

03-05-2017

Message: Respect God's Word! Don't Add or Subtract from It.

Text: Revelation 22:18-21

Introduction

A. Our once crucified, now risen and reigning, and one day returning Lord Jesus Christ has inspired His apostle John to write an epilogue to the visions and all that proceeded in this Revelation of Jesus Christ. In this ending to the book Jesus leaves us with 5 final exhortations, including commands and warnings, to continue practicing by faith that holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

B. In previous weeks we heard our Lord's first 4 exhortations ...

Epilogue: Revelation 22:6-21

1. 22:6-7 1st Exhortation - Keep these words!
2. 22:8-10 2nd Exhortation - Worship God!
3. 22:11-12 3rd Exhortation - Be wholehearted!
4. 22:13-17 4th Exhortation - Be pure-hearted. Wash your robes!
5. 22:18-20 5th Exhortation - **Respect God's Word! Do not add or subtract from it.**

C. And now today by God's kindness we have come to the final 4 verses of Revelation that include a life and death warning, a glorious promise of future grace, and an indispensable blessing of present grace.

I. The warning: Respect God's Word! Do not add or subtract from it.

A. I appreciate a question I was asked last week, because some others might have wondered the same thing. The question is essentially, "Do we need to preach these warnings to a generally sincere, wholehearted church?" Jesus answers this question for us within the book of Revelation, the answer being, "yes."

Notice how the book opens ...

Revelation 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, **which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants**, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John,² who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw.³ **Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it;** for the time is near.

1. Every exhortation within Revelation, including every exhortation using warnings, is written to all of His churches, to all of His servants, not just to those needing correction.
2. Every exhortation and warning in Revelation brings Christ's blessing upon those who

read, hear, and heed them. Warnings bless us not only by correcting us when we take a wrong path, but by protecting us from taking that wrong path in the first place. And they equip us to bring the love of Christ's correction and protection to others.

B. And so be glad to receive the blessing of Christ's final exhortation and warning.

Revelation 22:18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

C. Once as a child on vacation in Virginia with my parents and sister, we toured Monticello, the home of our nation's 3rd president. I recall seeing in one of the rooms what was called Jefferson's Bible. In 1804 while he was still president of the U.S., Thomas Jefferson began work on the first of two of his own editions of the Bible. Believing his first work, a 46 page extract called The Philosophy of Jesus, was too hastily done, he started on a 15 year project to distill the gospel of Jesus - what Jefferson thought Jesus actually did and said.

1. The Jeffersonian Bible was a compilation of material from the gospels. Yet Jefferson was a deist, believing in a Creator who endowed us "with certain inalienable rights," including "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," yet who withdrew from His creation, much like one who starts a top spinning and then steps back and watches from afar without again intervening.
2. So Jefferson assembled the material of the Gospels, deleting references to Jesus's miracles, His resurrection, the Holy Spirit, or to Christ as God and Savior. For example, Jefferson omits the incident of the shepherds receiving the announcement of angels of Christ's birth and that the name Jesus was previously given to His mother Mary by an angel (Luke 2:8-21).

Luke 2:7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.⁸ In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. ... 21 And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS.

D. Similarly, the New World Translation of the Jehovah's Witnesses moved a word to take away the deity of Jesus.

NAU 2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ:

NWT Simon Peter, a slave and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have acquired a faith as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and the Savior Jesus Christ.

- E. But contrary to some who assert that the warnings of Revelation 22:18-19 are directed to scribes to dissuade them from tampering with the written text, this final exhortation and warning of the book of Revelation is not directed merely to those who would copy this Scripture but to all who hear this Scripture. Notice what is written:

Revelation 22:18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

- F. Since altering the words of this book is not limited to scribes, translators, and editors of the text, but includes all who hear, the act of “adding” or “taking away” must not be limited to the use pen and ink, but can be done without any material instruments.
1. To add or take away from the words of Scripture is to require what God has not required, or to delete His requirements practically from our observance through reinterpreting them.

Deuteronomy 4:2 "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

Deuteronomy 12:32 "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.

2. While “this book” in 22:18,19 refers specifically to the book of Revelation, the principle of this exhortation not to add or take away from the words of this book extends to every book of Scripture.

Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. 6 Do not add to His words or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.

- G. It would be hard to imagine any believer here ever attempting to cut and paste the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus as Jefferson did, or alter parts of the entire Bible as Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, did in his translation. But without scissors or ink,

everyone of us who hears can add or take away from the words of Scripture. The most likely way we could fall into this error is through the oral tradition and the legalism into which the Pharisees fell.

1. Christians generally and correctly understand the legalism of the Pharisees to include adding requirements to God's law that He does not require in an attempt to justify themselves in their own eyes above others. E.g., ...

Matthew 12:10 And a man *was there* whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, "**Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?**"-- so that they might accuse Him.¹¹ And He said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out?"¹² "How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! **So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.**"

2. The Pharisees added to God's law the hating of our enemies, lowering God's requirement to love them. Contemporary oral tradition examples - sayings passed around among believers that are not biblical: "It's OK if it's only once in awhile." "To love your neighbor as yourself, you first have to love yourself."

Matthew 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR **and hate your enemy.**'"⁴⁴ "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the evil* and *the good*, and sends rain on *the righteous* and *the unrighteous*.

Exodus 23:4 "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him."⁵ "If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying *helpless* under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release *it* with him.

3. The legalism or Pharisaism not only involves tightening the requirements of God's commandments, but loosening the requirements of God's commandments in order to justify one's disobedience to God's law.

- a. The lawyer, that is, the expert in biblical law sought to justify his loveless disobedience by lowering the requirements of God's command through reinterpreting the definition of "neighbor" to exclude certain individuals.

Luke 10:25 And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"²⁶ And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"²⁷ And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."²⁸ And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE."²⁹ **But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"**

- b. The Pharisees sought to justify disobeying God's command to honor father and mother and avoid sharing their possessions to help aging, needy parents by dedicating their possessions to God - meaning they would be given to God after they died. Therefore, they could justify keeping their possessions for themselves and not using them to help their parents. This is a lowering of the requirements of God's law. This is subtracting from what His Word commands.

Mark 7:8 "**Neglecting the commandment of God**, you hold to the tradition of men." 9 He was also saying to them, "You are experts at **setting aside the commandment of God** in order to keep your tradition. 10 "For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH'; 11 but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' 12 you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; 13 thus **invalidating the word of God by your tradition** which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

- H. So receive Christ's loving exhortation and warning which corrects and protects us for the day He returns for us.

II. Christ's glorious promise of future grace.

- A. From the beginning and throughout Revelation until the end, Christ encourages us to overcome by an enduring faith in Him that fixes our hope on His return for us.

Revelation 1:7 **BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS**, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. **Amen.**

Revelation 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "**Yes, I am coming quickly.**" **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

- B. Christ's apostles are unified in their encouraging His church with this promise.

1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, **fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

James 5:7 Therefore **be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.** The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. ⁸ **You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.**

Colossians 3:1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, **keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.** ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died and your life is

hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ **When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.**

III. Christ's indispensable blessing of His present grace.

- A. It is by the grace of Christ that He will continue the work of faith, love, and hope in our hearts until the day of His return.

Philippians 1:6 *For I am* confident of this very thing, that **He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.**

- B. And so to enable us to keep on following Christ, clinging to Christ, imitating Christ, growing in conformity to Christ, trusting in Christ, overcoming the world by faith in Christ, our Lord Jesus has John use the final words of this book to pronounce Christ's blessing of His present enabling grace upon His church.

Revelation 22:21 **The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all.** Amen.