

Who is Adding to God's Word?

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Scripture Reading:

Deuteronomy 4:2

Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your Father's giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.

Revelation 22:18-19

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

Introduction

You've listened to our Scripture reading today. It is very obvious merely from hearing what we have already heard that to add to or to take away from God's Word is an exceedingly serious matter. To add to or to take away from God's Word is to make it impossible to keep God's commandments, and is to risk eternal destruction.

From time to time, some have arisen to insist that since the Seventh-day Adventist Church believes in the legitimate, present operation of the gift of prophecy, we are guilty of adding to God's Word. If so, then obviously the above condemnations and curses apply to us. Not just to "the church" or to "the pastor," but to us--each one of us--for we together are the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and we together hold that the beliefs of this church are true.

However, may I up the ante? Yes, if we have added to God's Word, then we are condemned. But let us be fair to the text of Scripture. It also states that no one is authorized to take away from God's Word. Let us study now together and see where we come out at the end. There is a lot at stake friends.

The Bible is the Infallible, Authoritative Bottom-Line Measure of All

Our starting point today will be Isaiah 8:20. Let's turn there together. And what do we read?

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

Notice here that there is a word, "this word," that is a measure of light-content for us. If any individual speaks not according to "this word," it is not because they have some light, but because "there is *no* light in them." Ephesians 5:13 says that "Whatsoever doth make manifest is light."

Friends, God has given us, in the Bible, an unquenchable lamp. It burns brightly; it is light for our pathway. It is a measure that our Father has placed within the reach of every hand and every mind. According to Isaiah 8:20, the law and the testimony is "this word." And the law that Isaiah references is the inspired writings of God. Here they are called in the Hebrew, the "Torah," a term frequently meaning the inspired writings as a unit.

The word Isaiah here uses, translated "testimony," is the Hebrew word "te-u-dah." It occurs in three passages: Ruth 4:7, Isaiah 8:16, and 8:20. In the Ruth passage, one man plucks off his shoe and hands it to another for a public testimony--a public sign of binding agreement in an exchange of rights or property. In Isaiah 8:16 the command is given "bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples." The ancient custom was to bind up a document and affix a seal to it. The point of all this was to signify the intention to seal, lock-in, or to preserve something.

Isaiah 8:19 helps us understand Isaiah's intention when he states that "this word" is the law and the testimony, God's measure of truth, the Bible. In verse 19 He points to the demonically influenced words to the astrologers and the prognosticators who plagued the land: "When they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? For the living to the dead?" The marginal reference for that last phrase reads, and I think better, "Than the dead in behalf of the living." In other words, Isaiah here urges his hearers not to turn to those involved in any kind of witchcraft, magic, spiritualism, etc, but instead to see what God has to say. He says "Why would you seek to communicate with the dead to find out about something that the living need to know." Isaiah knew that "the dead know not anything" (Ecclesiastes 9:5). He knew that the people who sought after the counsel of soothsayers or the supposed "spirits" of departed loved ones were opening their ears to the counsel of demons. He urged them and us to instead base everything upon a solid foundation, upon "this word," the preserved holy writings of a holy God, left for us as heaven's map and guide, heaven's measure of truth.

Let's also look together at another verse, Acts 17:11. And there we read the following:

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.

Now notice that the Bereans are commended for their attitude--they are approved for it. And what is their attitude? An attitude of receptiveness toward "the word." But while they received "the word" from Paul, they compared "the word" that came through Paul to "the word" already laid down in their Scriptures. So it states that they

"searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so." They compared Scripture with Scripture. Ah. Good solid Protestants. They were open to fresh light from God's word. But it all had to measure up to the continuously fresh light from God's Word that they had received in the Scriptures already laid down. God had caused the writings of His servants the prophets to be preserved down through time-- He had intervened in history to assure that the law and the testimony would be bound up by His disciples and carried on down to build up His people along every stage of the journey toward the grand conclusion of the conflict between good and evil.

These are serious writings. In 2 Timothy 3:15 they are called "the holy Scriptures," God's agency to make us knowledgeable of salvation and the operation of faith in Christ Jesus. The Bible as a book is different from all other writings. They are inspired, God-breathed, preserved for all as a measure against which we may safely compare any word claiming to be from the same God.

How serious is God about His Word? Look at Psalm 138:2:

I will worship toward Thy holy temple, and praise Thy name for Thy lovingkindness and for Thy truth: for Thou hast magnified Thy word above all Thy name. David said that God had magnified His word above all His name. This was because David recognized that what God spoke through His prophets was produced through the moving of the Holy Spirit. He recognized that I can say this in God's name and you can say that in God's name, but His word is always there as a test of what is spoken in God's name. Jesus spoke of this 1000 years later when He stated that Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity. Matthew 7:22-23

Our use of God's name will be carefully evaluated when we are judged. But here and now the measure is not a claim to speak in God's name, but comparison of the word we speak with the Word that God has spoken. So the Bible itself has been magnified as the final measure for us. The Bible is the infallible, authoritative bottom-line measure of all. The word of any supposed messenger, any supposed prophet, is to be fully compared to the Word God has already preserved for us. That is our measure of truth; that, and nothing else.

What is God's Word?

We have established that the Bible is our test of all truth. But now let's continue to pursue our study. What is the word of God? I might have my answer, and you might have your answer--it might seem entirely plain to you or I that God's word is such and such. But let's get a Bible answer. Turn with me to 2 Peter 1:21. And there we read For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Several things are evident from this verse. Prophecy is a speaking of God to man. Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. They didn't move

themselves--the Holy Spirit moved them. Their prophesyings came not by the will of man. When they spoke, it was God speaking through the earthen vessel. What did they speak? They spoke the word of God.

The "word of God" makes an interesting study. Forty-eight times the phrase "word of God" appears in the Bible, just once the phrase "God's words," and 6 times the phrase "words of God." If we really want to know what God's word is, then we'll find these passages most instructive. Let me just flash through the main meanings of the word of the phrase "word of God" as far as I can see it.

Often, the "word of God" is a command. In 1 Samuel 9:27 God commands Saul through Samuel in regard to how he should serve him (see 1 Samuel 10:8). In 1 Kings 12:22 the "word of God" comes to Shemaiah the prophet commanding king of Judah Rehoboam not to fight against the northern kingdom of Israel. When Jesus is experiencing the temptation in the wilderness and Satan suggests that He turn stones into bread, Jesus responds with Deuteronomy 8:3, that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every ___ that proceeds from the mouth of God." In the gospels it is fully written out, "by every word." The Greek reads "panti hreymati," literally every word or command. In Deuteronomy you have "by every ___ that proceeds from the mouth of God," literally, by every [thing or command] that proceeds from the mouth of God. God's word is often a command.

Again, the word of God is presented in numerous ways as that which is preached (Luke 5:1), spoken (Acts 4:31), or taught (Acts 18:11). Luke's writings use the phrase more than any other in the Bible.

The "word of God" is living (Luke 8:11; Hebrews 4:12) it multiplies when disciples multiply and as the church multiplies (Acts 12:24).

The "word of God" is a power that can abide in us too, through the grace of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 6:5; 1 John 2:14).

The "word of God" is "the testimony of Jesus" in Revelation 1:2, 9. We'll come back to that.

And the "word of God" is presented in Ephesians 6:17 as an offensive weapon. In the parallelism of Hebrew thought, Paul presents it to us in the threefold figure of "the helmet of salvation," "the sword of the Spirit," and "the word of God."

Finally, Jesus Himself is called "the Word of God" in Revelation 19:3.

So what's the point of all this? Just that *the word of God is not just the Bible*. No, I'm not showing you this to take away from the Bible at all. If anything, such a study *strengthens* our faith in the Bible. No, I am simply showing you that there is a lot more here than meets the eye of most people you will meet. It is because this is so poorly understood that so many people have such a shallow interest in the Bible and such a narrow understanding of prophecy. They think that God's word is limited to the Bible. The Bible is indeed God's word; it stands in a different place to us than any other portion of God's word. But it is only a portion of God's word. All of God's commands, all of His prophesyings, are not in the Bible. And let me just give you some Bible

evidence for that.

The Missing Prophets

Turn with me to 2 Chronicles 9:29:

Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer against Jeroboam the son of Nebat?

There are more than these, but here are a few items that ought to interest you. Alright now, would someone here turn to the book of Nathan the prophet? Let's see, which page is that? Maybe the table of contents will help. Hmm. No book of "Nathan" the prophet there? Guess what? The Bible does not contain a book of "Nathan the Prophet." Now Nathan the prophet shows up in the Bible, but not an explicit book of his writings. But he had a book; it was called the book of Nathan the prophet; he was a prophet, and therefore we may expect that his book was inspired. A book written by a prophet is an inspired book, right? Remember 2 Peter 1:21: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." So Nathan wrote a book, doubtless preserving his prophesyings in regard to Solomon.

But today no such book exists.

Interesting.

Now back to 2 Chronicles 9:29, the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite is recorded in Scripture in 1 Kings 11:30. This passage still seems to hint that that one was also written out somewhere, but we don't have a book of "Shilonite the prophet." That's not conclusive. But what about the last part of the verse? "Now the rest of the acts of Solomon...are they not written...in the visions of Iddo the seer against Jeroboam the son of Nebat?" Of course, none of us have seen a book of "Iddo the seer" or "Iddo the prophet," because there is no such book in the Bible. But that a book of Iddo the seer did indeed exist is absolutely clear to us. In 2 Chronicles 12:15 and in 13:22 are references to the book and writings of Iddo the seer. And friends, we've only begun to go into this list. There is in fact, quite a substantial list of prophets *in the Bible* whose prophesyings--which came not by the will of man but as they were moved by the Holy Spirit--written or unwritten, are *not* preserved for us in the Bible.

Interesting.

All of Scripture is God's word, but all of God's word is not in the Scripture. Iddo prophesied. But his prophetic writings are not in Scripture. So what then? Has someone edited them out? Did God let some crack-pot revise the Bible so that the book of Iddo would be missing? So that the book of Nathan the prophet would be laid aside and not preserved? No, not at all.

God Preserves His Word

According to 1 Peter 1:23 the word of God is an incorruptible seed--it is alive; it cannot die. If it is alive, then anything that God wants to be preserved is going to be preserved. Turn with me to Jeremiah 36:1 and let us begin to read:

And it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that this word came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day.

You will recall the story. In Jeremiah 36:4 we find Jeremiah's helper Baruch writing down the words that Jeremiah is speaking to him. When they are finished, Jeremiah tells Baruch to go and read the scroll before the people in the Lord's house, and Baruch does it. The writing was begun in the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign (Jeremiah 36:1) and the scroll was read before the people in the fifth year and the ninth month of his reign (Jeremiah 36:9). This scroll wasn't produced overnight; it looks like this took a good year or longer to put together. When the scroll was read, the king's counselors knew that the words of the scroll must come before him, but they were afraid that he wouldn't like them. They made arrangements to bring the scroll and read it to the king. But the king cut the pages out of the document and threw them into the fire (Jeremiah 36:23). Can you imagine that? God's prophet speaks and the spiritual leader cuts the pages out and burns them up in the fire!

But the story wasn't over! Look at Jeremiah 36:27-32:

Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned. And thus shalt thou say unto Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, why hast thou written therein, saying, the king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? Therefore thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim king of Judah; he shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not. Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words.

You see friends, cutting up God's words and throwing them into the fire didn't make any difference at all as to what was going to happen. The only difference it made when the king treated the word of God this way was that it brought condemnation upon him. And what happened in the end? God commanded Jeremiah to write it all out again. Baruch and Jeremiah began again with a blank page, and starting in right at the first line, they began to write. Only, in the end, "were added besides unto them many like words." See, *if God wants to preserve His words, they do get preserved.* If He doesn't wish them preserved, but they have only a local application, (perhaps as the prophesyings of Iddo the seer or of Nathan the prophet may have had), then God does not intervene to preserve the words. *It's just that simple.* Jesus said it this way: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

Not to Add To or Take Away From God's Word

Deuteronomy 4:2

It's about time that we really got down to brass-tacks and looked at the main texts about adding to God's word. Let's start with Deuteronomy 4:2, which states: Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.

Do you realize that in the early chapters of Deuteronomy Moses is recounting the history of Israel's travels, and that it is as he arrives at the point of recalling the events of Baal Peor/Beth Peor that he stops and urges them to do what is necessary to enter the promised land, commanding them neither to add to or to take away from God's word? Very interesting. Because it was while Israel was encamped at the Jordan river, ready to cross over and invade Canaan, that they had their disastrous run-in with Peor.

See, Balak had sent for Balaam to curse Israel, but all that he could do once he had arrived was to bless Israel. The only way that they could get Israel to fail was to provoke them to disobey God. So they carefully put temptations in front of them and lured them to sexual immorality with Midianitish women. Soon the camp of Israel was being transformed into a drunken hotbed of immorality, and Moses and Phineas intervened. And it is right there, at that point, that Moses says "Ye shall not add to the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it."

Here's a key point to remember: *either way*, by adding to God's word or by taking away from it, we place ourselves where we cannot keep God's commandments. If we add to His word--if we add to His commands--then our own explanations and rationalizations will inevitably lead us to think that there is some way around the necessity of our living a full obedience to God. We will invent a theological shortcut that will inevitably short-circuit God's plans to bless His people.

But adding to God's word is not the only thing we are at risk of doing. Moses insisted at the Lord's command "neither shall ye diminish ought from" God's word. If we take something away from His word by saying falsely that "this doesn't apply to us today," then we are again short-circuiting God's capacity to bless us; we are doing something that will truly block our keeping of God's commandments.

The children of Israel at Baal-Peor added to God's word by being ecumenical at an unecumenical time. They were enticed into whoredom with the daughters of Moab. Look at Numbers 25:2:

And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down unto their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-Peor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.

God's people bowed down to the gods of Moab: Baal and Ashtoreth. But the Ten Commandments, which Moses *next* recounts to Israel in Deuteronomy state: "Thou

shalt have none other Gods before Me," and "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them" (Deuteronomy 5:7, 9). Adding to or taking away from God's word is all the same; *in the end, it inevitably makes it impossible for God's people to keep His commandments*. God's people at that point in time stood on the brink of the final conquest of the promised land. It was a period of great spiritual interest and jeopardy. And on the very brink, they faltered, and added to or took away from God's word. The counsel of God's word was very important to them just then; they were going to finally go in and take the land. But because of how they treated the word of God, they were delayed.

It's pretty important to listen to God's word, whether it's Him speaking directly as when He gave the Ten Commandments, or when His prophets speak, isn't it?

Deuteronomy 12:32

The next text on this is Deuteronomy 12:32:

What thing so ever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

Sounds a lot like Deuteronomy 4:2, doesn't it? What is the context? This verse appears among verses that plead with God's people not to commit the abominations of the other nations as they serve their false gods. There is a simple line that is always drawn between God's true people, and Satan's true people. God's people are always the ones who are doing what God commands them. They are keeping His commandments. This passage doesn't explicitly mention the "word of God," but as we've already seen, His command is indeed His word.

Proverbs 30:1-6

But we must also look closely at Proverbs 30:1-6:

The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal, Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy. Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?

Every word of God is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him. Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

Here the Bible speaks of a prophet named "Agur the son of Jakeh." We know very little about him, or about Ithiel or Ucal for that matter. But we know what he said. He here views himself with humility, calling himself a brutish man who has not learned wisdom, and who has not attained to the piety that he wishes to. His words call to mind the finiteness of man in contrast with the wisdom and the power of God. He states that "Every word of God is pure," or a more telling translation, "Every word of God is tested." He insists that if we put our trust in Him, He will be our shield, our protection. And if Israel had trusted God's words, neither adding to nor taking away from them at Baal Peor, they'd not have fallen. Agur closes his paragraph with the command "Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."

Remember, Agur highlights man's limitations, but insists that God's word is tested. It is sure. It will stand up when our feeble reasonings collapse all over the place. Our ideas are, so often, untested--the very opposite of God's word. Just consider for example the person who has simplistically defined God's word as the Bible and the Bible only. Where is that person going to be when they run face to face into the truth that God's word is not limited to the Bible? Will they be ready to accept the truth, or will they retreat to their little troll-hole under the bridge of truth while the host of the Lord passes by overhead on their way to Canaan?

Agur's remark is about adding our reasoning to God's word. Let's keep it simple--nothing fancy, nothing garish or too-stylish; just keep it to the truth. That's all. Then we'll be alright. We mustn't mix the inspired with the uninspired. The consequences of this are coming right up. But since we know that God's word is also expressed through other venues beside the Bible, we know that the answers won't always be quite so hard and fast as we have come to expect. God may speak to His people through His word by prophets even now, 2000 years down the pipe from the Bible. So we are going to have to know the Bible and be able to weigh what we hear to know whether we can receive it as truth. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Revelation 22:17-19

Finally, there is another text. Consider Revelation 22:17-19:

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

As the Bible itself comes to a close, a warning comes to its readers. God is pleading for us to come; His church is pleading for us to come. The water of life is offered freely; salvation has been made available to all who will take it. But then this passage rings out with the warning testimony that should cause us all to pause: "If any man shall add unto these things [the prophesy of this book], God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book." We won't go back right now and review those plagues. But they are harrowing. No sane person would risk adding those plagues. But if anyone will add unto the prophesy of the book, they will get the plagues too. Remember, that in Deuteronomy 4:2 the reason we are not to add to God's word is what? *So that we can keep His commandments!* If someone adds to the prophesies of Revelation, it will work against their keeping God's commandments.

But John hasn't stopped with adding to the prophesy of the book. He goes on: "And if any man shall *take away* from the words of the book of this prophesy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." Why? Again, because if we "diminish ought from" this word, it will work against our keeping of God's commandments. The book of Revelation, indeed, all prophesy, hits its stride at the issue of obedience. Revelation 14:12 says "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus." This topic should be hitting

us pretty close to home right now. Because we live right there, right at the end-time. So truly worshiping our God is a central focus. His commandments are pivotal. All of us are here today in this meeting because we've been convicted by the Holy Spirit that God plans for His people at the end of time to keep His commandments.

I hope you can see today why this issue is so important.

Biblical End-time Counsel Regarding Prophecy

This lands on us because here we are--right down at the end of time. This teaching today is present truth. So then. What counsel does the Bible give us about prophesy in the last days of earth's history? Here's some of that counsel. Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21:

Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

Here is a pattern for you and for me. I believe that these three things go together. That's probably why the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to put them together. Notice the threefold admonition of these verses. See that there are two verbs--two action words--that we are to avoid, and one verb--one action word--that we are to be sure that we *do*. Hear the word of God:

"Quench *not* the Spirit." Don't put the Spirit out of your heart and mind! Don't quench Him. He can't be quenched out of existence, but He can be quenched out of your heart. How does the Spirit speak to us? "For the prophesy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The Holy Spirit speaks through prophesy. In fact, this speaking of God to us through the Holy Spirit and through prophesy could rightly be called His speaking through "the Spirit of Prophecy." That is what it is you know. If we *start* by ruling out the possibility that God can speak to us today through His prophets, we are quenching the Spirit. And a lot of people have written off a true prophet in this our day by simply quenching the Spirit. But that is only the first verb to avoid. The second is...

"Despise *not* prophesyings." A lot of people today think that the prophecies cannot be understood. Some still say that the book of Revelation is a sealed book. But may I suggest that a lot of the despising of prophecies is because people are ignoring the possibility that God is still speaking to us today through the gift of prophesy. If someone comes along saying anything that sounds like it might fit under the category of a prophesy, then it must be from the devil; at least that's how some people think. But what if? What if God *has* spoken by His prophets *even after* the Bible was written? What if in your studies you come across an individual who speaks in TOTAL harmony with the Bible? What then? What are you going to do? Despise it simply on the basis that it might be prophesy? "Despise *not* prophesyings" shouts the Bible! Don't take away from God's word by refusing to hear His prophets. Don't add to His word by saying that there can be no "word of God" today but through the Bible.

Friends, who's adding to God's word today? It is those who are despising prophesyings! They are adding to it and taking away from it at the same time. They are adding explanations why God cannot speak His word today through a contemporary prophet, while they are taking away from God's word by refusing to hear that word. They are corrupting the word of God (2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:2) by going around the cross of obedience to Jesus Christ, and pushing upon Christendom a cheap, vacuous Christianity that sells God short and leaves His people in their sins and headed for destruction! Oh, the sorrow that will come upon the world in this our day because they have despised prophesyings!

"**Prove all things; hold fast that which is good;**" now *that* is God's positive counsel to you and to me. We live down at the end of time. Jesus Himself said that false Christs and false prophets would deceive many. He warned against the counterfeits. He must have also foreseen true prophesy *on the scene in the end-time*. No, this isn't as tidy a solution as "dime-store theology Bible interpretation rule #1: no prophets after the Bible." Put that rule back into the Crackerjack box. No, we are going to have to weigh what we see and what we hear to know whether it is according to the law and to the testimony or not! No easy solutions. Nor were we ever promised any. Who does strong spiritual food belong to? "To them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14). Friends, we are going to have to get into the word. Deeper. Deeper than before. Don't think you can sit back and trust me. Prove all things. You'll know light when you see it only because you have seen the lantern shining before, and because you know the true you will know the counterfeit. God is coming to search out His people, and all who have grown Bible-cold, who have settled back on their lees and settled into a cheapened Christianity will be lost.

The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah. I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD. I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests; And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham; And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor inquired for Him. Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, He hath bid his guests. And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD'S sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel. In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, that there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate, and an howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills. Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off. And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil. Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build

houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof. The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for He shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land. (Zephaniah 1:1-18).

Mark this truth well: If you are ready, you will live for eternity. If you are unready, you will be lost for eternity. Complacency is the doorway to death.

The Testimony of Jesus

Fortunately, God has opened something before us that is not only necessary, but precious and beautiful. The Bible promises that in the last days, God will make present among His people His very own special testimony; something that the Bible calls, "the testimony of Jesus." What is the testimony of Jesus?

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

In order to understand this phrase, let's begin in 1 Corinthians and then finish with Revelation. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 1:4-9. After Paul's standard greeting, his first statement is this:

I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Immediately after this section Paul enters in on his discussion about being united in Christ. But the first thing he talks about is the confirmation of the "testimony of Christ" in them. Why was this testimony confirmed in them? So that they would "come behind in no gift" while focusing on the second coming of Jesus. The word gift there is, in the Greek "charismati," that is, we are talking about a certain kind of Spirit-anointed gifts, called charisms. And the Corinthian church had present within it individuals having the "testimony of Christ." What is this "testimony of Christ?" In 1 Corinthians 12:4 and 9 this word appears again. What does it say about these "gifts?" Let's read that passage together:

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to

every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.

God gives His church, through the Holy Spirit, many different gifts to meet His churches different needs. And one of the charisms that He gives is the gift of prophecy. Yes, there are many gifts of Jesus through the Spirit. But as you read on through chapter 13 and into chapter 14, you will find that the direction Paul's argument goes in is to affirm the gift of prophecy as supreme and the gift of tongues-speaking, (language-speaking) as a lesser gift. Why? Let's hear Paul's answer in 1 Corinthians 14:5:

I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

Prophesying is superior, because it immediately builds up the church. Remember, prophecy is a sign to believers, while tongues-speaking is a sign to unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:22). The church is not constituted of unbelievers, therefore tongues-speaking does not build up the church, for they are spoken to unbelievers.

Prophesying is for believers. Believers are in the church. Therefore prophesying builds up the church--it edifies it. Paul has a special place in mind for the gift of prophesy because, while all the gifts build up the church in some way, prophesy is the foremost gift to build it up. Prophesy hits the bloodstream of the church running full-tilt. It is straight, uncut, undiluted truth spoken. It does not require interpretation, it comes right at you, and you must respond to it directly. You accept or you reject. The gift of prophecy is very important for the church, brothers and sisters. Very important. The church in Corinth had this gift operating in its midst. It had "the testimony of Christ" so that it would come behind in no gift, and so that the church would be built up while looking to the second coming of Jesus.

Revelation 1:1-2

Turn with me now to the book of Revelation, where we will expand on this. Let's look in 1:1-2:

The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto Him, to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John, who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

I've often heard it said that the book of Revelation is the revelation of Jesus Christ, and it is. But there are two ways to understand this first phrase of this book. It can be the revelation that's primary object is Jesus Christ, or it can mean the revelation that has its source in Jesus Christ. Really, the gospels show us a great deal more about Christ than the book of Revelation does.

In fact, the gospel of John sets us up for a final primary prophetic tract of truth sourced in Jesus Christ when in John 21:21-22 Jesus suggests that He will later come again to John. "Peter seeing him [John] saith to Jesus, Lord, what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" And as you begin to walk through the book of Revelation what do you find? Jesus begins

explaining many matters to John--many matters about His church. These are very close-cutting remarks to the churches. Their source is Jesus. What did John state as he began to write the book of Revelation? He "bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw." These three thoughts are given together, and they have overlapping meaning. When we are talking about the word of God, we are also talking about the testimony of Jesus, and when we are talking about the testimony of Jesus, we are also talking of the things that are prophetically revealed through him--in this case, things that John saw.

Revelation 1:9

Can you begin to see the shape all of this is taking? The testimony of Jesus has to do with the gift of prophecy to God's church. It has to do with the word of God. Look in Revelation 1:9: "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." Why was John on Patmos? He had been exiled there; it was his prison house. Why was he imprisoned? For living and giving God's message to the people there. John was a prophet and a preacher; he did not hold his peace. And what else did he say? He was on Patmos for the word of God, and "for the testimony of Jesus Christ." What had Jesus told Peter? He implied that John would live until Jesus would return with an additional revelation for him. So when John went to Patmos--an aging John who was starting to become frail with the years--who remembered that Jesus had said He would come back to Him--perhaps He knew that in that isolated prison was where Jesus would finally come and present His last message to be included in the Bible to the disciple that he loved, who had patterned most closely after Him (John 13:23).

Revelation 12:17

Turn to Revelation 12:17. And what entity in the end-times does Satan, the dragon, go to make war with? Check this identification:

And the dragon was wroth with the woman [the church], and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

There are a people in the end-time who can be identified by certain criteria. Our verse here has two of the clearest. This last church--this remnant church--is a church teaching people to keep the commandments of God--*all of them without exception*--and it has "the testimony of Jesus Christ" in it. And what did we see back in 1 Corinthians? That early church had the "testimony of Christ;" it had the gifts of the Spirit, including as Paul especially noted, the gift of prophesy. And here what do we see? That God's final church will also have the testimony of Jesus! It will also have the gift of prophesy!

Just think of how much sense this makes. Satan goes to make war with a church that, in spite of all his deceptions, persecutions, and gyrations against it, persists in keeping God's commandments. Friends, no church will persist in keeping God's commandments unless it is a built up church--an edified church. And edifying is the very thing that the gift of prophesy in particular is positioned so powerfully to do.

Satan isn't at war with just any group of people claiming to be Christians. No. He is at war with those who keep God's commandments.

Remember the solemn warning after Baal-Peor in Deuteronomy 4:2? "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, *that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.*" Can you see all these connections falling into place?! *Failing to listen to God's prophets in any age prevents a people from keeping the commandments of God.* So we must not add to God's words by explaining away the present operation of the gift of prophesy, and we must not take away from God's word by declaring that one who is truly speaking the word of God is not speaking the word of God. That *is* taking away from God's word.

But if there were any question about what the testimony of Jesus is, our last three texts should remove all doubt. Remember, we are Protestants. The Scriptures are not interpreted for us by the pope or by the church. They are interpreted for us by *Scripture*. What you think or I think or the leaders think, all must bow to what the Holy Spirit thinks. And what does the Holy Spirit think? The last church is identified as keeping the commandments of God and having the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 19:10

Turn with me now to Revelation 19:10. Remember, the book of Revelation comes to us by the Spirit, from Jesus, the source. At the end of this book the plea is made "And the Spirit and the bride [the church] say, Come." How does the Spirit interpret the testimony of Jesus? An angel appears to John in vision, and overcome by its brightness and glory, John begins to bow down before him.

And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophesy.

The angel here declares his brotherhood with John. He too is a created being. He urges him to worship God, and to recognize the vast difference between the creature and the Creator. And he declares to John that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophesy." That's what the testimony of Jesus is all about. It is about the word of God spoken through God's prophets in ages past and in ages present. It is the gift that God has placed in the church to lead it to live-out His commandments.

Revelation 22:8-10

And finally in the very last chapter of all the Bible, we again read in verse 8-10: And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God. And he saith unto me, seal not the sayings of the prophesy of this book: for the time is at hand.

Who is it that is going to truly "keep the sayings of this book" in the end? Those who are undeceived, who take the word of God so seriously that they obey it all. No,

maybe it's not convenient to have to look into the issue of prophesy in the last day, to have to compare Scripture with Scripture and to have our senses exercised to discern both good and evil. No, God is not going to hand this to you on a silver platter. He gave you a brain. He gave you a Bible. He wants you to think, to pray, to soak the Bible into your mind--yes, to wash your brain out with it--until you know what you are hearing because His word is in you. But His word in the Bible always remains your measuring-stick of truth. Don't be like Pilate who asked "what is truth" (John 18:38), but then became distracted by the roar of the crowd. Don't listen to the roar of the crowd. Hear the roar of the word of God. "The time is at hand."

Conclusion

And my brothers and my sisters, I must here share with you that as I have studied through the Bible from beginning to end, and as I have taken up this question about who is adding to God's word, I have found myself absolutely clear through the evidence of the Scriptures, that the testimony of Jesus is our Lord speaking through His chosen vessels to His chosen church, so that that people will be enabled to keep His commandments--all of His commandments, including the seventh-day Sabbath of the Ten Commandments.

To believe that in the end, God will manifest the word of God through His prophets or prophetesses as the case may be, is only to obey the command not to add to or to take away from God's word. Because His word is still coming to us today; heaven is not silent. You and I must be clear. We must take every purported manifestation of prophesy, and, no matter how sweet or true it may look to us, no matter how much peace we may think that it makes us feel inside, we must take it to the law and to the testimony. It is the Bible that will show us who is a true prophet of God in the last days, and who is a false prophet sent from the god with a small "g," the prince of this world (John14:30), who has come down to us with great wrath because he knows that his time is short (Revelation 12:12).

Who is adding to God's word? People who refuse the word of God. I appeal to you today not to add to God's word, or to take away from it. Believe His prophets, and so shall you prosper. Disbelieve His prophets, and so shall ye not prosper. Test all things, hold fast that which is good. Do not despise prophesyings. Keep the sayings of His book. Keep His commandments.

End

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