

God's Word Is Forever Settled

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Introduction

The great psalm that exalts God's Word throughout its 176 verses contains the following majestic claim: "For ever, O Jehovah, Thy word is settled in heaven" (Psa. 119:89, ASV). It is hardly possible to imagine a stronger statement of warranty for anything than that it is "settled in heaven." The force of this statement is that God's Word is final, sure, immutable, and eternal **because** it is from Heaven—God Himself spoke it. When any matter is "settled in heaven," it is fully, certainly, perfectly, and indestructibly established.

On the word *settled*, Albert Barnes commented:

The word rendered *settled* means...that the Word—the law—the promise—of God was made firm, established, stable, in heaven; and would be so for ever and ever. What God had ... affirmed would always remain true; what He had promised would be sure for ever (204).

God's inspired poet wrote elsewhere in the same vein:

The works of his hands are truth and justice; All his precepts are sure. They are established for ever and ever; They are done in truth and uprightness (Psa. 111:7-8).

The sum of thy word is truth; And every one of thy righteous ordinances endureth for ever (119:160).

Isaiah spoke with the certainty of one filled with both deep faith in and knowledge of God: "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand forever" (Isa. 40:8). We could multiply similar Old Testament statements manifold times. The Lord Jesus added His testimony to the finality and indestructibility of the Word in a brief, but emphatic declaration: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). If what the Christ stated about this comparatively remote statement from Psalms 82:6 is true, how can it apply any less to all Scripture? Though spoken specifically concerning His warnings of the destruction of Jerusalem, our Savior's proclamation is nonetheless true of the fullness of God's Word: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Mat. 24:35).

The foregoing claims of God's prophets—and of the Son of God Himself—regarding Holy Writ imply at least the following: Its finality and its immutability.

The Finality of God's Word

God's Word is the "last word," "the end of the matter," the ultimate and dependable authority on every subject upon which it touches. It was conceived, "settled," and certified by the eternal Godhead before it was delivered to men. Therefore, men dare not seek a "second opinion" apart from the Sacred Oracles. Woe unto those Balaamites in any age who seek to "know what Jehovah will speak unto me more," after God has spoken clearly and finally (Num. 22:19).

The Bible is also final in the sense that there has not been – nor will there ever be – any additional revelation since the last New Testament apostle and prophet laid down his inspired pen. Jude's statement is too clear to be misunderstood in this regard:

Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write unto you of our common salvation, I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints (v. 3).

The faith here is not a reference to one's subjective belief in something or someone, but to that **in which** one believes or vests his personal faith. Jude thus refers to the Gospel "system" – the New Testament message as a whole – with its power to save the soul (Rom. 1:16). It is an entity that men can obey (Acts 6:7), preach (Gal. 1:23), strive for (Phi. 1:27), depart from (1 Tim. 4:1), and thus for which God's people must earnestly contend. These statements and many similar ones stress the uniqueness and singularity of the New Testament as an unrivaled revelation, rather than one among many God-given or God-approved messages.

Jude further emphasized the finality of God's revelation by writing that it was "once for all delivered to the saints." *Once for all* translates the very little, but powerful Greek word, *hapax*. Thayer's lexicon says that this term "...is used of what is so done as to be of perpetual validity, and never need[ing] repetition" (54), which definition numerous other Greek authorities echo. While Jude's exhortation particularly emphasizes the finality of the New Testament, his statement, in principle, embraces all Scripture. Likewise, while Paul's statement on the source and all-sufficiency of Scripture refers to the Old Testament in context, it is no less true of all of the Bible:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17, KJV).

The Hebrews writer states this unifying "revelation chain" succinctly in his majestic opening words:

God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds (Heb. 1:1-2).

Soon afterward he further described this revelation connection:

For if the **word spoken through angels** proved stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect **so great a salvation?** which **having at the first been spoken through the Lord**, was **confirmed unto us by them that heard...** (2:2-3, emph. DM).

What is true of one portion is true of all. God's Word through His Son is final – His last word! Therefore, away with every self-proclaimed "prophet" who has dared to claim he has received a Message from Heaven subsequent to the words which conclude the Bible: the New Testament. All such are false prophets and deceivers. God's Word – all of it – has already been delivered to mankind, and there will be no more.

The Immutability of God's Word

That which is immutable is fixed, inflexible, unchanged, unchangeable, and unvarying. *Immutable* is but another synonym for *settled*, as described above.

We live in a world of constant change and flux. Nothing pertaining to our material world and our lives in it long remains the same. The Word of God – because the Almighty is its source – is not subject to such fickle variations, evolutions, mutations, or fluctuations. Its immutability has survived centuries of the earnest efforts of pagans, kings, popes, atheists, amoral perverts, theologians, and even "translators" to destroy and/or alter it. God's providence has preserved it in thousands of various documents that include all or portions of it in ancient manuscripts, translations, lectionaries, letters, and other writings.

The Word of God is as immutable and eternal as its Triune source:

God the Father Is Immutable

"For I, Jehovah, change not..." (Mal. 3:6a). He is Him "...who is and who was and who is to come...the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 1:4, 8; 4:8; 21:6). He is "the eternal God" (Rom. 16:26) with an unwavering "eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11). Tillit S. Tedlie wrote faithfully when he wrote his beautiful hymn, "Hold to God's Unchanging Hand."

God the Son Is Immutable

The Son of God is the "King eternal, immortal, invisible...who only hath immortality...to whom be honor and power eternal" (1 Tim.1:17; 6:16). The Christ "...hath his priesthood unchangeable...[and] is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever" (Heb. 7:24; 13:8). To John on Patmos the Lord said: "I am the first and the last, and the

Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore..." (Rev. 1:17-18; cf.22:13). All of these passages either imply or clearly speak of the changeless nature of God's Son.

God the Holy Spirit Is Immutable

God the father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are one in their nature and attributes. Since the Father and His Son were changeless in what They spoke, so then was the Holy Spirit. He spoke not of Himself to the apostles, but the things the Father and the Son gave Him to speak (John 15:26; 16:12-15). He is "the eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14).

There is, of course, a sense in which men, as creatures of free will, can "change" the Word of God, as many have done and still do. Denominationalism is a glaring illustration of such alterations. Such turn the true Word of God into the word of fallible men. False teachers among the Galatian saints preached a "different gospel," but it was "not another gospel" (Gal. 1:6-7). All such perverters of the true Gospel brought—and bring—the anathema of God upon themselves (vv.8-9). The Old Testament contains innumerable warnings against false prophets. Beginning with the Lord and flowing through the New Testament books the reader finds systemic warnings **against** those who would alter the Holy Word and **to** those who would hear them (e.g., Mat. 7:15-16; 15:13-14; Acts 13:10; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 15:12-15; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 The. 2:1-3; 1 Tim. 1:5-7; 4:1-3; Tim. 2:14-18; 4:1-4; 2 John 9; et al.). Men can indeed "wrest" the Scriptures, but they do so "unto their own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:16b). Men dare not add to or subtract from Holy Writ (Rev. 22:18-19).

Conclusion

We can have the same absolute confidence in the Bible as God's settled, final, and immutable Word that Peter expressed:

"Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth... But the word of the Lord abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

May we ever be content to abide within its confines and enjoy its blessings!

Works Cited

All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

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