Their unfolding revelation is never-ending and ever-appropriate.

Last Sunday, I spoke to you about the Bible's capacity to teach or "show us truth"—to describe for us what is real and lasting, as opposed to what is shallow and temporary, or even imaginary.

When God removes the veil that hides Him from our sight and we glimpse the truth of who He is and what He is like, something else—something within us—is also revealed: how *unlike Him* we are.

When Isaiah had a vision of the Almighty, seated upon His throne, surrounded by angels chanting His praises, he also saw himself as he really was. In the presence of the Lord, he was exposed:

Isaiah 6:5 (NLT)

⁵ *"It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD of Heaven's Armies."*

I Don't Want To Be Exposed!

Paul called it “*exposing our rebellion*.” This is the second usefulness of the Scriptures. Though at first it may seem harsh, it is actually a tender, thoughtful mercy of God. If you were setting out to sail to an island and you were handed a map of the bay, revealing the rocks and reefs that could sink your boat, that would be a kindness. Just so, the exposure of your rebel tendencies is God's kindness to prevent you from sinking to destruction.

By means of the Scriptures, God exposes your rebellion *just to you*, to reduce the risk of it being exposed more widely and bringing you greater humiliation.

Paul taught the church in Corinth about this principle, as it applied to sharing in Holy Communion.

1 Corinthians 11:27-32 (NLT)

²⁷ *Anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily (in an unworthy manner) is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.* ²⁸ *That is why you should **examine yourself before** eating the bread and drinking the cup.* ²⁹ *For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself.* ³⁰ *That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died.*

³¹ ***But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way.*** ³² *Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world.*

This kind of temporal judgment is designed to keep us from the eternal judgment that is to come.

God kindly prefers to expose your rebellion only to you, so that you may change your ways and get on with His purposes for your life. He wants to humble you in private so you won't be humiliated in public.

If you refuse, and ignore His gentle promptings, God may show your sin to others who will help hold you accountable. And by the way, if He does, though it be embarrassing, it's a sure sign that *He loves you* and hasn't given up on you. For when He does give up, He turns you over to the full fury of your own sin, and that does not end well, as the report of some of the Italian believers indicates:

Romans 1:21-24 (NLT)

²¹ *Yes, **they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God** or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused.* ²² *Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools.* ²³ *And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.*

²⁴ ***So God abandoned them*** to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired.

Where Does Rebellion Come From?

Rebellion was first discovered in the Rebel Leader, Lucifer. Once the brightest, anointed angel, he became enchanted with his own beauty and popularity. In pride, he began to imagine he could become like God. Then, he began to declare that he would become greater than God. Almighty God thrust him out of Heaven and threw him down to the earth. Sweeping one-third of the angels with him in his rebellion, he set up shop as their king. We know him as the Accuser, the Destroyer, and Satan, king of the demons.

This Deceiver introduced rebellion to our first parents, Adam and Eve, luring them with the same notion that once stole his own heart, which is this: “God is jealously guarding His deity, but you will become like Him and discover all you are capable of, if you will ignore His forbidding words and step beyond the boundaries He has established for you.”

What they did discover—the root and power of sin—has haunted the human race ever since. Rebellion is now as natural to us as breathing. Even toddlers demonstrate their dedication to contrariness and self-actualization. We never outgrow it; it does not wear off or weaken with age.

What Does Rebellion Look Like?

The first king of Israel, Saul ben Kish, provides a gripping illustration of rebellion at work. The prophet, Samuel, gave Saul specific instructions from God about dealing with Israel’s enemy, the Amelekites.

1 Samuel 15:1-3 (GWT)

¹ One day Samuel said to Saul, “It was the LORD who told me to anoint you as king of his people, Israel. Now listen to this message from the LORD! ² This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies has declared: I have decided to settle accounts with the nation of Amalek for opposing Israel when they came from Egypt. ³ Now go and completely destroy the entire Amalekite nation—men, women, children, babies, cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys.”

Saul had another idea, which seemed even better.

1 Samuel 15:7-9 (GWT)

⁷ Then Saul slaughtered the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, east of Egypt. ⁸ He captured Agag, the Amalekite king, but completely destroyed everyone else. ⁹ Saul and his men spared Agag’s life and kept the best of the sheep and goats, the cattle, the fat calves, and the lambs—everything, in fact, that appealed to them. They destroyed only what was worthless or of poor quality.

Saul had the notion that it was a great waste of fine things to destroy them indiscriminately. Capturing the king of the Amelekites could bring him great notoriety, and distributing the best of their livestock to his soldiers would certainly earn their favor. Have you ever had an idea that seemed to improve on what God had asked you to do?

1 Samuel 15:10-11 (NLT)

¹⁰ Then the Lord said to Samuel, ¹¹ “I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me and has refused to obey my command.”

Here is the definition of rebellion that I want you to hear: “He has not been loyal to me and has refused to obey my command.” Disloyal and disobedient.

If you accept the rebellious rationale, it will make you delusional, as it did Saul. Listen to his pretentious manner and his dishonest remarks.

1 Samuel 15:13-24 (NLT)

¹³ When Samuel finally found him, Saul greeted him cheerfully. “May the Lord bless you,” he said. “I have carried out the Lord’s command!”

¹⁴ “Then what is all the bleating of sheep and goats and the lowing of cattle I hear?” Samuel demanded.

¹⁵ “It’s true that the army spared the best of the sheep, goats, and cattle,” Saul admitted. “But they are going to sacrifice them to the Lord your God. We have destroyed everything else.”

¹⁶ Then Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! Listen to what the Lord told me last night!”

“What did he tell you?” Saul asked.

¹⁷ And Samuel told him, “Although you may think little of yourself, are you not the leader of the tribes of Israel? The Lord has anointed you king of Israel. ¹⁸ And the Lord sent you on a mission and told you, ‘Go and completely destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, until they are all dead.’ ¹⁹ Why haven’t you obeyed the Lord? Why did you rush for the plunder and do what was evil in the Lord’s sight?”

²⁰ “But I did obey the Lord,” Saul insisted. “I carried out the mission he gave me. I brought back King Agag, but I destroyed everyone else. ²¹ Then my troops brought in the best of the sheep, goats, cattle, and plunder to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.”

²² But Samuel replied, “What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams. ²³ Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols. So because you have rejected the command of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.”

²⁴ Then Saul admitted to Samuel, “Yes, I have sinned. I have disobeyed your instructions and the Lord’s command, for I was afraid of the people and did what they demanded.

Rebellion is not anger or malice (though these may be its fruits). Sometimes rebellion appears nasty and vile, but mostly it is just ordinary behavior—even thoughtful behavior—that ignores God’s direction to carve a path of self-satisfaction. Rebellion may even be polite and sophisticated.

How Does God Expose My Rebellion?

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit is responsible to convict people of their rebellions.

John 16:7-8 (NLT)

⁷ It is best for you that I go away, because if I don’t, the Advocate (the Holy Spirit) won’t come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgment.

The Holy Spirit brings the Scriptures to our attention, comparing our behavior to God’s commands. He compares our motives to God’s own heart and the ways of His Spirit. He lines up our behaviors next to those of Jesus, our example. Against the standard of His own love and grace and faithfulness, our rebellion is clearly and undeniably exposed.

What Does Exposure Do (besides humiliate me)?

You will easily recognize the literal connection between “humiliation” and “humility.” Humiliation is the process by which humility is achieved.

Do you remember what I said earlier about God’s efforts to expose your rebellions to you privately in order to avoid public humiliation? Public humiliation adds unnecessary costs to the transaction. Humility can just as well be accomplished in private with God, when you bow before Him in remorse to confess your misdeeds.

1 John 1:9 (GWT)

⁹ God is faithful and reliable. If we confess our sins, he forgives them and cleanses us from everything we’ve done wrong.

Saul finally confessed, but only after making of himself a public spectacle; thus, it cost him his kingdom. Eternal forgiveness does not always exempt you from temporal consequences.

So, what does exposure of my rebellion accomplish for me? It launches me on a trajectory of spiritual transformation. Here are the five phases of that journey that I recognize:

- Exposure readies me for repentance
- Repentance leads to spiritual release
- Release leads to my recovery
- Recovery leads to my renewal
- Renewal leads to my spiritual restoration

Only when I see my rebellion can I turn around and return to God (that's repentance). As long as I imagine I have been serving God when I was only serving my own ideas, I am stuck in that pattern of behavior and self-justification. When I see that I have been wrong, I can stop and go back and choose the right path. Exposure readies me for repentance.

My choice to turn around invokes the grace of God. He empowers me to do it. He releases me from the bondage of my own blindness and slavery to sin. Repentance leads to spiritual release.

Breaking free from rebellion begins a heart-healing. My thoughts and God's begin to align. My ways and God's ways begin to merge. This release leads to my recovery.

The recovery of my spiritual sanity and Scriptural clarity begins to reorder my life. My heart begins to change, and that changes my relationships, especially with Jesus. Where there was distance and hiding, desire for and delight in His presence begin to grow. Recovery leads to my spiritual renewal.

When I draw near to God, He draws near to me. He comes with wisdom, grace, and sanctifying power. He walks with me into the circumstances of my every day, never leaving my side, filling me with His Spirit, guiding me by His truth. This renewed relationship leads to my spiritual restoration.

This is what God is after when He exposes my rebellion. He is not punishing me; He is delivering me! He is not ashamed of me; He is on my side!

Come to the written Word of God. See, and believe, and grow.