

Adding To and Taking Away

Mark Mickelson

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We're at the end of the Days of Unleavened Bread. I guess if we could go back, in type, Israel is getting ready to walk out into the wilderness between Days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost, and some of what God had to do with them was get their attention. But God made this point repeatedly: Would you just do what I tell you to do and would you stop making up things for yourselves! I want to walk through some of that, and look at us, as well, in the church. We believe that the original record of scripture is God-breathed: It's inspired by God and that's what the meaning of that word essentially is. We believe that we are to live by every word that comes from the mouth of God. So it's important to us to try to understand what God said, how we can do what He said to do, but with that, too, comes the recognition that we cannot be making up things just for ourselves. We all recognize the fact that religious teaching, including our own historical teaching within the church of God community, is riddled with the customs and traditions of men.

It is in our nature to make up those things for ourselves that we choose. The translations of the Bible we use have all been corrupted; the word "church" has a completely different focus and meaning from the word "ecclesia"; the fact that God's name is pronounced (and written as) "LORD" when it doesn't mean that by any stretch of the imagination. As we've gone through this you can begin to recognize layer after layer of bias, in some cases open references to the trinity, that were added to the text; there's bias in terms of Jesus Christ and the way He is referred to. And so we begin to go through the Bible and we start sorting through as we draw attention to those layers of corruption that have entered into the text. Frankly, in terms of the church of God, the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints was corrupted as well—I wouldn't say intentionally so, but simply through the lack of fuller understanding that was necessary to be able to understand what God's purpose originally was for us. But Jesus Christ did say, *My sheep hear My voice*. And so the Holy Spirit working in our minds is the factor that God uses to bring recognition of that voice.

I once knew a man who couldn't read; he spoke English but he couldn't read it. He learned to read by reading the Bible, and in the course of time, God worked with his mind to understand what was there, and he came into the body—the ecclesia—and was called. So God's active presence through His Spirit is the element that changes and works with our minds, but at the same time we need to learn and understand the regulations, the stipulations, the instructions that God gives. If we're going to live by every word, then we need to look at those words and see what it is God has said. If God says so, then we need to be doing so. If God doesn't say so, then we need to stop making it up for ourselves. This is an important distinction because, again, our history in the church of God is littered with doctrines and traditions of men.

Let's go to Exodus 9; I want to go into the middle of the plagues and I want to use a particular illustration that shows God bringing Israel out of captivity. Exodus 9:13 is the seventh plague, the plague of hail.

Exodus 9:13 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: "Let My people go, that they may serve Me, 14) for at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth. (NKJV)*

Then in verse 18,

18) *Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause very heavy hail to rain down, such as has not been in Egypt since its founding until now.*
19) *Therefore send now and gather your livestock and all that you have in the field, for the hail shall come down on every man and every animal which is found in the field and is not brought home; and they shall die." ' ' (NKJV)*

Notice Moses is warning the Egyptians that God said, I am going to give you a chance. I'm going to warn you; you must bring everything out of the field or it will die. Verse 20.

20) *He who feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh [we're describing Egyptians now] made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses.*
21) *But he who did not regard the word of the LORD left his servants and his livestock in the field. (NKJV)*

Even the Egyptians had to learn to fear the word of the LORD—God's words, His instructions—or they were going to suffer greatly.

22) *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt—on man, on beast, and on every herb of the field, throughout the land of Egypt."*
23) *And Moses stretched out his rod toward heaven; and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire darted to the ground. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt.*
24) *So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail [lightning, possibly, is what is being described], so very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.*
25) *And the hail struck throughout the whole land of Egypt, all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail struck every herb of the field and broke every tree of the field.*
26) *Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, there was no hail. (NKJV)*

Even in this case, if you were an Egyptian and you feared God and His words, and you did what He said, you still had a way, by obedience to His instructions, to be protected. It's an interesting lesson. Israel had a hard time with that themselves. But even some of the Egyptians feared the word of the LORD.

Then in Exodus 16, they go out into the wilderness. Exodus 16 is the Manna, the bread from heaven. Look again at God's efforts to try to get Israel to obey Him—just do what I tell you and quit making these things up for yourselves. This is important and this is important in our day.

Exodus 16:1 *And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt.*

2) *Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.*

3) *And the children of Israel said to them, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."*

4) *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. (NKJV)*

God set it up so that they would have to learn to be obedient; He caused it to be that they would have to obey or it would become obvious and they would be punished.

5) *And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily." (NKJV)*

Then in verse 22,

22) *And so it was, on the sixth day, that they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses.*

23) *Then he said to them, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.'"*

24) *So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not stink, nor were there any worms in it.*

25) *Then Moses said, "Eat that today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field.*

26) *Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none."*

27) *Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none.*

28) *And the LORD said to Moses, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?" (NKJV)*

Do you know what Israel said? What difference does it make? Well, I don't think that's what they said, but that's how they behaved.

29) *See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day." (NKJV)*

God said, would you just do it the way I have commanded!

There are two stories in the wilderness, one about bread to eat and the other about water to drink. The water to drink goes into a little bit of a different direction, and as we go on then to chapter 17, and further, to chapter 20, we see how this worked out well once but not too well another time. Again, it's a matter of God saying, would you just do what I say!

Exodus 17:1 *Then all the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink.*

2) *Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, "Give us water, that we may drink." So Moses said to them, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the LORD?"*

3) *And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"*

4) *So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!" (NKJV)*

I never wanted to be too close to the throne, so to speak, of anyone leading the church. ((laughs)) There was always (in a manner of speaking) lightning when near to the throne because we always gathered power to ourselves; we obviously thought we used it for God's purposes but oftentimes it was according to our own will.

5) *And the LORD said to Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go.*

6) *Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.*

7) *So he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?" (NKJV)*

God said, strike the rock; Moses struck the rock and they drank. He did what he was told and it worked out quite well. Let's go over to Numbers; I want to go forward a little in the account because this happened on two occasions but it didn't always work out quite so well. Chapter 20 of Numbers is another account, a different one.

Numbers 20:1 *Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month [later, obviously, in the story flow], and the people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there and was buried there.*

2) *Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron.*

3) *And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! (NKJV)*

It's like they pre-recorded that statement, and then punched a button on the recorder, which then blurted it out—their complaining was just that repetitious.

4) *Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here?*

5) *And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink."*

6) *So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them.*

7) *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,*

8) *Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes ... (NKJV)*

God now changes the instructions: You're not going to do this the way we did it last time, but you're going to do it the way I say. Speak to the rock before their eyes,

8 continued) *... and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals."*

9) *So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him.*

10) *And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?"*

11) *Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice [not just once; he smacked it again in a fit of anger] with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.*

12) *Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, [must we give you water from this rock] therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." (NKJV)*

It cost Moses his opportunity to enter into the Promised Land, because in this case, a servant of God, a faithful servant of God, lost his temper and in anger took the glory to himself—we're going to give you the water—and smacked the rock (and yes, God honored that and the water flowed), but then Moses was held accountable for his careless words. Over and over again, the lesson from God is, do what I tell you to do and quit making up things for yourselves.

If we go back to Numbers 13 (I had to roll forward in the story to show the contrast), we have the spies that are being sent out into the land. Again, this happened in the very same way. In Numbers 13, verse 1,

Numbers 13:1 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,*

2) *“Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.”*

3) *So Moses sent them from the Wilderness of Paran according to the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of the children of Israel. (NKJV)*

These are the leaders but what they do becomes very actionable. People watch these men for the example they set, and follow them, so it becomes critical how they behave. Going on to verse 26, we all know the story that they came back with an evil report.

26) *Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land.*

27) *Then they told him, and said: “We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.*

28) *Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there [the giants].*

29) *The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.” (NKJV)*

They are just saying, this isn't going to work and we don't want to go there.

30) *Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.”*

31) *But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.”*

32) *And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature.*

33) *There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.*” (NKJV)

So they said, we just can't do that, it's just not going to work. Then going over to chapter 14, notice the consequences, beginning with verse 26.

Numbers 14:26 *And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying,*
27) *“How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me.*
28) *Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the LORD, ‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you:*
29) *The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above.*
30) *Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in.*
31) *But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised.* (NKJV)

So God first said, go into the land and scout it out, and they replied, we can't do that, this isn't going to work. God's response: you are going to die and you will never enter what I had given as a promise—you've been unfaithful, don't go into the land—I'm telling you now that you won't go there. So what is Israel determined to do? We're going to go into the land now; God said go, so we don't want to do that, but if He says stop, we don't want to do that either—we're going to do it the way we want to do it. As we see in verse 39,

39) *Then Moses told these words to all the children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly.*
40) *And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, “Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised, for we have sinned!”* (NKJV)

We're going to go now and do what You said to do the first time.

41) *And Moses said, “Now why do you transgress the command of the LORD? For this will not succeed.*
42) *Do not go up, lest you be defeated by your enemies, for the LORD is not among you.*
43) *For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned away from the LORD, the LORD will not be with you.”*
44) *But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop. Nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed from the camp.*

45) *Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back ... [and they were defeated].*
(NKJV)

If God says to do it, then be about the business of getting it done. If God says, don't do it—do not go there—then we cannot afford to make up our own things. As that played out, those died and the next generation is now getting ready to enter the land; Deuteronomy 4 is the second giving of the law, the reset or reboot, as God is intent on fulfilling His promise. In Deuteronomy 4, again, here is this warning. (Even the Egyptians in Egypt, if they feared the word of the LORD, were blessed, or at least protected.)

Deuteronomy 4:1 *Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you.*

2) *You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.*
(NKJV)

Very specific. The same instructions and lessons they had been given before and what they had violated continually. Then in Deuteronomy 12, verse 29,

Deuteronomy 12:29 *“When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land,*

30) *take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’*

31) *You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.*

32) *“Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it. (NKJV)*

Over and over again God tries to get His people to trust Him and to do His will. Go to the beginning of the book of Joshua and you will see this is constantly hammered back into their minds; if only they would have listened and done what God said. Joshua is now given the responsibility to lead them.

Joshua 1:1 *After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying:*

2) *Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel.*

3) *Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses.*

4) *From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates ... (NKJV)*

If you go from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River, the honest answer is, Israel never fully occupied that land. They are going to occupy that land; it's a millennial promise that ultimately will be fulfilled.

4 continued) *... all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory.*

5) *No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.*

6) *Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.*

7) *Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. (NKJV)*

Do it the way I say. Brethren, what have we done through much of our own history? We have done it the way that we pleased. Maybe at some point in the beginning it was the best understanding we had, but then when the time came, and information was at least being made available that this is not the way God instructed, then the person who brought such a message to the leadership was punished or would be, and those who stood up would also be punished, and met with, "Do not tell us that we have to make any change!" Verse 8.

8) *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*

9) *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." (NKJV)*

Again, if you just do what He says.

So that's the beginning of Israel's nationhood freedom and their entering of the land. After that, Israel wouldn't obey God, Israel goes into captivity; Judah wouldn't obey God, Judah is going to go into captivity, so I just want to walk down to the other end of the story. Let's go to Jeremiah. What is the problem? The problem is the leadership would not put God first and the people followed their leaders. The people themselves demanded their own way as well. Some of the warnings here are so strong it's actually hard to read parts of the passage. Jeremiah 23; this is all the way down, they go into captivity now, that last remnant of God's people that were still free (under those conditions at least).

Jeremiah 23:1 *"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" says the LORD.*

2) *Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: "You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings," says the LORD. (NKJV)*

It goes into a prophetic statement but the point is, there are passages to the priests, to the shepherds, where God says, you have trampled My sheep, you have fed them the foul food, you have protected your own interests. A sermon was given right here in Spokane a year or a year and a half ago about not making any noise in the Temple. My answer to that sermon was, when Tobiah (the Ammonite official) moved into the Temple, I bet you there wasn't any noise at all. People turned their heads, looked down, and walked away, but when Nehemiah threw him out on his ear I bet there was a ruckus indeed. There are times when noise needs to be made in the Temple, when evil needs to be removed. The fact that the stones were carved off-site has a symbolism to it of course. The time was quiet when Tobiah moved in. I'm sure it took a ruckus to put him out. In Jeremiah 23, going on down further, to verse 15,

15) *"Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets: 'Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall; For from the prophets of Jerusalem profaneness has gone out into all the land.'"*

16) *Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; (NKJV)*

The ministry by percentage have been turned into hirelings by the administrative policies of the church of God in our time. Hirelings, doing as they're told by man rather than doing as they're told by God.

16 continued) *... They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD. (NKJV)*

Speak their own words, have their own doctrines, make their own things.

17) *They continually say to those who despise Me, "The LORD has said, 'You shall have peace'" [just sing "Kumbaya" and hold hands and everything is going to be okay]; and to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'"* (NKJV)

Your country club membership is secure—you need not worry.

18) *For who has stood in the counsel of the LORD, and has perceived and heard His word? Who has marked His word and heard it?*

19) *Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD has gone forth in fury—a violent whirlwind! It will fall violently on the head of the wicked.*

20) *The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly. (NKJV)*

So there are a few scriptures that in the latter days God says it is His intent to reveal more fully His purpose, who He is, and His record, and understanding is going to expand. It kind of has to, because again, if the two witnesses were to start speaking tomorrow, the church of God would reject them as false prophets because they would not be teaching what the church itself has said. There has to be a process, it would seem to me, where at least part of the church is willing to move by looking at God's word, directed by His Spirit; the fact is when the time does come and those witnesses speak, they will hear that voice as authentic because they will understand those same things. It simply has to take place.

Going on down, it just says—if I didn't quite finish—in verse 21,

21) *"I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.*

22) *But if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings.* (NKJV)

Then God's power and majesty would have been made evident among His people, not hidden and buried and funneled off somehow—away.

Have we in the church of God, over the years, added anything to or taken anything away from what God commanded? Have we turned either to the right hand or to the left from what God breathed? Does the Bible say that the one God includes both the Father and Jesus Christ? It does not. Do we say that? We've added to God's word.

Does the Bible say that Jesus Christ is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? It doesn't say that. It says, God the Father glorified His Servant Jesus. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus—that's what it says. How do you get Jesus being the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? You have to add to the Bible record. You have to add to the text. It's in a booklet, it's in a study paper, it's in a sermon, but it's not in God's word.

Does the Bible say that no one has ever heard the voice of God the Father? It does not say that, no matter how many times it's repeated. That is not in scripture. Does the Bible say that Jesus is the Creator (the title)—not assisting God, not a servant of God, but the Creator? Is Christ the Creator? The Bible does not say that. We say that, we've said that, we demand it be so, but it's simply not there.

Does the Bible say that Jesus Christ spoke to Moses at the burning bush? Jesus Christ said that God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, and Jesus Christ refers to God in that passage as "He". [Mark 12:26] Why can't we bring up a scripture in the record and get people to agree that these things are so? Because Israel and spiritual Israel too often want to do it their own way. They want to do their own thing, they want to strike the rock, they want to strike the rock their own way. Does the Bible say that Jesus was

the I AM in the account of the burning bush? It does not, it says the I AM is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the Bible says that is the Father. You can make it up, you can punish people, you can shut down the discussion so that nobody hears the answer. The discussion will continue and God will have His way.

Does the Bible say that Jesus Christ was the presence in the Holy of Holies of the Temple? That's a big one. The watchman on the wall is not warning the approaching army, he's warning the people inside the wall, and if the ministry who know these things will not get up and warn God's people of the danger to come, then they face what Israel faced in the wilderness when they just wouldn't do it God's way. They wouldn't believe God's words. This is what ministers now offer instead: Here's what this really means; here's the problem with that; what difference does it make? It makes a big difference.

The Father and Jesus Christ are one, right? One what? They are two Beings. Are they one God?—they are not—the Bible doesn't say that either. There are consequences for adding to and taking away from the words of God. Moses, a faithful servant of God, sacrificially giving his life—forty years in Egypt, forty years in a wilderness, forty years with Israel—didn't believe God in one thing and give Him the glory due His name, and God said, you know, that is not enough. You will be in My Kingdom, you have been My servant, but no, you do not get to finish and have it your way. You're going to have it My way—that's how this works.

Look at Luke 11. I wanted to pick a New Testament verse and some of the passages are so strong, I'm almost afraid to read them; I'm trying to pick one that's in the middle.

Luke 11:37 *And as He spoke, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat.*

38) *When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first washed before dinner.*

39) *Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness.*

40) *Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also?*

41) *But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you.*

42) *"But woe to you Pharisees! (NKJV)*

I once said to a group of the leadership of the church of God in which I served, "We are the Pharisees. The corporation is run by the Pharisees and is teaching the Talmud." That was not well received but it's true. When the Talmud—when what we say is worth more than what God says—when the Talmud overtakes the Torah in terms of what the record should be, when our words and our ways become the rule and the law, we are in for serious consequences.

42 continued) *... woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.*

43) *Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.*

44) *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them.” (NKJV)*

Looks good on a fast horse, as they say.

45) *Then one of the lawyers answered and said to Him, “Teacher, by saying these things You reproach us also.” (NKJV)*

Teacher, you certainly don't think that that applies to the rest of us, do you?

46) *And He said, “Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.*

47) *Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them.*

48) *In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs.*

49) *Therefore the wisdom of God also said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,’ (NKJV)*

Why is it always the same? Why does Israel never change? Why wouldn't spiritual Israel be different? Brethren, we must be different. We have God's call to be different.

50) *that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation,*

51) *from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.*

52) *“Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.” (NKJV)*

They actually hindered people from putting God first. I cannot say definitively what “the key of knowledge” is because we could all say, this is what I think it is and this is important. I don't have it spelled out but I will say this: I think the biggest mistake in the church of God in my lifetime—and I apologize to the degree that I contributed to it—is teaching people to look to man instead of God; to what man says instead of what God says; the way man had his authority and the way man had his presence and appearance in office. We needed to put God first, we needed to teach the people to put God first. Yes, we did that, but we need to do that exclusively, and not offset with, “By the way, if you don't do what I told you to do, you need to go away”—that's not how that should have played out.

A passage I chose not to read was Matthew 23; it says, you are like whitewashed tombs—inside you are full of dead men's bones. I have a list of sermon titles that I wrote down and then threw away. One of the sermon titles was “Dead Men's Bones”. That

lasted a little while on my desk then it ended up in the trash. There have been a number of them with these titles. One was “Upside Down and Backwards”—I’ve had that one in my mind for a couple years. I said to myself, no, just forget it; get over it and go on, and so I leave them there for a while and then throw them away.

These are serious matters though. Brethren, these are very serious matters. Look at Revelation 22—go to the end of the book of Revelation. The statement here, in verses 18 and 19, specifically, is a reference to this book—I accept that. But Revelation is the bookend to the Bible, so it’s not like God didn’t know how much of the Bible He wanted these end verses to apply to. I think this passage can be broadly applied, but let’s just take it as it is written.

Revelation 22:18 *For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book;*

19) and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. (NKJV)

Very serious—salvation. Are these salvational issues? They are indeed. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the one true God, the only true God, and Jesus Christ. A friend of mine said, if you’re having trouble looking at the Old Testament, you look and see God everywhere, when you find the servant, that’s Jesus Christ. He’s called a Servant in the Old Testament, He’s called a Servant in the New Testament, He is the Servant of God. He was the Servant in the Creation, He was the Servant all through the record. Find the one who is the Servant to God and you will find Jesus Christ. I thought, you know, that’s actually a very helpful concept because that’s the way He would be seen. You have in God’s word—the Bible, the scriptures—the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. It was God-breathed, from the mouth of God, and then you have the customs and traditions of men. Choose the one you will.