

john 15:4
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Bible studies for disciples who make disciples

Loudonville Community Church

Volume 5 - Number 12
The week of February 9, 2020

Jesus-Formation
Thinking Like Jesus...
About Righteousness
Matthew 5:17-48

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

Main Point: Jesus reveals the true intent of Scripture calling us to a greater righteousness of the heart that flows from grace.

What Did Jesus Believe about the Bible?
by Paul Carter¹

While there is a great deal that could be said about what Jesus believed about the Bible, any honest treatment of the subject will likely start with these three observations.

Jesus Believed that the Old Testament was Decisive and Binding

One of the best ways to learn what Jesus believed about the Bible is to observe how Jesus used the Bible in his earthly life and ministry. In John 10 Jesus is engaged in a heated exchange with a hostile Jewish crowd. They are hostile because Jesus has just made a very controversial claim: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). That's a bold statement and the Jews reacted with anger. After all, doesn't the Bible say: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

To state the obvious: if there is only one God, how can Jesus and the Father both be God? At first glance that seems like a very solid point. The Jews obviously thought so (cf. John 10:22-38). Jesus is clearly operating under the assumption here that if you have a verse and you are using it correctly, then you win the argument. The Jews were saying, 'the Bible teaches that there is only one God – you say that you are God – therefore you must be blaspheming.' Jesus says in response that the Bible refers to other people as "gods" as per Psalm 82:6 – therefore the issue is not "do I use the word God to refer to myself" but am I using it legitimately, and by legitimately I mean biblically. D.A. Carson says in his commentary on John:

As Jesus uses the text, the general line of his argument is clear. This Scripture proves that the word 'god' is legitimately used to refer to others than God himself. If there are others whom God (the author of Scripture) can address as 'god' and 'sons of the Most High' (i.e. sons of God), on what biblical basis should anyone object when Jesus says, *I am God's Son?*²

"You haven't understood the whole Bible on this matter. I have. Therefore I win."

That's an interesting window into how Jesus understands the Bible. The approach of Jesus in this particular conflict is rooted upon his fundamental conviction that "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). God's Word is the last Word. Therefore, if you have a verse and you're using it correctly, you win the argument. He said the same thing in Matthew 22 while arguing the Sadducees. They came to him with a made-up question trying to trap him and Jesus stops them

short. He says: “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God”).

After thwarting a representative of the Pharisees in a similar fashion, Matthew brings the chapter to a conclusion by saying: “And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions” (Matthew 22:46).

No kidding!

The opponents of Jesus learned an important lesson that day: don’t bring a knife to a gun fight. Don’t bring your tradition, your superstition or your stupid and try to wield that against the Word of God, because the Word of God wins every time. That is important for us to understand because many of the progressive Post-Evangelicals like to style themselves as Red Letter Christians; but to state the obvious – to do that, you have to ignore some really important Red Letters. In Matthew 5:19 for example Jesus – in Red Letters, states the following: “Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus did not commission his people to undo the Old Testament; he faced the devil with Deuteronomy 8:3. He faced the Sadducees with Exodus 3:6. He faced the Pharisees with Psalm 110:1. Jesus clearly operated under the assumption that the whole Old Testament – properly understood – was binding and decisive and to be his follower requires you to do the same.

Jesus Believed that the Apostles were Speaking on his Behalf

Near the end of his earthly ministry Jesus had an important conversation with his disciples. He told them that he would soon die and rise again and ascend into heaven. In preparing them for those events he said: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:12–15).

Jesus said that he had more to say to his disciples than he had said in his earthly ministry. He also made it clear that after ascending into heaven he would send down the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Truth – who would take from Jesus and give to the disciples so that they could flesh out the complete revelation of God. J.I. Packer comments on this passage saying: “He had promised the twelve that the Spirit should come to teach them what in His own earthly ministry he had left unsaid, and He kept His promise; so that the apostolic teaching was in reality the complete and final version of His own.”

*There are no Red Letters.
There is only the Word of God.*

There is what the Father wants to be said as passed on to the Son as passed on through the Spirit as terminating in the Apostles. That’s why Jesus said in Matthew 10:40: “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.” There is a line and it stretches back from the Apostles to Jesus to the Father and you accept it all or you reject it all.

You don’t get to have a smaller Bible than Jesus.

Jesus believed that the Old Testament was the Word of God and Jesus believed that through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the words of the Apostles were the Word of God. And Scripture cannot be broken.

Jesus Believed that He was the Climax and Focus of all of Scripture

In John 5:39 Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39). Jesus believed that the entire Old Testament was preparing people for and pointing people towards his own life and ministry. Why do you think God had you killing pigeons and doves and goats and lambs – why do you think he was doing that? It was because he wanted you to understand that sin leads to death and he wanted to prepare you to recognize and worship me! Most of the Jews in Jesus’ day didn’t see that, but John the Baptist did. He saw Jesus and with the help of the Holy Spirit he said: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). John got it! He understood that the whole Old Testament sacrificial system was trying to say three things to a very stubborn people:

God is holy.
Sin is serious
People need a Savior.

John saw that. He saw the whole sacrificial system landing on Jesus Christ – he saw the whole Old Testament Scripture pointing people and driving people towards Jesus Christ.

It took a while for the disciples of Jesus to get to that same place. Even after the resurrection while walking on the Road to Emmaus, they still hadn't connected all the dots. Jesus obscured his appearance and came alongside them and gave them a Master's level course in Christian hermeneutics. Luke 24:27 says, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

He taught them how to read the Old Testament such that it lands climactically on the person and work of Christ. It was a labor and it was a miracle. Luke goes on to say: "Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'" (Luke 24:45–47)

Jesus taught the disciples how to read the Bible such that everything in the Old Testament leads to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ! That's how you read the Bible as a Christian! That's how Jesus read the Bible and that is the foundation of the church. The Apostle Paul said that we Christians, "are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:19–21). That is our foundation: The Prophets and the Apostles – with Christ as cornerstone!

¹Paul Carter is the host and Bible teacher on the *Into the Word* podcast.

²D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary.

STEP ONE . . .

OBSERVATION

What does the text say?

~ Matthew 5:17-48 ~

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

³¹“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³²But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

³³“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ ³⁴But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.

³⁸“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴²Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

1. Double underline **do not think** (v. 17).
2. Place a † over all the personal pronouns related to Jesus in this passage.
3. In the right margin of verse 18 write: *Jesus’ View of the OT*.
4. Circle the word **righteousness** in verse 17. In the left margin write, = *not mere outward obedience but heart-wholeness*.
5. Place brackets around each occurrence of the phrase, **You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you**.
6. In the left margin of verse 21 write: *Case Studies of Heart-Righteousness*.
7. Number each of the examples systemically 1-6.
8. Underneath the previous marginal note write: *Pattern: Torah Statement–True Intent–Practical Reality*.

Complementary Passage

~ Ezekiel 36:22-28 ~

²²“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ²⁸You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.”

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

What does the text mean?

The commentary is intended to enhance your own study of the text.

NOTE: Verses 17-20 is Jesus' thesis statement. These verses are the interpretive key to the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Understanding this section of the sermon is critical for understanding the sermon as a whole.

¹⁷⁻²⁰ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus lays down two categorical propositions. In the first (vss. 17-18) He says that everything He is going to teach is in absolute harmony with the entire teaching of the OT Scriptures. There is nothing in this teaching which in any way contradicts them. More explicitly, there is no difference between God's voice on Mount Sinai and Jesus' voice on this mountain. The second proposition (vss. 19-20) which He lays down in verses 19 and 20, is that this teaching of His which is in such harmony with the OT is in complete disharmony with, and an utter contradiction of, the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees.

For truly [Aramaic = *amen*] is Jesus' signature statement. It combines the ideas of truthfulness and solemnity. The statement to follow is of the utmost importance.

Verses 21-48 contains a series of six contrasts marked by the phrase, "You have heard that it's been said...but I say to you..." The most repeated phrase in this text. In each case Jesus quotes a statement of *torah*, reveals its true intent, and spells out its practical implication for the citizens of His kingdom (i.e. murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation and hatred). Jesus is the authoritative interpreter of Scripture.

What is distorted about the scribes and Pharisees' understanding **righteousness** is their adherence to the letter rather than the spirit of the Law.

These verses are a bit tricky, but not as tricky as you might think. The basic message is: "Don't be like the scribes and the Pharisees, be like God."

²¹⁻²⁶ "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of

fire.²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go.

First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny."

The first example comes from the sixth commandment (cf. Exodus 20:13). Jesus declares that there are fuller implications to the commandment. We should not be concerned about civil courts but God's knowledge of our hearts and His eternal judgment. Since when is not murdering someone the essence of righteousness? Jesus calls us not to harbor anger. He calls us to a greater righteousness. It's not an inconvenience to leave your gift at the altar and reconcile with your brother or sister. Reconciliation is our act of worship.

²⁷⁻³⁰ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

The second example comes from the seventh commandment (cf. Exodus 20:14). As in the first example the true intent goes deeper than the act of adultery. Sexual sin begins in the heart. Lust and adultery are not equal in degree but both are sinful. Jesus used hyperbole to make a point with color and clarity. Unchecked lust can lead to physical adultery. Thus, those whose hearts have been transformed by the gospel should be willing to make significant sacrifices in order to have a heart-posture of purity that is bent towards a greater righteousness.

³¹⁻³² "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' ³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Jesus cites Deuteronomy 24:1. The text spawned a debate between two rabbinical traditions in Jesus' day. The more liberal view prevailed so that in the culture of Jesus' day divorce was permissive, typically unjust and stacked against the woman. Sexual immorality [*porneia*]: adultery; perversion. The exception clause in verse 32 permits cases where the divorce is legitimate.

³³⁻³⁷ **“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ ³⁴ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.”**

The OT citation reflects Leviticus 19:12. The fact that we live in a world of lies indicates the need for oaths. Jesus is concerned about the practice of swearing by something other than God, creating a lower degree of accountability. Instead, the new community of Jesus speaks truth for we know that every word we utter is spoken in God's presence. Ultimately, we are to say no more or no less than what is needed.

³⁸⁻⁴² **“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with**

him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”

The law of retaliation which appears in several Old Testament texts (cf. Exodus 21:23-24; Leviticus 24:19-20) which prohibited personal revenge. Jesus further commands a willingness to be defrauded, going beyond what is required, and a spirit of generosity.

⁴³⁻⁴⁸ **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?”**

The commandment to love your neighbor is found in Leviticus 19:18. The command to hate one's enemy is nowhere in the Old Testament. Jesus asserts that only loving one's friends makes a person no better than a pagan. Jesus commands enemy-love.

⁴⁸ **“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”**

The word perfect refers to completeness or wholeness. Jesus refers to the heartfelt devotion of our lives to God. This does not mean that we are without sin but are completely dependent upon God for the provision made by Christ.

STEP THREE . . .

EXPLORING the passage through discussion

Read verses 17-20.

1. How does Jesus characterize His relationship with the Old Testament?
2. What does He mean by “abolish” and “fulfill?”
3. Why might His contemporaries have thought that He was trying to “abolish the Law and Prophets?”

4. What false impression is Jesus seeking to correct?

5. What did Jesus think about the nature of Holy Scripture?

6. How does this teaching reflect a commitment to the “divine inspiration” and the “trustworthiness” of the Bible?

7. What does this indicate about our seriousness regarding Holy Scripture?

Read Matthew 5:21-48. This section is a series of six case studies of scriptural interpretation in light of Jesus’ thesis in 5:17-20.

8. What does Jesus mean by “You have heard that it was said ...?”

9. What do you learn from His repetition of “. . . but I tell you ...?”

10. As a group, choose one or two cases studies to examine and answer the following questions:

What is the commandment or tradition under consideration?

How does Jesus reveal the true intent of the Law?

11. In what way is Jesus’ method of understanding Scripture different from the scribes and Pharisees and other religious leaders?

12. By examining these case studies, how is Jesus training us to think more like Him?

Sermon Notes: Matthew 5:17-48

Thinking Like Jesus: *About Righteousness*

Read the Bible: Reading Plan for 2020

Sunday, February 9 thru Saturday, February 15, 2020

Genesis 42, Mark 12, Job 8, Romans 12; Gen. 43, Mark 13, Job 9,
Rom. 13; Gen. 44, Mark 14, Job 10, Rom. 14; Gen. 45, Mark 15; Job
11, Rom. 15; Gen. 46, Mark 16, Job 12, Rom. 16; Gen. 47, Luke 1:1-
38, Job 13, 1 Corinthians 1; Gen. 48, Luke 1:39-80, Job 14, 1 Cor. 2

Memory Verse

~ Matthew 5:20 ~

For I tell you, unless your righteousness
exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.