



Part 29: Jesus and the Bible
Matthew 5:17-20

Jesus loved and lived the Bible as God's Word, and he teaches us to do the same.

I. The Bible in our cultural moment

We have moved increasingly into a culture that's suspicious of authority of all kinds, and this suspicion has seeped into the Church as well. Charles Taylor, Professor of Philosophy at McGill University in Quebec, is the world's leading expert on secularism and religion. In his book, *A Secular Age*, Taylor contends that in the last 500 years, the West has moved from a "culture of authority" to a "culture of authenticity."

"I mean the understanding of life, which emerges with Romantic Expressivism of the late 18th century that each one of us has his or her own way of realizing our humanity and that it's important to find out and live out one's own way as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside by society or the previous generation or religious or political authority." – Charles Taylor

"You do you."

The cultural air we breathe is seeking to form us to be suspicious of claims of authority especially those from a religious book like the Bible. There is a lot of evidence that this suspicion has made its way into the Western Church leaving many with doubts or questions about the Bible and its authority.

Our Scripture for today is vitally important for our cultural moment. Jesus tells us what he thinks about the Bible. If we are a disciple of Jesus, we should listen to Jesus above all other voices.

"The argument is simple yet profound: when it comes to the doctrine of Scripture, we cannot go wrong if we hold to the perspective of Jesus." – Justin Taylor

II. Jesus' relationship to the Bible (v.17-18)

A. Jesus is fully committed to the Bible.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them." Matthew 5:17

1. "Do not think..." Jesus is countering suspicion that he is loose with Scripture.
2. "Law and the prophets" were a common way of referring to the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament was Jesus' Bible).
3. "Abolish (katalyo)" means to dismantle or destroy a building or institution or to declare an authoritative text as no longer valid.
4. Jesus comes to "fulfill (pleroo)" the Scripture (Old Testament).
 - He doesn't say "obey" or "keep" as we might expect given the suspicion about him being loose with Biblical authority.
 - "Fulfill (pleroo)" = "to fill" = the Old Testament patterns and predictions are coming to realization in Jesus. Jesus is "filling full" what was promised and taught. Promises and prophecies are coming true in him.
 - He is revealing the original and deeper meaning of God's law (torah = instruction) (see Matt. 5:21-48).
 - Jesus is the final interpreter of God's Word (not the distortions of the religious leaders).
 - A staggering claim to make!

"The entire Old Testament is the expression of God's will, but it is to be obeyed and taught from the perspective of how Jesus 'fulfills' it through his interpretation of its intent and meaning." – Michael Wilkins

B. Jesus believes the Bible is God's Word

"I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth pass disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of the pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." Matthew 5:18

1. "I tell you the truth" = what I'm about to tell you carries the highest authority so pay the closest attention.
2. Jesus believes God's inspiration and authority extends to every letter and word. The words of Scripture are the Word of God.
3. The Scripture is binding until its purpose is accomplished in Jesus.

Note: Some elements of the Old Testament were accomplished in Jesus' ministry like the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sin and other aspects of the Jewish ceremonial law (Hebrews 9:11-15). Jesus and the Apostles tell us what has already been accomplished and what is still binding.

4. Jesus teaches us to have confidence in the inspiration and authority of the Bible in a culture of skepticism.

III. Our Relationship to the Bible (v.19)

“Anyone who breaks 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 practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:19

According to Jesus, there is a reciprocal relationship between the way we treat the Bible and our experience of the Kingdom of God.

Key Q = What does Jesus mean by “least in the kingdom of heaven”?

There are two schools of interpretation:

1. Minority view = these people are ultimately excluded from the kingdom because their faith was not revealed in the commitment to obey Jesus’ teaching (see Matt. 7:21-23).
2. Majority view = “Least” and “great” are ways to describe our commitment to obeying God’s Word and refer to different groups of disciples in the kingdom.

“...to be called great in the kingdom of heaven means to be high or low in God’s esteem, to be a more or less worthy representative of those who acknowledge him as king.” –R.T. France

See Isaiah 66:2b and 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

“This verse warns us, in any case, against the temptation to dismiss Scripture, to relativize it arbitrarily, to get out from under its difficult texts too easily, to evade obedience to it through sophistry or a ‘deeper’ theology. In short, our verse is a call to careful interpretation... ‘Do you want to be great?’ Jesus asks. ‘Then here is how: Live to do (and so) to teach Scripture.’” – Dale Bruner

Our commitment to know and live the Bible’s teachings, read through the lens of Jesus, will result in a life of transformation in which we come to know God intimately and become like Jesus. There is very little true knowledge of God or deep transformation apart from this commitment.

“Ultimately, you see, our trust in the Bible stems from our trust in Jesus Christ: the man who is God, the King of the world, the crucified, risen and exalted rescuer. I don’t trust in Jesus because I trust the Bible; I trust the Bible because I trust in Jesus. I love him, and I’ve decided to follow him, so if he talks and acts as if the Bible is trustworthy, authoritative, good, helpful, and powerful, I will too even if some of my questions remain unanswered, or my answers remain unpopular.” – Andrew Wilson, *Unbreakable*

IV. The Beautiful Kingdom

Many people have written of the influence of the Bible and Christianity in Western culture all pointing out that so much of what we take for granted in the West find their origin in the Bible ... human rights, respect for all people, women's rights, concepts of justice, respect for life etc.

We keep referring to God's Kingdom as the "beautiful Kingdom." Let me conclude with just two considerations of why this is true and attractive.

First, Jesus offers us the gift of knowing that which is good and true and leads to human flourishing. In a culture of skepticism, we can know that the way of Jesus is the way to human flourishing.

The way King Jesus mediates his wise and gracious authority is through His Word. Second, in a culture allergic to authority, we can know that our surrender to King Jesus is to surrender to a Servant not a tyrant.

Recommended Resources:

1. Unbreakable – What the Son of God said about the word of God by Andrew Wilson.
2. Taking God at His Word by Kevin DeYoung.
3. How to Read the Bible Book by Book by Gordon Fee & Doug Stewart.
4. Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind by Tremper Longman.
5. According to Plan – The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible by Graeme Goldsworthy.
6. How (Not) to Read the Bible by Dan Kimball.
7. www.bibleproject.com.
8. Strange New World – How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution by Carl Truman.

Discussion Questions:

1. What has been your view of the Bible? How did you acquire your view?
2. Do these Scriptures change your view of the Bible in any way?
3. What has been your practice of reading and studying the Bible?
4. What is your response to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:19?
5. Do you have any sense of what Jesus is inviting you to do in your relationship with the Bible?