



The Bible

Matthew 5:17-48

We believe in the unique divine inspiration, entire trustworthiness and authority of the Bible.

[Matthew 5:17-20](#) is a part of the “Sermon on the Mount,” perhaps the most profound and far-reaching sermon ever preached. In this wonderful teaching, Jesus describes the way of Christian discipleship, the kind of life that is consistent with the Kingdom of God. His introduction is a brief sketch of the inward character (5:1-12) and cultural influence (5:13-16) of his disciples. Then Jesus immediately turns to the place of the Law and Prophets, the Old Testament Scriptures, in the life of his disciples. The extent and depth of his teaching suggests something of its importance. Jesus says many other things about the Old Testament in the course of his ministry, but this statement is something of a thesis statement, a perspective-setting manifesto.

1. Read [Matthew 5:17-20](#) aloud. What false impression is Jesus seeking to correct? Why might his contemporaries have thought that he was trying to “abolish the Law and Prophets?”
2. Focus more closely on vv. 17-18. How does Jesus characterize his relationship with the Old Testament? What does he mean by “fulfill?”
 - Think through the meaning of his statement about “the smallest letter” and “the least stroke of a pen.” Jesus begins the statement in v. 18 by saying, “Truly I tell you...” What is the principle in these verses and why is it of such great significance?
 - What have you learned so far about Jesus’ basic belief on the nature of Holy Scripture? How does this teaching reflect a commitment to the “divine inspiration” and the “trustworthiness” of the Bible?
3. Now look at vv. 19-20. Verse 19 sets up a contrast between two different practices or approaches to Scripture. What are these two contrasting stances?
 - How have you been tempted to “set aside” the commands of Scripture? Have you seen situations where someone has effectively taught others to “set aside” a commandment?
 - Notice that both “practice” and “teaching” is mentioned. Why would Jesus emphasize both aspects? How might this help us understand v. 20? What does this suggest to you about the seriousness of our beliefs about Holy Scripture?
4. [Matthew 5:21-48](#) is a series of six case studies of scriptural interpretation in light of the basic perspectives set in 5:17-20. Read vv. 21-48 silently, looking for the repetitions in each of the case studies.

- What does Jesus mean by “*You have heard that it was said . . . ?*” Does he refer to the text of the Old Testament with these words? What evidence in the passage gives you the best basis for answering this question?
 - What do you learn from the repetition of “. . . *but I tell you that . . . ?*”
5. Focus on the first (vv. 21-26) and last (vv. 43-48) of these interpretive case studies. Consider digging into the other four case studies on your own.
- What is the commandment under consideration in vv. 21-26? What does Jesus say is spiritually and morally equivalent to murder? What is the difference between being “angry” toward a brother or sister and saying “*Raca*” (meaning, “*you are stupid*” or “*you fool*”)?
 - What do the two examples in vv. 23-26 add to the teaching of Jesus?
6. What commandment is under consideration in vv. 43-48? Can you find the command, “*hate your enemy*,” anywhere in the Old Testament? What light does that shed on the meaning of “*You have heard it said . . . ?*” Who would his contemporaries have viewed as enemies? What does Jesus call for in our relationship to enemies?
- Who do you think of as an enemy? How can you move toward these adversaries in obedience to the command to love your neighbor, even your enemies?
 - What do you learn from this case study about Jesus’ approach to the commands of Scripture? In what way is his method different from that of the religious leaders?

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- When you are faced with a temptation to compromise morally, how might a firm commitment to the authority of Scripture help you in this crisis?
- How should a high view of Scripture guide your planning for the life of your campus fellowship? Think, for example, about your large group gatherings. Do they include teaching that faithfully comes from the Bible? Do they “set aside” some of the more challenging teaching from Scripture? Do they include searching, inwardly challenging applications of Scripture to the situations of your fellowship and its members? Ask the same questions about your small group gatherings.
- As the leaders of the fellowship and sponsors of those gatherings, remember Jesus’ words about who is “least” or “greatest” in the Kingdom. How might this be a warning and encouragement for leaders?

GOING DEEPER

Jesus not only taught obedience to the Scriptures, he put them into practice. Look at these poignant stories of costly obedience in the temptation of Jesus ([Matthew 4:1-11](#)) and in his final crisis at the cross ([Matthew 26:47-56](#)). Discover other important teachings on the inspiration and authority of the Bible in these passages: [2 Peter 1:16-21](#), [2 Timothy 3:14-17](#), [Isaiah 55:9-11](#), [Psalm 119:9-16](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

John Wenham, [*Christ and the Bible*](#) (Baker, 1984). Wenham provides an unsurpassed grounding for a high view of Biblical authority. He surveys the four Gospels to discover Jesus' teaching and view of the Old Testament and how that bears on the meaning and authority of the apostles.

J. I. Packer, [*God Has Spoken*](#) (Hodder and Stoughton, 2005). This is a classic exposition of a high view of Scripture that is thorough, thoughtful and compelling. Packer argues for the view expressed in the IVCF Doctrinal Basis thoroughly, thoughtfully, compellingly.

Telford Work, [*Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation*](#) (Eerdmans, 2002). Telford Work is a younger evangelical theologian who offers a fresh, faithful and high view of Scripture with an eye on the challenges of our post-Christian and post-modern age.