

## Sermon – 07/09/2008 pm

### Warning about This Book

Study Text: Revelation 22:18-19

A retired judge was caught speeding on a roadside camera. In contesting the fine he told the court that another person was driving his car at the time. Upon investigation the other person was found to be deceased at the time of the offence. The former judge was found guilty of making a false statement to the court. Perjury is a very serious offence.

Even more serious according to God's covenant law is the offence of adding to his word or taking from it. God's law is just that – the law of God. For any man to think he can improve on this law is the height of arrogance and blasphemy.

'If we believe that what God has said in his book is not sufficient for salvation, but that we need to make certain additions of our own if we are to be saved; or if we believe that some of the demands of God's book are superfluous, and we can get by without observing them; then we are not only saying that we know better than him – we are (which is much worse) acting as if that were true. Rudeness he can forgive; but blind wilfulness is the sin against the Holy Spirit. Of the curse that comes upon those who alter the gospel to suit themselves it will be said, with the most terrible truth, that they have asked for it' (Wilcock).

### Covenant Law

When the Lord God brought his chosen people out of Egypt he made a covenant with them at Mt Sinai. Through Moses he gave his people covenant commands. He set out the consequences of observing, or of failing to observe these commands – covenant blessings and covenant curses respectively. Moreover, they were warned not to add to, or take from, the word of the divine command (Deuteronomy 4:2).

In giving this warning Moses reminded the people of the plague which killed thousands of their own people when they were led astray into harlotry and idolatry by Moabite women – the judgment at Baal Peor. *The Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God* (Deuteronomy 4:24). The Lord is jealous for his honour and glory. To add to his word or subtract from it is dishonouring to God and tantamount to idolatry.

### AddTo These T hings

The words of this book are the testimony/witness of Jesus. Everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book is warned not to tamper with them (22:18). It has been thought the warning applied to scribes copying the text or to those translating it – but the warning is to those *who hear*. It is not just a warning about using the correct translation of Scripture. The warning is specifically about the *prophecy of this book*, which is Revelation, this book sent to the seven churches in Asia Minor. It is nevertheless applicable to all of God's law as similar words in the book of Deuteronomy indicate.

Jesus gave these words to an angel to pass on to John, and for John to tell to the churches. They are not the words of man but the words of God. As such, to deliberately distort these

words and the message of this book is a serious sin. Perhaps no book of the Bible has been added to and distorted more than the book of Revelation. Leaders of religious sects often come out of churches and they have come out on the basis of some prophecy, usually a distortion of what is written in this book.

Charles Russell was a Bible study leader who denied the existence of hell – as well as the Trinity and the deity of Christ. There is no conscious existence after death according to Russell, the founder to the Jehovah Witnesses. The Jehovah's Witnesses are renowned for their many predictions of the date when Jesus will return – beginning in 1914 and at many other dates since then. They also declared that only 144,000 would be saved. They clearly and deliberately distort this book, as well as other parts of the Bible. They have their own translation of the Bible.

Joseph Smith of Mormon fame (or infamy) supposedly unearthed golden plates in a hill in New York State. He translated the ancient writing on these plates, some of it strangely similar to the KJV Bible, and produced the book of Mormon. The Church of the Latter Day Saints holds this book, not the Bible as the final authority in matters of faith.

These are but two examples of adding to the words of God and deliberately distorting the message of this book. Thousands have been deceived by this false teaching. Here in these verses we clearly see the grave error of such teaching. There is a warning here for us to be very careful in our reading and interpretation of this book. Do not add to the words of this book. Do hold another book above the Bible. Some are too ready to latch onto a preacher and accept whatever he says – even in Reformed circles. We have our Confession of Faith as a summary of Biblical doctrine but it is a subordinate standard never to be held above or even alongside the Word of God.

To this warning is attached a covenant curse or penalty. The penalty fits the crime in that *the plagues that are written in this book* will be added to the person guilty of adding to this book (22:18). The wrath of God came upon the Jews for violating his covenant. 'You want to worship other gods and live like the heathen then go and live among' was what the Lord in effect said as he sent them into exile. If you think you know better than God then you are aligning yourself with Satan. God will add to you the plagues promised Satan and his followers in this book.

### **Take From This Book**

*The devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire...and will be tormented day and night forever and ever (20:10). And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (20:15).* Thousands who call themselves Christians do not believe in the reality of the devil or of hell. Many refuse to believe there is everlasting torment, preferring to believe in annihilation of body and soul.

Such denial is clearly to take away from the words of this book – and the rest of Scripture. The reality of heaven and hell is taught throughout the Bible, most especially by the Jesus Christ the Son of God. Because non-Christians dislike this truth some Christians have removed it from the gospel they proclaim.

It is not just the sects but mainstream Christianity that has done this. Liberal doctrine has removed this truth and much more from the Scriptures in critical studies and attempts to 'get

behind' the words of Scripture. I remember a preacher turning the pages of his Bible and as he came to a passage denied by liberals (much of what Paul wrote), he tore the page out in a vivid demonstration of our text today. A more subtle way of taking from these words is simply to ignore them. Many leave off reading this book after the first three chapters.

What is promised those who take away from the words of this book? Again it is a fitting penalty – *God shall take away his part from the Book of Life and the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book* (22:19). Most manuscripts have the 'tree of life' rather than the 'book of life'. We know that names are not removed from the book of life. There is no teaching that salvation can be lost in this verse or anywhere else in the Bible. This is a warning to the church. Those who fail to heed the warning show they do not belong to Christ.

Access to the tree of life, and being in the presence of the Lord in the holy city are wonderful promises given in this book. There shall be no more death, nor sorrow nor crying nor pain. These are wonderful promises given to those who believe – who believe in Jesus and all that he says. To say there is no hell means there is no heaven either. To say there is no resurrection of the body is to say that Jesus did not rise from the dead and you are still in your sin.

Remember what happened to the people of God when the covenant curse came upon them. That curse came because they neglected the word of God and did their own thing. It is amazing that keeping the Feast of Tabernacles stopped during the time of Joshua and was only celebrated again when Ezra read the Law to the returned exiles (Nehemiah 8:17). Under the curse of God they were dispossessed of their land. They were scattered and became slaves in a foreign land.

I pray that you have found this book enlightening and encouraging as we have heard it together. That is why it was given to the seven churches and to us. Moreover, a blessing was promised to those who hear this book and heed its words (1:3). Understanding the apocalyptic genre is not easy but with the help of the Old Testament and the words of Jesus we have been able to see and understand something of what the Lord revealed to John on Patmos. Remember how he saw Jesus in all his glory. Then he was shown the Lamb upon the throne and people from every tribe, every tongue and every nation worshipping the Lord.

We have heard Jesus saying *Behold I am coming quickly*. No one knows when he is coming despite the great effort of some to determine this from the numbers in this book. The message of the book is not for us to work out a date for the second coming of Christ, but to be ready all the time, and to hold fast to the end.

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