

## THE UNALTERABLE WORD

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*The nature of inspiration requires the acceptance of the Word of God verbatim as it was originally penned in the autographs. The consistent call for Scripture to be left unaltered in principle and in word (as demonstrated in the texts presented below) necessarily demands the rejection of any view that violates this fundamental doctrine.*

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### Introduction

There are times in every generation of Christianity when intelligent, well-meaning, and gifted believers come to errant conclusions. Typically, these stem from efforts to grapple with real interpretive challenges in Scripture. While through diligent study they posit powerfully reasoned arguments, they fail to see that though their logic answers many interpretive challenges, it nevertheless violates a fundamental principle of Scripture. This is nowhere more evident today in contemporary evangelicalism than in the doctrines of inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility. As will be briefly discussed below, there are a number of contemporary views of Scripture that fundamentally violate the testimony of Scripture to itself.

In order to demonstrate this, three primary “do not add or take away” passages will be examined in their immediate contexts. This will be expanded into broader biblical implications. This study will show that the Bible calls for the unequivocal acceptance of the fact that what God inspired the original authors to write in His Word is to remain unaltered (in whole or in part). The implications of this truth necessarily set the boundaries for faith and practice as it relates to what God has said and how His people are to respond to it.

### Deuteronomy 4:2

Deuteronomy is primarily a written record of Moses' final address to the nation of Israel on the edge of the promised land (Deut 1:1). He begins by recounting the history of the nation up through the opening conquests (1:2–2:37). It continues as he brings the narrative up to their present position on the edge of the land itself (3:1–

17). Moses reiterates the present standing orders (3:18–22). It includes the Lord’s rejection of Moses’ appeal to enter the land personally (3:23–29). This is the backdrop for Deut 4:1–2. Moses had been informed that he will not enter the land. The nation must proceed without him. So, he gives the Lord’s final instructions that are to carry the Israelites through both the initial conquest and into the future.

“Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. 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” (Deut 4:1–2).<sup>1</sup>

The instructions begin with a direct address which is something of a “listen up people.” The terms “statutes” and “judgments” are both used at times in the Bible as either legal terms or synonyms for Scripture. The overall and immediate legal context here argues in both cases for the former. The term “statutes” (מִקְוִים, *huqqim*) often refers to legal regulations or stipulations. Typically, the word stresses that these regulations are permanent or lasting ordinances. They are cut in stone, so to speak. So, here it means these are the things they are required either to do, or not do, by law as they enter the land. The word “judgments” (מִשְׁפָּטִים, *mishpatim*) can refer to legal verdicts or judgments. Here, when paired with “statutes,” it is best to take it as the judgments or legally decreed consequences for failing to adhere to the regulations stipulated herein.<sup>2</sup>

Moses also gives his motive for writing. He is sharing these legal requirements with them because knowing and obeying them are the means by which they will remain in the land. God is giving them this land. If they want to go in and stay, they need to keep these commandments. What Moses shares with them in this text is the divine requirements for their happy existence in God’s good land.

The very first statute is this—You shall not add nor take away from these legal regulations (4:2). They have neither the right nor the authority to change this legal document in any way. This is a fairly standard “no tampering” clause in ANE texts.<sup>3</sup> Used in conjunction with the legal terminology of v. 1 (statutes and judgments), this

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations will be from the NAU.

<sup>2</sup> There is something of a debate among scholars as to whether these terms should be understood as comprehensive or complementary terms. I.e., is it a complementary expression like “rules and regulations” (a hendiadys of two essentially synonymous terms which in this context encompasses the entirety of God’s legal requirements) or a comprehensive expression which conveys both the rules and consequences for violations. The distinction between these two views has no impact on the interpretation of the text beyond the issue of emphasis. In either case, these are the statutes and judgments Israel needs to adhere to in order to enter and remain in the land.

<sup>3</sup> See Kramer’s translation of the Lipit-Ishtar Lawcode in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 159–61, especially the *Epilogue* where it pronounces a blessing upon the one “who will not damage my handiwork [in writing the inscription], who will [not] erase its inscription, who will not write his own name upon it . . .” I.e., a blessing is offered upon the one who does not tamper with this inscription in any way.

is easily recognizable as a typical ANE suzerainty treaty formula. This type of agreement stipulates the requirements incumbent upon the vassal. It also articulates the commitments the master is making within this same legal arrangement. Deuteronomy is God committing Himself to the nation. It lays out in a written document the legal requirements incumbent upon the nation if they expect to remain in His land and enjoy all His promised blessings. The “do not add or take away” language is a clear and standard “no tampering” clause.

Now, the question is, How far does this stipulation go? Does it apply to the immediate context only? Does it relate to the entire document? Beyond that, does it have implications related to the entire Pentateuch or even the whole Bible? The answers to these questions define one’s understanding of the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy.

### The Scope of the Instruction

As mentioned above, the terms “statutes” and ‘judgments’ identify the content of Moses’ instructions to the nation. Together, these terms refer comprehensively to all the legal requirements God has for the nation of Israel in order for them to remain in His good land. There is some debate whether these terms should be understood as a comprehensive or complementary tandem. I.e., do the statutes refer to the specific regulations and the judgments refer to the consequences for violating them? Or, do the two terms simply serve as a hendiadys (like the modern expression “rules and regulations”) thereby referring to the totality of God’s instructions? Neither of these views has an impact on the interpretation of the “do not tamper” clause which is the focus of this discussion. However, the recurrent uses of these terms through Deuteronomy do.

Throughout Deuteronomy, these terms are used collectively to refer to the entire body of legal regulations given in the whole document. This is evidenced in part by the way the terms “statutes” and “judgments” are both plurals in v. 1. However, in v. 2, the entire set is referred to as “the word” (singular) which Moses is commanding them. This “word” which Moses is composing at the moment is the book of Deuteronomy as a whole. This means that it refers to the entire collection of commandments which Moses is recording that the nation must comply with in order to remain in the land. As Currid puts it, “Israel is to obey ‘the statutes and judgments’: these terms together refer to the entire body of law in Deuteronomy 5–26.”<sup>4</sup>

There are those, starting with Craigie,<sup>5</sup> who insist that, “In its immediate context . . . the injunction [do not add or take away] relates to the law which Moses was about to present to the people (not to the book of Deuteronomy per se). It was the law, the gift of God at Horeb, that could not be supplemented or reduced.”<sup>6</sup> This argument is pushed one step further when he adds, “Note too that the reference is to the essence

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<sup>4</sup> John Currid, *Deuteronomy* (Faverdale North, UK: Evangelical Press, 2006), 96.

<sup>5</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 131–32.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

of the law, not the letter of the law.”<sup>7</sup> The proof of this is explained via the restatement of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5. When compared with Exodus 20, the commandments agree in principle, but they are not stated verbatim. On this basis, it is argued that the prohibition here is not about the individual words or wording, but related to the primary intentions and principles conveyed.

However, the real challenge here is in trying to make a distinction between the restatement of a stipulation by the Lord who gives the regulations in a legal document and a vassal’s right to alter it in any way. The immediate implication of a statement like this is not just that Israel cannot change ‘in principle’ what God has given them in this document. It is that they cannot alter what it says, period. God’s restatement of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5 is slightly different in wording than in Exodus 20. But this is still the same God by way of the same human instrument (Moses) conveying His covenant regulations to His people. He is here establishing the parameters for this second generation (and those that follow) for their continuation in the land. It is the same author stating the rules. It is not “precisely” the same wording. But that does not equate to the idea that the wording is therefore somehow inconsequential either this time or in the previous text (i.e., Exodus 20). The vassal does not have the right to alter what is stated or how it is stated—even if it is stated multiple times or in a plurality of ways. The entirety of this argumentation by Craigie (et al.) is non sequitur (it does not follow from the evidence given). Deuteronomy 4:2 absolutely forbids anyone from making any changes to the statutes and judgments which God is conveying to Israel via the pen of Moses.

In order to further demonstrate this, all one needs to do is examine Deut 11:31–12:32. In 11:31, Moses again addresses the context of these instructions. They are about to go in and take possession of the land God is giving to them. He then adds in v. 32, “and you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the judgments which I am setting before you today.” So, it is seven chapters later, but the context and the instructions are the same. In fact, in Deut 12:1, Moses says, “These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall carefully observe in the land,” and then begins defining them. In 12:2, they are told to destroy the high places. In 12:5, they are told to seek Yahweh only at the place He chooses. In 12:13–14, they are forbidden to offer sacrifices except in the place Yahweh chooses. In 12:28, they are instructed again to be careful to listen and do all these things so it will be well with them. It is the same message, the same point, the same instructions. The context of the “do not add or take away” is way beyond the Decalogue. It encompasses chapters 5 to 26 at a minimum. The clearest evidence of this is seen in Deut 12:32. At this point, Moses even restates the no tampering clause itself when he writes, “Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.” With this instruction, Moses himself has defined the limits of the no tampering clause to include all the instructions beginning in Deuteronomy 4 and continuing until at least the end of the articulation of these instructions in chapter 26.

It is also worth noting that the very next chapter begins with instructions on how to recognize a false prophet who performs miraculous signs. They are not to follow him regardless of the signs if he adds or takes away from what God says. Again, what

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 132, fn 7.

God has commanded Moses to write in this book is to be the lasting and unalterable requirements God has for them. In Deut 13:18, Moses makes it clear that these instructions are also part of the commandments which he is giving them on that day. The immediate scope of the no tampering clause is the bulk (if not the entirety) of the book of Deuteronomy.

### The Point of the Instruction

The clear intention of the no tampering clause is to forbid any alteration of the text Moses is penning under divine inspiration. The way it is stated is emphatic.<sup>8</sup> One might even translate it, “You shall *never* add to the word which I am commanding you; and you shall *never* take away from it, in order to keep the commandments of Yahweh your God which I am commanding you.” The double use of the participle (commanding) again demonstrates that this is an ongoing process (i.e., a listing of instructions beginning in Deuteronomy 4 and continuing through the rest of the book).

In this final book of the Pentateuch, Moses is giving a summation of the legal requirements for Israel to enter and remain in the land. The no tampering clause is an absolute forbiddance of any alteration of the text in any way. What God has said through the pen of Moses in this book is exactly what He means to say. No one has either the right or authority to alter it in any way.

### The Implications of the Instruction

The immediate implications of the statement are obvious. Israel is accountable to God to conform to all these legal stipulations if they want to enter into God's good land and enjoy the blessings He has promised them. They have no authority to alter these instructions in any way. In fact, the way they are to recognize false prophets in the future is by comparing what they say with the word God is giving them here. If the prophet's instructions contradict what God has said here, then that prophet is not from God.

Beyond this immediate context, there are implications related to the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy. It is clear from this passage that God's rules and regulations for His people are not open for debate. They are lasting ordinances which He Himself has established as the requirements He has placed upon His people. These “add or take away” restrictions are most directly applied to the book of Deuteronomy. Nevertheless, there is inherent in the events recorded in Deuteronomy 33–34 (coupled with the Josh 1:8–10 reference to “this book of the law”) an imposition of those same restrictions upon the completed whole of the Pentateuch itself, because all of it is revelation God gave to Moses.

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<sup>8</sup> See Bill T. Arnold, and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 137. The *al* negative coupled with an imperfect conveys a permanent prohibition.

### Proverbs 30:5–6

This next text comes from what is arguably “the most difficult section of the book of Proverbs to translate and understand.”<sup>9</sup> One of the things that makes the book more difficult than the rest of the OT in general is that the text frequently and significantly lacks an immediate and surrounding context for many of the individual sayings. This is further complicated in Proverbs 30 by the fact that the text marks a new section in the book by a new author—namely, Agur.

There is extended debate about the context of this chapter—in particular, whether vv. 5–6 are connected to the opening statement in vv. 1–4, or not. For the sake of this discussion, the conclusions of a number of stellar works will be leveraged, which present convincing arguments for seeing these opening six verses as a unit which introduces the whole of chapter 30.<sup>10</sup> Working under this premise, the following observations can be made related to the context of the passage in question.

#### The Context of Proverbs 30:5–6

The text of Prov 3:1–6 reads as follows:

The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle.  
 The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal:  
 Surely I am more stupid than any man,  
 And I do not have the understanding of a man.  
 Neither have I learned wisdom,  
 Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One.  
 Who has ascended into heaven and descended?  
 Who has gathered the wind in His fists?  
 Who has wrapped the waters in His garment?  
 Who has established all the ends of the earth?  
 What is His name or His son's name?  
 Surely you know!  
 Every word of God is tested;  
 He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.  
 Do not add to His words or He will reprove you,  
 and you will be proved a liar.

The specific identification of the human author beyond the name given may be undefinable. It would seem a near certainty that it is not a pseudonym for Solomon. But, beyond that, who Agur was must remain a mystery. There are also a number of challenges related to the translation of the rest of v. 1. However, the term “oracle” is almost certainly a claim to inspiration in this context (i.e., to writing Scripture here).

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<sup>9</sup> Tremper Longman, III, *Proverbs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 517.

<sup>10</sup> See the excellent summary discussion of Pauls and Franklyn in Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15–31*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 466.

This claim fits with the inclusion of this chapter in the OT. As such, this necessarily influences the way the rest of these opening verses should be read.

The next two verses (vv. 2–3) articulate Agur's lack of knowledge and understanding. It seems odd that one writing wisdom would begin by proclaiming that he has none. But, a close examination makes it apparent that he is simply establishing the limitations of his own human understanding in order to set it in contrast with God's revelation. The real point of vv. 2–3 is that in his earthbound limitations, Agur confesses that he cannot find wisdom on his own. The last phrase "knowledge of the Holy One" is probably better translated as "knowledge of holy things" since it is a plural. As such, he means he has no ability in himself as a human being to understand how to approach God or honor God on his own. That is where v. 4 presents the real question: How can anyone know true wisdom? Answer: Only if God reveals Himself to man. That is what sets the stage for the main point of Agur's opening message. God has revealed Himself! All man needs to know about living for God is in His Word. And, that revelation is written and reliable.

This is the backdrop for the second "do not add" statement in the Bible. Man's wisdom is not sure. Man's wisdom (even that of a prophet) is not reliable in itself. That is because man has never gone to heaven and come back to reveal the excellencies of God and how to relate to Him. But, in contrast to the limitations of human wisdom, God's Word is sure.

#### The Meaning of Proverbs 30:5–6

In v. 5, Agur declares that "Every word of God is refined."<sup>11</sup> The term "word" is from the root (אמר, *amar*). Here it is the noun form (אמרה, *imrah*). It can refer to either: (1) an individual word, or (2) a statement or a saying. However, in the next verse, Agur uses the plural form of the root (דבר, *dbr*) referring more generally to statements or sayings. So, the sense conveyed in the pairing is deliberately expansive (i.e., from every word, to all the statements). In v. 5, every word is refined. So, in v. 6, do not add to any of His statements lest chastening result.

The term 'refined' or "tested" is taken generally from metallurgy and the smelting process by which precious metals are purified. The predicate use of the participle matches the 'word' in gender and number and conveys very much the characteristic of being refined, purified, or unmixed—i.e., having been fully cleansed of any and all impurities. This is a very direct way of affirming the absolute integrity of not just the Word of God as a whole, but of every single word in it. Every word is absolutely pure.

In v. 6, Agur follows the basic pattern found in Deuteronomy 4. However, his negation is stated as a general principle rather than as an immediate and absolute negation.<sup>12</sup> He reiterates what some have referred to as the "canonical formula" (i.e., do not add or take away).<sup>13</sup> By stating it this way, Agur declares that no addition to

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<sup>11</sup> Every word, not the whole word, because in this case lko precedes a singular without the article.

<sup>12</sup> A simple negation because it is l[ and the imperfect.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns), 477.

God's Word is to be made by men, period. Every word and all the statements in Scripture are without fault. Therefore, the injunction against altering God's Word is now applied to the totality of God's written revelation taken together as well as in every part. The theological reason given here in Prov 30:1–6 is that adding to God's Word is strictly forbidden because there is a fundamental distinction between human reasoning (vv. 1–4) and divine revelation (vv. 5–6). Man cannot add to God's Word because man does not have God's comprehensive knowledge or power. What Agur is writing here in Proverbs 30 is not his own thoughts. Even as a Spirit-superintended author, the only way he is able to communicate this divine truth is by way of inspiration. So, any addition to God's Word will ultimately corrupt it. But, as long as it is not changed, it can be relied upon to be absolutely true—including every word, and every statement.

### **Revelation 22:18–19**

The final “do not tamper” text is found in the very last portion of inspired Scripture. The context is established in Rev 1:1. There is some discussion on whether the opening genitive should be taken objectively or subjectively. Strong arguments can be presented for both views. It is true that much of the book is about the revealing of Jesus Christ in full glory. It is also true that a significant portion of the revelation itself is given via intermediate means (i.e., an angel). However, it is Jesus Himself in full glory who is introduced in Rev 1:9–20. It is Jesus who addressed John telling him to write in a book all the revelation he is about to be given. It is Jesus who then addresses each of the seven churches personally (Revelation 2–3). Finally, it is Jesus who speaks again in the closing declarations of the book (Rev 22:12–16). This is the revelation from Jesus to His church relating to them both the expectations He has of His people, and a foretaste of the culmination of redemptive history—together with a glimpse of the eternal state.

The message of the book is largely this. Christ wants His people to know that He is personally very aware of their individual historical circumstances. He is constantly both with them and evaluating their conduct and faithfulness to Him. There is nothing that comes upon them of which He is unaware. There is nothing they face that He is unable to sustain them through. In fact, He offers many consolations and comforts. This is especially true for those struggling to obey under either the duress of persecution or the challenge of being in a less than faithful local church. Jesus promises all who stay true that they will enjoy a place of honor in His future kingdom (Rev 2–3). In the meantime, a vision of heaven is granted that shows that all that is transpiring is part of the divine plan to bring in the fullness of God's elect—and ultimately, the consummation of redemptive history (Revelation 4–18). Wrath will be poured out in measures that are intended to both harden and judge the non-elect, and to offer the elect opportunities to glorify God in the midst of great distress. All God's good promises will come to pass. Christ will return in glory (Revelation 19). Christ's kingdom will be established by Him personally on this earth (Revelation 20). The wicked will ultimately be condemned along with the devil and his angels. A new heavens and a new earth will be the eternal reward and home for God's people (Revelation 21–22). The final words of the angel instruct the reader to give heed to all that

has been said in this book (22:10–11). Then Jesus addresses the reader again in closing (22:12–16) by affirming the immanency and certainty of His return. There is some difficulty in distinguishing between the words of John and those of the Lord Jesus Himself in the final verses (22:17–20). This includes the “no tampering” clause itself. Nevertheless, it is clear that these verses are very emphatically closing off this final revelation from Christ to His people, permanently. It is this high-level view that is most informative in catching the main point of the no tampering clause in this final chapter of the Bible.

The text of Rev 22:18–20 reads:

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; 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. He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The phrase in v. 20, “Yes, I am coming quickly,” is clearly from Jesus since He is the one who is coming. So, the one who is testifying here is the Lord Jesus. When this “one who testifies” is coupled with the “I testify” in v. 18, it seems rather certain that it is Jesus who is personally appending this “no tampering” clause to His revelation to the church.<sup>14</sup> The emphatic use of the independent personal pronoun “I Myself am testifying” in v. 18 stresses the fact that this is a divine directive. The directive itself is twofold: (1) Do not add to what is written in this book; and, (2) Do not take away from what is written in this book. The consequences are likewise, twofold: (1) he who adds to what is written will have the plagues written herein added to him; and, (2) he who takes away from what is written will have his portion in the eternal promises taken away.

The details of these injunctions are as follows. In v. 18, the first part of the “no tampering” clause says that if anyone adds to the words written in this book, then the ‘plagues’ written therein are added to him. The term “plagues” or “blows” in this context refers to judgments—specifically, the judgments or expressions of divine wrath that have been revealed throughout the book itself. The most immediate references to judgments are found in Rev 20:11–15 and 21:8. Both of these refer to eternal condemnation. It becomes clear when looking at the second part of the “no tampering” clause that these are precisely the judgments intended. In v. 19, the one who

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<sup>14</sup> It has been suggested that these verses were added by early copyists with such a high view of Scripture that they borrowed from the “no tampering” language of Deuteronomy and Proverbs in order to protect the content of this book from scribal additions, emendations, or alterations—see the discussion in Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 513–14. However, there are three immediate reasons to reject this suggestion outright: (1) There is no textual evidence to support the addition of these verses. The extant manuscript evidence universally includes these verses. (2) If it is true, then the very scribes who inserted these verses violated their own consciences and principles. (3) The immediate context of the “no tampering” injunction is placed on those who “hear” not those who “copy” the book. So, there are no legitimate grounds for rejecting the verses as part of the original autograph.

takes away from the words of this prophetic book will have his portion in the tree of life<sup>15</sup> and the Holy City taken away. Both of these are descriptions of eternal life and blessing in the New Creation given in Revelation 21 and 22. So, that which is decreed is this: The one who tampers with God’s revelation incurs eternal condemnation. This book contains God’s own words. It is absolutely not to be altered in any way.

By way of extension, it is worth noting that this same principle is also given in Jer 26:2. Though not technically an “add or take away” passage in the same way as those above, it still conveys the same principle. The Lord instructs Jeremiah to stand in the temple and declare all the words He commanded him to speak, and to “not omit a word!” This is the very same word used in Deut 4:2. God’s prophets were to speak what God told them to say—verbatim. What God says, He means. It is not up to man, even God’s prophets, to edit or alter it. The fact that this principle is given in each of the four main sections of Scripture (the Law, Prophets, Writings, and the NT) confirms the unchanging nature of God’s absolute commitment to this principle.

Jesus uses very much the same kind of language that was used in Deut 4:2, Jer 26:2, and Prov 30:5–6. He forbids anyone from altering God’s Word. As such, He canonizes the Book of Revelation on a par with Deuteronomy and the rest of Scripture as well. As the final prophetic witness from God, He closes the canon and affirms a universal unalterable condition for the whole of the text of Scripture. From Deuteronomy (including every rule and every regulation), to Proverbs 30 (including every word and every statement), to Jeremiah 26 (not omitting a single word), to Revelation 22 (and every prophecy God has given), the Word of God is fixed and unalterable. Any who seek to change it will answer directly and eternally to the God who inspired it.

Now, it is true that in an immediate sense, Jesus is speaking most directly of anyone adding to or taking away from the book of Revelation. However, it is impossible to miss a correlation between the “no tampering” language of Deuteronomy, the expanded application in Proverbs 30, the command given to Jeremiah, and the words Jesus used here in Revelation 22. The clear implication conveyed by this language is that the canon is hereby closed. It is all to be held in the same light, according to the same unalterable standard, and on the basis of the same divine authority. As one writer put it, “Use of the canonical model [here] is equivalent to saying that there is no more room for inspired messages.”<sup>16</sup> With these final words, Jesus completes the revelation of God to men and declares the whole of it complete and unchangeable forevermore.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The KJV reading of “book of life” is due to a copyist error. This is easily identifiable and resolved by the process of textual criticism. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: American Bible Society), 690.

<sup>16</sup> Robert L. Thomas, “The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy in Rev 22:18” *JETS* 32, no. 2 (June 1989), 211.

<sup>17</sup> See also, Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 515–17, for additional proofs and a discussion of the cessation of revelation at this point.

## **Practical and Theological Implications**

### **Practical Implications**

The no tampering clauses convey a number of practical lessons. A brief summary is offered here.

First, there is a direct implication related to the correctness and completeness of Scripture. If nothing is to be added to or taken from what God has said, then there is clearly nothing written that is either in error or incomplete and needing later revision or correction. By the end of Deuteronomy, Israel has been given in the Pentateuch everything they need to know in order to take possession of God's land and remain in it. There are no additional directives needed to convey the requirements God has placed upon His people. There are also no superfluous remarks either. Everything He has said, He means. Every word is precisely what God intends to convey. This principle ripples forward via the later "no tampering" expressions.

Additionally, there is a clear call to obey the Word of God without reservation or revision. This speaks to the legalistic practices of the Pharisees that added traditions to the legal instructions God gave His people in His Word. This speaks to the Sadducees neglect of the full revelation from God in His Word. It speaks to the current modern society which seeks to alter, discount, or disregard God's Word when it speaks to moral or social issues that are contrary to current cultural trends. When the Bible defines marriage as one man and one woman in a one-flesh relationship for life (Genesis 2; Ephesian 5; et al.), it is not acceptable to either ignore or discount God's Word on this subject. Likewise, it is not permissible to redefine homosexuality as an alternate lifestyle when Scripture clearly condemns it as sin. Man does not have the right to alter God's Word. The same could be said for those who seek to reject 1 Timothy 2 when it defines the role of women in the church on the basis that Paul was either limited by cultural and societal pressures in his day, or was a chauvinist himself. The Word is unalterable. It says, now and forever, exactly what the God who inspired it wanted it to say.

Finally, there is an implied call to preserve what the original autographs said with precision, given the fact that it says exactly what God wants it to say from the time it is written. The primary focus of these passages does not carry this emphasis. However, it does seem reasonable to derive this as a natural implication. This realization becomes part of a justification for the discipline of textual criticism. It also merits consideration of textual critical matters even within the exegetical process itself. If God meant precisely what He originally said, then it is imperative that the expositor diligently seek to confirm what was originally written.

These suggested lessons are not exhaustive. However, it should give an initial starting point for those seeking to consider the broader practical implications of this doctrine.

### **Theological Implications**

There are a number of implications of this study that relate to many and varied errant, contemporary evangelical views. These include, but are not limited to, questions of authenticity, historicity, and originality.

Some evangelicals affirm their belief in a divinely inspired Bible, but then question the fundamental principles of the doctrine of inspiration. Some question whether the Gospels actually record what Jesus said, or if they contain only the principles He taught put into words by the authors of the Gospels. They affirm that the Bible is to be taken literally, then question whether ‘Paul’ means Paul in the pastorals. Some affirm the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and then adopt a view of inspiration that includes updating and revisions to the text. Some affirm the veracity of the Bible and then allow for apparent contradictions in historical narratives (in both the OT and the Gospels) to be viewed as non-historical.

All of these views, even though held by well-meaning and faithful men (who are frequently in their own right stellar scholars), must be rejected because they violate the basic principles of the doctrine of inspiration. The no tampering clauses make it clear that what God said, He meant. There is nothing errant, inadequate, or needing later revision contained in it. Any alteration is a violation on the highest order. It is time for evangelicalism to return to this fundamental position on the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy.

It is time to consider the ramifications of accepting any or all of these views, and many like them. If Jesus did not say what the Gospels say He said, then what does that say about Scripture? If ‘Paul’ does not mean Paul in the pastorals, then what does that say about inspiration? If Jesus accommodated Himself to the limitations of His society and contemporary context—affirming as true what He knew was not true—then what does that say about the integrity of Christ and God? If the numbers in Numbers are not the actual factual numbers, then what does that say about the integrity and reliability of Scripture as a whole? If the Bible cannot rightly record historical details, how can it be relied upon in spiritual matters? If the Gospels and other parallel historical accounts cannot be harmonized, and they do in fact contain historical and factual errors, then how can the message of the gospel itself be trusted? If the issues in the Pentateuch are not resolvable by way of harmonization, legitimate interpretive explanation, or textual critical examination, and they are only explainable by accepting a view of ‘textual updating’ (inspired or otherwise), then what does this say about the process of inspiration itself? If Moses wrote the Pentateuch under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, then the product of his work is the inspired Word of God. Any later update of that originally inspired work fundamentally undermines the doctrine of inspiration, because it says an inspired Word was updated, altered, or corrected because of some perceived lack or shortcoming.

There are obviously extended answers that can be given to each and every one of these (and many other) errant views contemporary evangelicalism is debating in this generation. But, the answer in each case is the same. What God originally inspired in the autographs of Scripture was true, reliable, authoritative, and inerrant. As the divinely inspired Word of God, it was therein also commanded to be left unaltered.

### **Conclusion**

There are many well-meaning, intelligent and very articulate evangelical scholars who affirm the Bible as the inspired Word of God. But, inspiration necessarily

includes the principles of reliability, historicity, and permanence. The fact of inspiration (2 Tim 3:16) took place when the human author picked up the pen and began to write, being moved along by the Spirit (2 Pet 1:20–21). It ended when the pen was lifted from the page. At that point, what God said through the instrumentality of the human author was the unalterable, factual, inerrant Word of God. No change is allowable from that point forward. The above discussion of the “no tampering” clauses have confirmed this argument.