

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

DEUTERONOMY 4

¹So now, Israel, listen to the statutes and the ordinances that I am teaching you, and carry them out so that you may live and so that you may enter the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving to you and take possession of it. ²Do not add to the word that I am commanding you, and do not subtract from it, so that you keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you.... ⁶Keep them and put them into practice, because in this way your wisdom and your understanding will be recognized by all the people who hear about all these statutes; and they will say, “This great nation is certainly a wise and understanding people,” ⁷because what other great nation is there that has a god as close to it as the LORD our God is to us whenever we call on him? ⁸What other great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances as righteous as this entire law that I am presenting to you today? ⁹But guard yourselves and guard your whole being diligently, so that you do not forget the things that your eyes have seen and so that those things do not disappear from your heart all the rest of the days of your life. Make them known to your children and to your children’s children.



A father is helping his son on Labor Day put together his first model airplane. They open the box, sort out the pieces, and unfold the instructions. The small boy has little use for instructions. When the father leaves the room, the boy immediately begins gluing pieces together. Some pieces don't seem to fit together too well, but with a little cramming, he succeeds. The half dozen pieces left over do not seem to go anywhere, so he tosses them out. But something seems to be missing, so he jimmies and jury-rigs the leftover plastic and comes up with a passable, fair-looking ... car.

God's Word is not a kit or a set of instructions. But many go into God's Word like the boy's approach to his model airplane. They have little regard for the pieces

and even less regard for how the words should fit together. Their theological airplane turns into something different from the way God intended.

What's worse, in sorting out God's Word, people are not putting together the pieces of a model plane. It is more comparable to putting together a rescue plane. A rescue plane must be ready when needed, full of space, and airtight. If pieces are missing and makeshift parts are added on, a rescue plane could explode upon lift-off, could malfunction while full of passengers, or could suddenly fall from the sky. To add or subtract at will from a rescue plane would jeopardize people's lives.

With God's Word, the odds are much riskier, the stakes are much higher, and people's lives are on the line. Moses tells the people of Israel at the end of his life in Deuteronomy, they can be sure of that. God's Word must be airtight. True believers in God and His Word can give or take NOTHING. Yet in doing so, true believers could gain no better blessings than God has in store.

GOD'S WORD EQUALS GOD'S RESCUE MISSION

1. His Word is airtight, give or take *nothing*

Moses was about to die, and he had things to say. We call it Deut. Some of his things might be considered rather strict. He would repeat the law and appeal to the Hebrews to listen closely. They must not add or subtract to God's Word.

Now why would anyone decide to add or subtract to the Word of God? Is it possible that it is because they do not LIKE what God has to say? This has always been the sinful reason why. Some of God's commands require us to resist or suspend pleasure. Some of God's commands, if we really followed them, would jeopardize a friendship. Some of God's Word, if we read it off the page, would require us to believe in miracles and the supernatural. Some of God's Word, if we listened to it, would challenge our personal sense of morality. Sometimes we are just ignorant. By nature, people simply refuse to let God's Word be their final and complete authority.

But over time, some have developed more sophisticated ways to deny God's Word. They may say they believe in just the fundamentals, yet the non-fundamentals, that no one can really agree upon, do not matter. They may say they believe in just the theological truths, but the historical accounts, statements

about nature, yet non-theological statements may be the work of men. They may say there were Babylonian additions, hints of oriental influence, and echoes of older myth along the way. Once you play those games, you realize you have become the judge of what is fundamental or not fundamental; what is theological truth and what is non-theological truth; and what were additions along the way. You have become the judge of God's Word, and you, sinner, will never be sure if this ship will sail. You'll never know if this plan will fly. You'll never know what to believe for certain.

Hence, God simplifies. Forever and always, once and for all, God says, "*Do not add and do not subtract. Keep commands. Put them into practice.*" Simple. Suspend reason and personal judgment and lean not on your own understanding. Keep His Word. For the Hebrews, yes, this meant all of God's ceremonies and ordinances, the special offerings of sheep and bulls, the blood of the lamb on Passover, and the various gestures and signals for personal cleanness. Yet it also meant maintaining the promises that weaved their way through these routines and rituals. The promise of the Savior, the coming Messiah, who would be the ultimate Deliverer from their sins. It meant the coming Great Prophet whom Moses predicted, greater than any before who would mark His Word with miracles and authoritative teaching. It meant being reminded of the depth of sin and the heights of redemption in Jesus Christ, whose cross would be the punishment for all sin, and whose blood would flow like the lambs of sacrifice. It meant keeping to God's Gospel as well as to God's Law. Don't jimmy-rig this plane. Don't blow a leak that it falls from the sky. Keep it airtight, give or take NOTHING. There is no adding or subtracting.

Some pushback: "Well, it's pretty arrogant to think that we have it all right and very few other Christian denominations do as well." Okay, this line of thought WOULD make sense. This WOULD make sense IF we could not be confident whether the true doctrine is discoverable in God's Word. But to the Jews who believe Him, Jesus says, "*If you continue in my Word, then you are really my disciples, then you will know the truth*" (John 8:31-32). Jesus says, "*Teaching them to keep EVERYTHING I have commanded you*" (Matt. 28:19). Clearly the truth can be found with careful study. Clearly it protects and rescues.

2. His Word leaves no believers behind

"*Guard yourselves and guard your whole being diligently*" (v9). Moses is saying, "You must take care and keep your soul diligently." See the progression?

“Watch not only the Word closely, but watch yourselves closely.” Why? “*So that those things do not disappear/ depart/ slip from your heart all the rest of the days of your life*” (v9) This is intense. Basically Moses is saying that if you watch the Word of God, you are ultimately guarding your own soul. If you pour time and energy into God’s Word, there will be untold benefits and blessings. Paul says, “*Watch your life and doctrine closely; persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers*” (1 Tim. 4:16).

Just see the great blessings Moses leaves behind for the Hebrews, if they will only hold to the Word of God. Surrounding nations were used to distant gods. Who else has a god close by? The reaction would be like this: “No one like the *LORD* our God is close to his people. No one is near to us.” Christians, your God is desirable because He is near to us and was made man for us and suffered as one of us. The Hebrews would receive accolades for wisdom and understanding from other nations, recognition for their wisdom. So there is a mission behind God’s Word, and its wisdom can be spread to more people. Thus, more than one nation can gather in God’s Word of rescue. After all, the Savior of the world has died for all. Eyewitnesses of His powerful acts must never take them for granted. These acts of God must of necessity become generational hand-me-downs: “*Make them known to your children and to your grandchildren*” (v9), etc. Conversely, messing with God’s Word can tear the faith from and destroy generations upon generations.

Thus the command is repeated at the end of the Bible. Revelation 22 says if you add to the words of this book, God will add His plagues to you. If you take away any words of the book, God will take away the promise of heaven. Wow, God doesn’t like to mess around with adding or subtracting, does He? From the first writer, Moses, to the last writer, John, God has book-ended His Word with this warning. Why a warning? Well, why is there ever any instructions or warnings for heavy and powerful things? I’ve heard of rescue missions using airplanes that left people behind, stranded. If used incorrectly, heavy and powerful things are dangerous. When used correctly ... His Word is His rescue mission.

Indeed, this is terrifying. We have all knowingly or unknowingly twisted God’s Word to our hearts’ desire. Is there any hope? It is the Word that shows us Christ and forgives our sins. He still offers the Promised Land (v1) to take possession of eternity in heaven. If the words are removed or combined with something other than God’s words, then we are on the wrong plane. But we can trust God’s promises precisely because we can trust His Word. **Amen.**