

“What Did Jesus Believe About the Bible” (Matthew 5:17-18)

Introduction

“The question of biblical authority is ultimately a question of Christology. What you believe about Jesus will ultimately determine what you believe about the Bible.” (Russ Bush, Professor of Philosophy and Apologetics)

“The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God’s revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. *Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.*”

Transition

I want to try and answer the question, “What did Jesus believe about the Bible? What was the Savior’s view of Scripture?” After all, as Clark Pinnock put it so well early in his academic career, “Unreserved commitment to Jesus requires us to look at the Bible through his eyes.” (*God’s Inerrant Word*, 202). We shall call to the stand several statements made by our Lord. The key texts where Jesus speaks to the issue of biblical authority are: Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 24:25-27, 44-49; John 10:35; 17:17. In particular I want to give attention to Matthew 5:17-18. A careful examination of this text reveals 2 basic truths concerning Jesus’ view of the Bible.

I. Jesus believed all the Scriptures point to Him. 5:17

- In the greatest sermon ever preached, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus returns to the theme of the kingdom (3 times in 5:19-20)
 - These verses serve as the introduction to the “6 great antitheses” of 5:21-48. They also explain how it is that we can live out the beatitudes of 5:3-12 and be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (5:13-16).
- 1) 5:17 introduces us to the high view of Scripture held by Jesus. Though there is no questions He has the Old Testament Scriptures in view, what He affirmed about the Old Testament He also promised concerning the New Testament as well. In John 16:12-15 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.

- 2) Jesus introduced teachings that were new and striking. Indeed, as John 7:46 states, “No man ever spoke like this man.” Some may have concluded that His teaching constituted a decisive break with the Old Testament Scriptures. That is certainly the judgment of some Baptists today. Not so says Jesus. Do not think (or consider) that I came to destroy (annual abrogate, disintegrate, demolish.) J.A. Alexander notes the idea is that of “the destruction of a whole by the complete separation of its parts, as when a house is taken down by being taken to pieces.” Jesus says I did not come to tear apart or dismantle the law and prophets (a reference to the whole of Scriptures of His day). I did not come to destroy (repeated for emphasis) but to fulfill. Note that the antithesis is not between “abolish” and “keep” but between “abolish” and “fulfill.”

- 3) Jesus provides not only an emphatic denial but also a positive declaration for his coming – he came to fulfill, complete the Scriptures. To set them aside was never His agenda. To bring them to fulfillment and fruition was why He came. **(Slide 9)** Don Carson has it right when he says, “Jesus fulfills the entire Old Testament in many ways. Because they point toward him, he has certainly not come to abolish them. Rather, he has come to fulfill them in a rich diversity of ways ... Jesus does not conceive of his life and ministry in terms of *opposition* to the Old Testament, but in terms of *bringing to fruition* that toward which it points. Thus the law and the prophets, far from being abolished, find their valid continuity in terms of their outworking in Jesus. The detailed prescriptions of the Old Testament may well be superseded, because whatever is prophetic must be in some sense provisional. But whatever is prophetic likewise discovers its legitimate continuity in the happy arrival of that toward which it has pointed.” (Carson, *Sermon on the Mount*, 37).

John 5:39 – “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me.”

Luke 24:25-27 – “Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

Luke 24:44-45 – “Then He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.”

It’s All About Jesus

Jesus is the true and better *Adam* who passed the test in the wilderness and whose obedience is imputed to us.

Jesus is the true and better *Abel* who, though innocently slain, has blood now that cries out, not for our condemnation, but for acquittal.

Jesus is the better *Ark of Noah* who carries us safely through the wrath of God revealed from heaven and delivers us to a new earth.

Jesus is the true and better *Abraham* who answered the call of God to leave all the comfortable and familiar and go out into the world not knowing where he went to create a new people of God.

Jesus is the true and better *Isaac* who was not just offered up by his father on the mount but was truly sacrificed for us. And when God said to Abraham, “Now I know you love me because you did not withhold your son, your only son whom you love from me,” now we can look at God taking his son up the mountain and sacrificing him and say, “Now we know that you love us because you did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love from us.”

Jesus is the true and better *Jacob* who wrestled and took the blow of justice we deserved, so we, like Jacob, only receive the wounds of grace to wake us up and discipline us.

Jesus is the true and better *Joseph* who, at the right hand of the king, forgives those who betrayed and sold him and uses his new power to save them.

Jesus is the true and better *Moses* who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and who mediates a new covenant.

Jesus is the true and better *Rock of Moses* who, struck with the rod of God’s justice, now gives us water in the desert.

Jesus is the true and better *Joshua*, who leads us into a land of eternal rest and heavenly blessing.

Jesus is the better *Ark of the Covenant*, who topples and disarms the idols of this world, going Himself into enemy territory and making an open spectacle of them all.

Jesus is the true and better *Job*, the truly innocent sufferer, who then intercedes for and saves his stupid friends.

Jesus is the true and better *David* whose victory becomes his people’s victory, though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves.

Jesus is the true and better *Esther* who didn’t just risk leaving an earthly palace but lost the ultimate and heavenly one, who didn’t just risk his life, but gave his life to save his people.

Jesus is the true and better *Daniel*, having been lowered into a lion’s den of death, emerges early the next morning alive and vindicated by His God.

Jesus is the true and better *Jonah* who was cast out into the storm so that we could be brought in.

Jesus is the real Rock of Moses, the real Passover Lamb, innocent, perfect, helpless, slain so the angel of death will pass over us. He’s the true temple, the true prophet, the true priest, the true king, the true sacrifice, the true lamb, the true light, the true bread.

The Bible's really not about you — it's about Him.

Adapted from Tim Keller, "It's All About Jesus" (*Theology and Quotations*, Dec. 4, 2006)

Transition

Jesus believed all the Scriptures point to Him.

II. Jesus believed all the Scriptures were perfect in detail. 5:18

- Verse 17 affirms a promise – fulfillment understanding of Jesus' view of Scripture, not a promise – abolish paradigm.
- Verse 18 provides the Christological and theological rationale.
 - 1) Jesus introduces verse 18 with a note of personal authority that transcended all other rabbi's. "For truly" or "I tell you the truth" is the word *Amen*. It alerts us that the words that will follow are of paramount importance and authority.
 - 2) Until heaven and earth pass away means until the end of the age, as long as the present world order persists.
 - 3) Not an Iota, a reference to the *yod*, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, similar to our comma.
 - 4) Not a Dot, the smallest projection or part of a Hebrew letter, similar to that which distinguishes our "F" from an upside down "L."
 - 5) Will by no means (*ou me*) a double negative used for force. "No not."
 - 6) Shall pass away from the law 'til all is fulfilled
 - In the Lukan parallel we read, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail." (Luke 16:17) Jesus in the strongest possible language affirms the reliability and truthfulness of the Scriptures. He is not saying the Old Testament contains some truth or that it becomes truth when men and women have a significant encounter with it. As he affirms in John 10:35, "the Scripture cannot be broken." As it proclaims in prayer to the Father in John 17:17, "Your word is truth." The outstanding scholar H.C.G. Moule says it well, "[Jesus] absolutely trusted the Bible; and though there are in it things inexplicable and intricate that have puzzled me so much, I am going, not in a blind sense, but reverently, to trust the Book because of Him." (Pache, 223).

"However difficult the interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20 may be, or how disputed the exact nature of the "fulfillment," surely it is clear that when Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt 5:18), he assumes the truthfulness and reliability of the "the Law" (which in the context refers to all of Scriptures: cf. "the Law" and "the Prophets" in 5:17; 7:12) *as it is enshrined in Scripture*. (Don Carson, "Approaching the Bible," in *New Bible Commentary*, 1-19)

When we survey our Lord's teaching in the Gospels we discover that the judgments of these scholars is confirmed.

1. Jesus consistently treated the historical narratives of the Old Testament as straightforward records of fact. He referred to Abel (Luke 11:51), Noah (Matt. 24:37-39), Abraham (Jn 8:56), Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:15, 11:23-24), Lot (Luke 17:28-32), Isaac and Jacob (Matt. 8:11), the manna (Jn 6:31), the wilderness serpent (Jn 3:14), David (Matt. 22:43), Solomon (Matt. 6:29, 12:42), Elijah (Luke 4:25-26), Elisha (Luke 4:27), Jonah (Matt. 12:39-41) and Moses (Matt. 8:4), among others. No where is there the slightest hint that he questioned their historicity or the accuracy of the account.
2. It is interesting to note that Jesus often chose as the basis of his teaching those very stories that many modern skeptics find unacceptable (e.g., Adam and Eve, Noah's flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and Jonah).
3. For Jesus, Scripture was the final court of appeal in his disputes with the Pharisees and Sadducees. In their battle in the wilderness both Jesus and Satan accepted scriptural statements as arguments against which no further argument was possible (Matt. 4:1-11). Jesus might set aside or reject the Rabbinic or Pharisaical interpretation of the Old Testament, which He does in Matthew 5:21-48, but He never questioned its authority or truthfulness.

Conclusion

- 1) I had much of my initial theology formed and influenced by Clark Pinnock. Few lament his theological disintegration more than I. Earlier in his life as he reflected, in my judgment, more clearly on this matter of Jesus and the Bible, I believe he saw the issue with crystal clarity.

“Shall we follow Jesus in his view of Scripture? In the light of this evidence the question calls for another. How can a Christian even consider *not* doing so? Our Lord's view of inspiration was not an incidental tenet on the border of his theology. His belief in the truthfulness of the Old Testament was the rock on which he based his own sense of vocation and the validity of much of his teachings. The question about the inspiration of Scripture really boils down to the issue of Christology. It is impossible to affirm his authority while at the same time seeking to evade his teachings regarding the divine authority of the Bible. If Christ's claim to be the Son of God is true, his person guarantees the truth of all the rest of his teachings as well. **(Slide 26)** So long as Jesus Christ is confessed, honored, and adored, we may confidently expect a high view of Scripture to persist in the church. And in the light of a considerable defection from that view amongst professed Christians today we boldly appeal for a return to a proper view of the Bible on the basis of the massive fact of our Lord's doctrine of

inspiration. (The “early” Clark Pinnock, “The Inspiration of Scripture and the Authority of Jesus Christ,” in *God’s Inerrant Word*, 215)

- 2) In my early days at Southern Seminary in 1996, I had lunch with a former professor. Even though we held significantly different theologies, he was always very gracious and supportive of me and I enjoyed the time of fellowship with him. As we sat down to eat he looked at me and said, “I want to ask you a question and I mean no offense.” I told him he could ask me anything that he wanted and his question was simply this, “How did you turn out theologically the way that you are? I mean, why do you think theologically like you do?” I told him I was not offended by the question at all, but I did not think that my answer would be very satisfying. I then simply shared that when I was a little boy at about the age of eight, I trusted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I told him that as I had grown in the faith, I had come to understand that to be a Christian meant to live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and that His Lordship should permeate every area of our lives. That would include what I think about all matters of theology, including the Bible. I told him that as I had studied the view of Jesus concerning the Bible, I came to the conclusion that I could do nothing other than hold to its complete truthfulness and reliability. To be anything other than that would be to set aside the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That professor simply responded by saying, “I have never thought of it like that before, but it does make a lot of sense.”