



WOW: Word Of the Week

Doulos

August 26, 2020

You are not your own, you were purchased at a high cost. Your #1 job is to glorify God in your lives because your entire life belongs to him. (See 1 Cor. 6:19-20)

The US church has largely missed and misunderstood the message of these verses. When I read “you are not your own” from a first-century perspective, I think of slavery. The Greek word is “doulos.” To translate the word as “servant,” or even as “bondservant,” does not do the word justice; a “doulos” was a slave. Most people in US churches have no personal experience with slavery. We have grown up with a good dose of independence and self-direction, even self-sufficiency. We have been trained to look out for #1. We are for the most part quite selfish when it comes to relationships – evidenced by marriages that are dissolved because one partner or the other is not happy. The idea that Christian relationships require **submission** – 1 Peter 2, government, employer, owner, master, family – is beyond our cultural thinking. Slavery, even voluntary slavery to God, is repulsive to us.

When we try to understand the message of the Bible verses above, that God has acquired his chosen people at a high cost, our value system gets in the way. In the US, in a typical week, we spend more money on eating out and enjoying a nice meal with our family, or on a weekend getaway, than we give to God. Christians in our materialistic society are more prone to measure the percentage given than to look seriously at what is left and to ask how such blessings should be shared. In a world where national evangelists in many countries can be supported for a few thousand dollars annually, what level of luxury and excess is justifiable? Unfortunately, genuine financial **sacrifice** is fairly uncommon among God’s people in first-world cultures.

The **challenge of developing the submissive spirit** that gladly walks in Christ’s footsteps and the **challenge of adjusting the selfish spirit** that establishes artificial levels of generosity are not the most serious results of our “doulos” failure. When Christians buy into the cultural values around them, **spiritual development** is often dwarfed.

The gospel message says that God values people so much that he sacrificed his son to buy back (redeem) his lost and straying creation. The history of the early Christians declares that God’s great love motivates people to commit themselves wholly to the cause of Christ. What does it mean to be wholly committed? Biblically, whole-hearted commitment is communicated as “slavery.” Paul describes himself as a “slave” to Jesus Christ.

In those parts of the world where poverty abounds, esteem building is often stunted. Many people battle low self-esteem, uncertain of their personal value, worth, ability. Education may be unavailable, jobs scarce. In such a world, the gospel is indeed Good News! In Christ, the great price that was paid to acquire us motivates zeal for the good works the Master desires. People become more than overcomers in Christ, through his saving grace.

New life in Christ produces passion for service, from people who are grateful because they have been rescued! They submissively live under the lordship of Christ – their voluntary response to His love. They rejoice that God knows their name and has given them new identity and new hope. People who have never known agape love experience it for the first time! What a joy to be loved! The churches schedule activities four nights each week, prayer meetings overflow. In these Covid-19 days they attend virtual Bible studies two hours every night. Because the Good News is indeed good news, they share it with everyone who will listen. They find importance and develop their gifts and talents through empowerment that helps them discover how much they are capable of doing for God.

Contrast that with the US experience. Many are satisfied with weekly attendance. Bible study is replaced with “feel good” self-focused activities. Fewer and fewer hunger and thirst for righteousness or for the word of righteousness. Why? Our value and importance are not derived from God but from our jobs, our families, our resources, our things, our possessions, our experiences, our secular and sports activities. Instead of Paul’s “I become a slave to all,” we are taught that we should become a slave to none. Our spiritual development is stunted!

Inserting the gospel into today’s US culture and society is going to require some fresh thinking, a fresh vision of why the Good News is Good News. A part of that will be making clearer the “bad news” of life without God. Many do not see that life is all that bad. Even for Christians, the idea that I am God’s “doulos” is seldom in view. Many are satisfied with a little dose of church—that can’t hurt anything, just in case! Each person must answer truthfully for self – how central to your life is the fact that God has acquired you at great cost? You are his, you are not your own. How should that truth change your life?