



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume IX
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God Assembles His Book

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Whereof I [Paul] am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill [complete] the Word of God (Colossians 1:25).

We sometimes hear about the “lost books of the Bible,” as if somehow parts of God’s Word had been lost. We will also hear of those who profess to have a “word of revelation from the Lord” again, as if God’s Word was somehow incomplete – and needed some additional words appended.



an explanation. This would be to base our faith upon human history and reasoning. Both are, in and of themselves, valueless when it comes to matters of faith!

We need to ask ourselves, What about the saints who lived during the three hundred years prior to these councils? Where was the Bible during this period? Was there a Bible that was finished and complete that the saints possessed prior to the fourth century?

We will take a brief look at the divine assembly of the book that we call “The Word of God,” or “The Bible.”

How was the Bible actually assembled? How was the so-called “canon” established? How did we get the twenty-six books of the Greek Scriptures, the so-called “New Testament”? Was it by human standards? Or did God give it to us?

We are often told by “Christian” tradition and theology that the Council of Hippo (A.D. 393) established the twenty-seven books of the Greek Scriptures and that the Council of Carthage (A.D. 397) limited its “canon” to those twenty-seven books.

Yet we must seriously reflect, “Is our faith to be founded upon religious councils that met some three hundred years after those books were even written?”

The Bible believer would not be satisfied with such

Faith requires God’s instruction on these matters!

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

THE DECLARATION OF GOD’S COMPLETED WORD

Whereof I [Paul] am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill [complete] the Word of God (Colossians 1:25).

The simple fact of the matter is that God ordained a *completer* for His Word. Our passage clearly tells us that God chose Paul to complete the Word of ►

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God! Paul filled-full (“fulfilled”) the Word of God.

Strong defines *pleroo*, the word translated “fulfilled” in the *King James Version*, as “crammed.” The same word is translated in Colossians 2:10 as “complete.” This is the word that the *Concordant Literal Translation* uses in our text – “to **complete** the Word of God.”

The Lord did not give the responsibility of completing His Word to the Council of Hippo. Mark it well! Paul’s writings filled-full God’s Word. When Paul was finished with his divinely appointed task, you couldn’t fit any more in the Scriptures! When Paul wrote his last epistle, the Word of God was *completed*; it was *full*; it was *finished*; and the Body of Christ had in its possession the *entire* Word of God! Thus anything written after Paul could not possibly be the Word of God because God commissioned Paul to complete it – regardless of what anyone may profess to the contrary.

THE PROCESS OF GOD’S COMPLETED WORD

The Circumcision Portion of the Greek Scriptures

We can go to the Bible and look for the information regarding the delivery of the completed Word of God, now that we know it exists. The reason that this normally is not done is because of the blinding power of tradition. Tradition tells us that the Bible was *not* complete until the fourth century. Tradition tells us that Paul was *not* the last Bible author. For example, it has John, the Apostle, writing Scripture some thirty years after Paul – thus undermining the ministry of Paul and his authority to complete the Scriptures. This in turn opens “God’s Word” to false additions from all fronts.

Tradition has a way of numbing one to the truth. Men no longer hold on to *every* “word” of God. Tradition demands that the emphasis of the “words” be “downplayed.” Thus the emphasis of Bible doctrine is “downplayed,” if not altogether destroyed!

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God’s abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God’s purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the “preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from the law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with ...
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any “church,” “denomination,” “movement,” “organization,” “mission,” “creed,” “meeting,” “school,” “conference” or “fellowship.”

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Remember that it is our responsibility as husbands and fathers to take the truths we learn from God’s Word, the truths that we hold dear, and impart them to our families.

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Yet we can actually see the assembly of God's completed Word through the very testimony of the Scriptures themselves. We will begin with those portions of the Greek Scriptures that belong to Israel – the Circumcision writings.

Acts 6:2, 4, 7

Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, "It is not reasonable that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables ... But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word" ... And the Word of God increased ...

The Apostles did not want to "leave the Word of God." They wanted to give themselves to "the ministry of the Word." Something very significant is going on here. Israel's Apostles are busy writing their "Gospels" and "Circumcision Epistles." We know this because the result was that "the Word of God **increased**." What does this word translated "increase" mean? The Greek word *auxano* is defined by James Strong as "to grow, i.e., enlarge." The Word of God is *enlarging* because books are being added to it!

Acts 10:36-37

The word which God sent unto the Children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all:) That word, I say, you know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached."

Here we see that Cornelius knew the Word of God spoken by Jesus Christ to Israel. How did he know this? Because it had been "published"!

Now this word translated "published" is an interesting one indeed. This is not the same word used throughout the "Gospels" which means to "pass the word along." This word is *Strong's Greek Lexicon #1096* meaning "to generate; to come into being."

The Word of God was being *generated* (given life – God-breathed – i.e., inspiration). It is coming into being! The Greek word for "published" is translated in Acts 15:25 in a most enlightening way, as "being assembled."

These saints are busy *assembling* the Circumcision Scriptures of the "New Testament."

Acts 12:24

But the Word of God grew and multiplied.

Here we are told that the Word of God *GREW*. The Greek word is *auxano*, the same as we saw in Acts 6, meaning "to grow, i.e., enlarge."

Not only did it *grow*, it also *MULTIPLIED*. The Scriptures are being added to ("grew") *AND* copies are being made ("multiplication")!

The Writing of Paul the Apostle (Evidence from the Book of Acts)

Having considered Israel's writings in the "New Testament," we will now look at the testimony regarding Paul's writings.

Acts 13:49

And the Word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.

Here we see, under the ministry of Paul, the word "published" being used again. However, this is *another* Greek word!

Now before we go to the definition of this particular Greek word, let us look at the interesting definition of our English word by Noah Webster (*American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828). He shows the root of the word "publish" to be "public" (i.e., open to all), and then he defines it as, "to discover or make known to mankind or to a people in general what before was private or unknown."

Does this not describe the distinct "mystery" ministry of Paul the Apostle? ►

If that was not enough, let's look at Strong's Greek Lexicon definition of *diaphero* (#1308): "to differ." This same word is translated in the *King James Version* in I Corinthians 15:41 as "differ," in Philippians 1:10 as "excellent," in Matthew 6:26 as "better than," in Mark 10:31 as "are of more value," in Romans 2:18 "things that are more excellent."

Paul's ministry and message were different and superior to all other messages previously revealed in the Scriptures. This is what is called progressive revelation.

Acts 17:2-3, 11

... Paul ... reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that "Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." ... These [the Bereans] were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Notice carefully that the Bereans already had the "Gospel" records of Christ's life to compare with the Old Testament prophecies contained in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Acts 19:20

So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed (Acts 19:20).

Now we see that the Word of God grew again (*auxano*, Strong's Greek Lexicon #837 – "to grow, i.e., enlarge"), and *this time* it grew **MIGHTILY!** It grew mightily because Paul had picked up the pen and had begun to write; now a *different* and *excellent* Word of God is going out! The capstone of divine revelation is being hoisted to the top!

Acts 20:32

... I commend you to God, and to the Word of His Grace, which is able to build you up,

and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

Paul left the Ephesian elders with God's Scriptures! Not just Circumcision Scripture, but with "the Word of His Grace" – advanced Pauline writings!

The Writing of Paul the Apostle (Evidence from His Epistles)

I Corinthians 15:3-4

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (I Corinthians 15:3-4).

The "third day" that is "according to the Scriptures" is only found in Matthew and Luke, not in the Hebrew Scriptures. This passage shows us that the "Gospels" were already in place and in use by the Corinthian saints!

Colossians 3:16

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ... (Colossians 3:16).

The Colossian saints had the Word of God – and it was *not* just the "Gospels" that they had (c.f. II Corinthians 5:16). They had also the Word of Christ revealed through Paul. They had Paul's epistles!

Paul speaking to Timothy about his own writings calls them "*wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (I Timothy 6:3).

Paul already had written from six to nine epistles by this time (depending on which timetable one uses).

Titus 1:9

Holding fast the Faithful Word as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers (Titus 1:9).

Titus and the Cretian elders had the Word to which they could *hold fast*. It was in their possession!

II Timothy 4:2

Preach the Word (II Timothy 4:2).

Timothy had the Word of God in his possession too; and he was to “*preach*” it! Paul did not say “*prophesy*,” he said “*preach the Word*” – “*herald the word*” – “*proclaim the Word*.” Timothy did not need to generate, or produce the Word of God; he had it in his ownership – from Paul’s pen – and this instruction was Paul’s final letter: the Word of God was now finished and complete.

HOW GOD’S WORD WAS COMPLETED

Whereof I [Paul] am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill [complete] the Word of God (Colossians 1:25).

How did the early saints know that a particular book or letter was to be a part of the Word of God? They had special divine gifts in lieu of the Word of God not being yet complete! They could accurately – beyond any doubt whatsoever – identify and assemble the Word of God with these gifts!

I Corinthians 14:37

Here is an example of how these gifts worked in the identification and assembly of the Word of God:

If any man thinks himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord (I Corinthians 14:37).

The major function of the Acts-period prophets was to acknowledge the true Word of God so that it might be identified and assembled!

I Corinthians 13:8-10

Love never fails: but whether there are prophecies, they shall fail; whether there are tongues, they shall cease; whether there is knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away (I Corinthians 13:8-10).

The gifts were until “*that which is perfect is come*.” At the time of the writing of First Corinthians the knowledge and prophecy were only in part. That which was perfect is that which has reached its end; that which is complete. When the fullness of the revelation of the mystery was complete – so were the Scriptures.

Little wonder Paul said in his last letter:

Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be FULLY KNOWN (II Timothy 4:17).

Ephesians 4:13

Until we all come in the unity of the Faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

Notice the word “until.” The supernatural gifts and abilities of “*apostles ... prophets ... evangelists ... pastors and teachers*” (Ephesians 4:11) were:

(1) given “*for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*” (Ephesians 4:12);

(2) “*Until we all come in the unity of the Faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*.”

These divine, supernatural “*gifts*” WERE given at a specific time in the past, but they had an expiration date on them – “*until*.” ►

With the completion of Paul's last epistle – II Timothy – God's work and process of revelation and inspiration closes, the gifts cease, and the Word of God was full and completed. The so-called "canon" was sealed! This all took place some 300 years before any religious council made a decree.

THE ASCENSION GIFTS

The Time of Their Giving

When He ascended up on high, He ... gave gifts unto men (Ephesians 4:8).

This was an historic time; a place in the *PAST* when these gifts *WERE* given. The passage does not say that "he **began** to give gifts unto men." It was not an ongoing process. It was during the time covered by the book of Acts ... "until."

The Time of Their Expiration

These ascension gifts were in affect until "*the unity of the faith*" occurred (:13).

"*The Faith*" is that body of doctrine which Paul taught.

"*Unity*" is that which is *complete*, that which has all its parts.

The Purpose of Their Existence

The purpose of these special ascension gifts were "*for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*" (Ephesians 4:12) – all in lieu of the fact that they did not yet have the full, complete revelation of God in written form.

Now, all of these things – "*the perfecting of the saints,*" "*the work of the ministry*" and "*the edifying of the body of Christ*" – take place by the application of the full (*i.e.*, complete) written Word of God, finished by the hand of Paul. No "gifts" are now needed. There are no divine, supernatural gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher today.

Someone may carry out certain aspects of these – such as evangelist or teacher – but they do so not by these special gifts, but by dedication to the written Word of God. If a man will teach, for example, he must *labor* in the study of the Word – learning, adjusting, growing – so that he may teach others. It is not a "gift" in any sense of the ascension gifts.

This is why in the last letter written by Paul – which completed the Scriptures – he told Timothy,

But watch in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of your ministry" (II Timothy 4:5).

Paul does not tell Timothy that he has the "gift" of "evangelist." Nor does he say that he is "an evangelist." He only tells him to do an evangelist's work – "*do the work of an evangelist.*" He could now do so – without the divine "gifts" of the ascension – because he had in his possession the full, complete Scripture which was able to enable him to "*do the work of an evangelist,*" thus making "*full proof*" of his ministry.

Notice what Paul wrote in his final letter, concerning the Word of God:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:16-17).

"Gifts" were no longer needed. The Scriptures themselves – now full and complete – were "*profitable*" for "*doctrine [i.e., teaching],*" etc., "*that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*"

Paul's term "*man of God*" is in no way clerical. It is in contrast to immaturity; in contrast to a "*babe.*" There is a significant difference between simply being a "*child of God,*" and becoming a "*man of God.*" What is it that changes one from spiritual

(See **ASSEMBLE**, last page)

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

by – Howard Nathaniel Bunce

Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth (II Timothy 2:15).

Anyone who has made a careful, earnest, intelligent study of the Word of God, applying the rule laid down in II Timothy 2:15, can hardly fail to notice how frequently God's order is reversed. Attempts are made to bring to agreement things that are opposite and to unite things that God has purposed to keep separate. Things that are harmonious are made to disagree; things that are the same are set over against one another.

As an illustration, we call your attention to the following:

1. The teachings of Jesus are considered as being superior and, therefore, more binding upon us than the teachings of Paul.

Such expressions as, "In the School with Jesus," "The Example of Jesus," "The Words of Jesus (in Red)," "Back to Jesus," are to claim our attention at an almost complete exclusion of the Pauline Epistles.

Over against any such argument we offer such Scripture Texts as follows:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (II Timothy 3:16-17).

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely

given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Ghost teaches; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (I Corinthians 2:12-13).

Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the Circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers ... Nevertheless, brothers, I have written the more boldly to you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:8, 15-16).

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery; (as I

No one who lays claim to the promises of Israel has ever come to see the truth of His exceedingness in Christ.

wrote before in few words, Whereby, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it

is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Ephesians 3:1-5).

2. The claim is made that in the ministry of rightly divided truth, many precious portions and promises are taken from believers.

It is again necessary to refer the reader to II

Timothy 3:18, 17. We are not in the robbing business. There could be no greater crime than to rob people of any portion of the Word of God.

Rightly dividing is not ruthlessly robbing. The rule of II Timothy 2:15 only takes from us by interpretation that which by interpretation does not concern us.

If there is the necessity of “*Rightly Dividing*,” then there is the possibility of wrong division. Wrong division brings about distortion, while “*Rightly Dividing*” will but properly apportion. There are many distinctions in Scripture. Is it a crime to respect these?

God has distinguished between Jew, Gentile, and Church of God.

Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God (I Corinthians 10:32).

It is profitable for us to know just what Scripture concerns Israel. It is profitable for us to know just what Scripture concerns the Gentiles. It is certainly profitable for us to know just what portion of the Word of God concerns The Church which is His Body.

There are promises in the Word of God that concern Israel as a Nation. Any believer in the Lord Jesus Christ today is surely in the robbing business who seeks to appropriate unto himself those promises. Not only that, he is robbing himself of greater portions. No one who lays claim to the promises of Israel has ever come to see the truth of his exceedingness in Christ.

It is for each of us to know what concerns Israel as a Nation; it is not for us to claim it as truth for the Body of Christ.

Scripture Research, 1961

ASSEMBLE (continued from page 1998)

infancy to spiritual adulthood? The Word of God.

Notice again the results: “*that the man of God may be ...*” – what? – “*perfect, thoroughly furnished.*” That’s what the full, complete Scriptures can do! For what purpose? “*Unto all good works.*” This is why Paul tells Timothy to “*do the work of an evangelist.*”

Do not trust church history, religious tradition, or ecclesiastical edicts. Avoid turning to “church councils” – for they are “*profane and vain babblings.*” Study the Bible diligently for yourself.

Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness (II Timothy 2:15-16).

Questions of Import

If the punishment for sin is eternal torment in hell and Jesus Christ took our punishment for us, why is He not still being tormented there?

How could an “Almighty” being lose anything?

If most of creation will be destroyed and most of humanity cast into a lake of fire to be tortured forever, would that not make this world and all the people the biggest mistake and failure the cosmos has ever experienced?

If God is All-knowing, then He knew most of mankind would end up in eternal torment before He ever created the earth. Then, if God is Love and loves all with a father’s

love, why would He go ahead and bring them into existence just to send them into eternal suffering?

If Jesus Christ did not save the world, how could He be the Savior of the world?

If Jesus Christ took away the sin of the world, whose sin was not included in that?

If God is really sovereign, who can resist His will? Is it His will to save the world through Jesus Christ?

Can God finish what He started? Or has He just become frustrated and scrapped the whole project?