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PCA 50th Anniversary Devotion

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

For many of us, the danger is not that we would explicitly deny the Word of God. The danger is that we nullify the truth in other, more subtle ways.

In this article, Kevin reads from a devotional he wrote for "By Faith" for the 50th anniversary of the PCA.

Transcript

[Music] Greetings and Salutations. Welcome to Life and Books and Everything. This is Kevin DeYoung.

Today I'm reading a brief devotion I wrote for "By Faith." That's the magazine of the Presbyterian Church in America. They are running a series of devotionals in celebration of the PCA's 50th anniversary. And I was able to write one recently here at the beginning of February.

And here it is. Revelation 22 18 through 19. I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book.

If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes away the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the Tree of Life and in the Holy City, which are described in this book, Revelation 22 18 and 19. This injunction comes from Deuteronomy, chapter 4, chapter 12, see also chapter 18, and is typical of covenantal formulas.

At the close of ancient covenants, after the stipulations had been laid down and the blessings and curses enumerated, there was often a warning against tampering with the covenant. The admonition was meant to underscore the sanctity of the text and the severity of judgment that would befall anyone who would dare to alter in the slightest what had been written down. The fact that revelation closes with this formula suggests that John understood that as the last living apostle, his writing marked the end of an era.

Well, he may not have known he was writing the last book of the Bible, or even thought in those exact terms. He certainly could have known that the time for writing new covenant documents was closing, and thus it was necessary to apply the same covenant a warning found in Moses to his own letter. Most immediately, John was warning against tampering with anything in the letter he had just written.

More broadly, however, he was providing a fitting conclusion to the whole Bible. Even if John's formula only applied to this one letter, he still would be telling us a lot. Don't tamper with the deity of Christ.

Don't tamper with the atonement. Don't tamper with the character of God. Don't tamper with the exclusive claims of the gospel.

Don't tamper with the reality of eternal punishment and eternal reward. All of this is taught plainly in the book of Revelation, and we must not deviate from any of it. For many of us, the danger is not that we would explicitly deny the word of God.

The danger is that we would nullify the truth in other more subtle ways. We intellectualize the word of God so as to get out from under its demands. We might throw up our hands because we are not scholars and because so many smart people disagree, and how to interpret the Bible.

Such an approach has the appearance of sophistication, but it effectively robs the word of its power. We compartmentalize the word of God so that it applies to stealing and lying and a few other matters, but it doesn't speak to our business, our money, our family life, our desires, or what we do with our time. We psychologize the word of God so that it doesn't apply to us because of our temperament and because of our background.

The Bible is only allowed to say what makes me feel good and what encourages my self-expression. We marginalize the word of God by coming to it with preconceived notions of what it obviously can and can't say. Consequently, the scriptures can only mean what our culture already affirms, and God can only say to me what I already believe.

Much as we might like to, we cannot keep the warning of Revelation 22, 18, and 19 safely at arm's length. It is the temptation of every human heart to want God to say more or less than what he has said. The child of God will come to Scripture with a humble heart, knowing that God's Word gives us everything we need for life and godliness, and that every word, in the Word, is not only true, but for our good.

God's Word is final and fixed. Addition and subtraction are not allowed.

[Music]