

## How Are We Doing?

R12.2 May 2025 Blog

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

~ Deuteronomy 4:2<sup>1</sup> ~

It may have been about the 40th annual reading of the Bible when I was early in Deuteronomy that I saw a verse I had apparently not considered carefully during all my previous readings. Deuteronomy 4:2 settled on me with a weight I had never experienced before. And later in chapter 12 of the same book (just in case I was not paying attention), it was essentially repeated in verse 32: "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it."

I found these verses sobering. They became imprinted in my thinking as I read through the rest of the Bible that year, serving as a filter and magnifying the import of the other 61 books of GOD's Word. The months went by and as I was ending that year's reading, it was as some might say, "taken up a notch" when I was struck even more intensely by two verses at the close of the Book of Revelation. There are only 21 verses in the final chapter – carefully consider the words contained in verses 18 and 19:

"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."

~ Revelation 22:18-19 ~

As I considered/meditated on what God had said, two things seemed apparent. First, I knew I was destined to fail if I had any thoughts I could keep those commands perfectly. Second, it was clear paranoia about failing wouldn't help, but circumspection might.

It occurred to me there are numerous ways I could be *taking from* or *adding to* God's Word, even without any willfulness at play, so I began to make a list of the possible ways I might err. I hope that sharing at least part of the list might be of value. In no particular order, here are the more prominent factors from my list:

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<sup>1</sup>All scripture references are NASB95 unless otherwise noted

- ⇒ *Presuppositions / Predispositions*. We all have them, but it is not uncommon to underestimate their influence. It is a worthy exercise to consider and list your own.
- ⇒ *Confirmation Bias*, which can also come under the axiom “we tend to find what we would like to find.” This one can be subtle because we like to be affirmed in things we are confident are correct (none of us like to acknowledge we think that way).
- ⇒ *World View Application*. How well we understand and apply the distinctions between our preferences, convictions, and doctrines, that develop the “personality” in our worldview, drive how much this factor affects us. If we are not thinking carefully, the lines of distinction can be blurred if not completely ignored.

There is nothing wrong with *preferences*, everyone has them. They are similar to *convictions*, which are mandated in the Bible; preferences are not. When Paul addresses convictions in Romans 14:5, he makes a very basic comparison of “one person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike.” He then goes on to say, “Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.” Parenthetically, I think this raises two interesting questions. First, what is required for a person to be fully convinced in their own mind? Second, assuming convictions are attained based on the initial part of the verse, can one then view theirs as normative for others?

Continuing with our list, I want to raise the issue of what I would call the *significance of sequence* using these well-known verses for illustration:

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, [which is] your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

~ Romans 12:1-2 ~

I do not know what your experience has been, but I have heard from the middle portion of v.2 about “being transformed by the renewing of your mind” many, many times more than “present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice,” and “do not be conformed to this world,” even though the order is reversed. I think the sequence is significant because it was inspired to be that way.

In a similar fashion, there can be a tendency to separate *promises* from *commands*, emphasizing the promise while paying scant attention to the command. There are many illustrations. I have often heard people quote James 4:7 in part, “resist the devil and he will flee from you.” The whole verse reads, “**Submit therefore to God.** Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” The first part is the command, the second the promise. You cannot separate them. The first part of James 4:8 also repeats the pattern, as do many others in

the Bible. It is hard to adequately stress the importance of being clear on God's intent, as we may welcome the promises and not the commands. We must be careful not to decouple them.

Now, take a moment and carefully reread the three verses at the beginning of the blog, especially Revelation 22:18-19. Chew on these routinely as you continue reading GOD's Word, endeavoring to understand and apply it.

Let me close by repeating a statement from above: Paranoia about failing won't help, but circumspection could. So, how are we doing? Awareness is the first step. The next steps should come by walking with the Holy Spirit Who indwells those who know Jesus as Savior and Lord. Finally, I encourage you to consider something A.W. Tozer once wrote, "Thinking is the easiest thing to do. Thinking rightly is the most difficult."<sup>2</sup> May the Holy Spirit equip each of us to think rightly about the things of GOD, and very importantly, to continually submit our wills to His. Obedience is paramount if we are to finish well. Let us not add to or take away from the Word of GOD.

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<sup>2</sup> From Tozer's book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*