



“How Jesus Viewed the Scriptures”

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It may seem like a strange question to ask but it's actually a very important one: how did Jesus view the scriptures? Jesus had a Bible to read, to live by, and to preach from. He referred to it and quoted it often. The Old Testament was the basis of proving that He was the Anointed One, the Christ, the Messiah sent to Israel and the world. He told the Jewish people of His time:

John 5:37-39 “And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”

So, they had the scriptures and the scriptures pointed forward to Jesus. God first revealed Himself to mankind through the witnesses of creation and conscience, and He individually spoke to the patriarchs. But unto the Jews, with whom He made a covenant, He revealed Himself through a special revelation: He spoke to them through His prophets and they wrote down what God said. That became the Old Testament scriptures which were fully in existence when Jesus came to earth. In fact, there was already a Koine Greek translation of the Old Testament scriptures called *The Septuagint*. It was widely used in Jesus' and the apostles' day because by then most Jews could no longer read the Hebrew scriptures. So, in effect, they had a Bible. How Jesus viewed and used that Bible should teach us a great deal about how we should view and interpret the Bible we have today.

The attitude of religious people toward the Bible is quite varied. Some see it as the verbally inspired, infallible word of God while others believe it is the writings of men who were merely influenced by the Holy Spirit in a general or vague way. Still others believe it is an antiquated book written by primitive men who were simply interpreting their times and the world as it existed then. But the Old Testament scriptures were in existence during Jesus' earthly life. He acknowledged them and referred to them often. He lived by them. Studying how Jesus viewed the scriptures will help us to see how we should view the scriptures and that's important because today, many—even in churches of Christ—are espousing a new hermeneutic; that is, a new way of interpreting and applying scripture.

For example, they say that we should see the Bible as more of a general love letter from God. Some go so far as to suggest that we should see it as addressing issues that arose in Bible times distinct to those

churches in existence at that time, but that they're really not a pattern and they don't have a great deal of bearing on how the church conducts itself today. Some say the Bible does not provide any pattern for the worship and work of Christians in this time and should not be upheld as such. They say the only things expected of Christians today are those things that are very plainly and explicitly demanded. Do we need Bible authority for what we practice in the church? That's really the question before us. Were the scriptures given to us and intended in such a way that we should expect Bible authority for what we practice in religion? The advocate of a new hermeneutic says no, we shouldn't look to the Bible as a pattern and we don't need precepts, examples, or necessary inferences for what we practice or believe. Some would tell us it's just a matter of studying the life of Jesus and seeking to apply the principles that He lived by and do as we feel He would do, but we shouldn't really concern ourselves with strictly following scripture. Is that how Jesus looked at the Bible when He was on earth? Was that His attitude toward Moses and the statements of Moses? Is that how He applied scripture to others? Let's examine the Savior's view of sacred scripture.

First, I want to emphasize that Jesus respected the scriptures as the word of God and not that of men. The Lord often cited the words of prophets such as Moses and Isaiah and attributed their words to God Himself. When Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for elevating their own traditions over the law, He cited the things that Moses said, calling them the words and commandments of God.

Mark 7:8-9 "For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition."

Now, what commandment were they rejecting?

Mark 7:10-13 "For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye."

What word of God were they making *of none effect*? What Moses said: *to honor father and mother*.

Jesus identified the source of the law as coming from God and delivered through Moses. That's the way inspiration works.

II Timothy 3:16 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"

Contextually, Paul here is referring to the Old Testament scriptures because that's what they had written down at that time. The word *inspiration* is the translation of a Greek word meaning *breath*. To put it simply, just like when you or I speak, it is literally the breath coming out of our mouths. Paul says that all scripture is the breath of God. All scripture is what God has spoken. But God used men as His mouthpiece to relay the message given to them.

II Peter 1:21 "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

That means they were guided and superintended by the Holy Spirit when they spoke and wrote so that the word of God was perfectly and accurately conveyed. It's not the word of men, but the word of God, even though men wrote it down. They did so by inspiration of the Spirit. Later, Paul would say this of himself and the other apostles of Christ:

II Corinthians 4:6-7 "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

So, the treasure is the gospel, and it came from God into the hearts of the apostles. Paul said God put that treasure in *earthen vessels* to declare it to the world. Paul could affirm that God was speaking through them because the message they were preaching was given to them specifically and entirely by inspiration of the Spirit of God. Thus, he said the things that he wrote and commanded were the commandments of God (**I Corinthians 14:37**).

That's how Jesus viewed the scripture, too. He said that what Moses commanded was the commandment of the Lord. You see, He believed in the verbal and plenary inspiration of the scriptures. But some allege that the Bible cannot be taken as a historically accurate book because it was written by men, and that the stories told in the Old Testament were myths and legends passed down for generations and they changed as they were passed down; that they were the Bible writer's way of understanding the past and the world around them. But that's not how Jesus saw those accounts. For example, Jesus accepted the historicity of the flood in Noah's time (**Matthew 24:37-39**). He spoke of Jonah spending three days and nights in the belly of that great fish in **Matthew 12:39-41**, comparing it to His own entombment after His crucifixion and His resurrection on the third day after. Jesus gave every indication that such were true events. He affirmed the inspiration and the historicity of such accounts and so should we because God revealed them.

Jesus also respected the literal and specific accuracy of the scripture. What do we mean by that? Listen to Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:17-18 "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

Now did Jesus look at the law as just some sort of vague message from heaven that was just to be generally followed in principle, but people weren't to concern themselves with literally and specifically following it? He said that not *one jot or one tittle* would pass away until it was fulfilled. A *jot* was the tiniest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. A *tittle* was but the tiny stroke that distinguished one Hebrew letter from another. Now Jesus didn't say that what we need to do is try to see the big picture, glean the big principles, and stop straining at the details. Jesus acknowledged that every word of the law was important and binding. Jesus one time said that they were overlooking the big principles of the law and they were looking at the more tedious things of the law to the neglect of the big principles, but He didn't say for them to ignore specific commandments of the law in order to embrace the big principles; He said for them to do both. He said they ought to have followed the law as well as accepted its principles, and that if they did live by its principles, they would follow what it says.

Jesus made one of His most powerful arguments against the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection. He made His argument by pointing to the tense of a single verb; a verb that were you not paying close and careful attention, you might miss the point altogether.

Matthew 22:31-32 "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

Not *I was*, but *I am*. If God IS the God of the living and at the same time, He IS the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who have physically died, that means those men are at least in some sense not dead. Jesus uses the statement recorded by Moses to affirm the truth of the future resurrection when those men will be reunited with their glorified bodies. That's a very foundational truth to scripture and to the gospel. In this case, Jesus used the tense of a verb to make that argument.

Many people today would be critical of Jesus for straining at a word within the Bible, but Jesus taught a major doctrine hinging on that one verb in that single verse. Words matter, you see. God's words certainly matter. Every single word of God matters. When Jesus was tempted by the devil, He said, "**It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God**" (**Matthew 4:4**). I've seen people get very frustrated by Bible discussions and debate because they

think it's too technical, too picky, straining at words and phrases. Friends, there is no such thing as an insignificant word or phrase in the word of God. We can't play fast and loose with the Bible. Every word is there for a reason. That's why we need to be careful, for example, with which Bible translations we rely upon. Not all are as good as others. We must be conscientiously careful as we examine the word of God.

Someone says, *that's what the Pharisees did*. No, the Pharisees strained at the word of God to find a loophole or a way around God's commandments--not to determine the will of God. Jesus said that we live by every word that God has spoken.

But that's not all we learn about Jesus' attitude when He dealt with the devil in the wilderness. He affirmed the authority of the scriptures. He said three times, ***It is written...It is written...It is written***. He refused to compromise with the devil's temptations. He refused to compromise what was written in scripture for His own comfort, His own convenience, or His own self-serving purposes. He was intent on doing the will of God, which is doing that which is written. I want to stress that: doing the will of God is doing that which is written. If it's not written, it is not the will of God. Let that sink in. Not *I think, it seems, or I feel...* but what is written. Is that your attitude towards scripture? I meet a lot of people who can't give Bible for their belief or practice, but they think or it seems or they feel as though...Not Jesus. He said, ***It is written***.

He also showed there is a necessity of harmony in interpreting the Bible. In **Matthew 4:6-7**, Satan quoted scripture. He'll do that, you know. Satan uses scripture. He twists it, he perverts it, he rips it from context, he uses it for his own purposes and not to relay God's will. He quoted scripture to Jesus, out of context to bolster his cause. When he told Jesus to jump off the pinnacle of the temple, he said this:

Matthew 4:6 "..."If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."

Jesus showed that the scripture that the devil was citing had nothing to do with Jesus jumping off the temple:

Matthew 4:7 "Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

Jesus wasn't saying that one scripture made the other untrue; He was saying that the other scripture was being misused because such an interpretation as the devil was trying to make of it contradicted another scripture. This is an important rule of Bible interpretation, friend: the Bible doesn't contradict the Bible. We have to take ALL of the scripture and not just part of it. If you have to ignore, dismiss, or even deny some Bible statement or commandment in order to uphold your doctrine, then your doctrine is not correct.

For example, if you ignore that Jesus said, "**He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved**" (**Mark 16:16**) because Paul said, "**For by grace are ye saved through faith**" (**Ephesians 2:8**), if you're pitting one verse against the other saying that one negates the other, the fact is you don't understand faith, grace, or baptism. Jesus believed in rightly dividing the word of God, and that is something we must do as well. Jesus also believed that scripture is intended to teach man how to worship and live.

Matthew 4:10 "Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

Mark 7:7 "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

It would've been right if they were teaching people to worship according to the will of God, but that's not what they were doing. They were replacing God's way with their own way, the traditions of their fathers. Setting aside the law of God, which consequently multitudes of people seem to be doing today by saying, *God doesn't care how we worship. One way will do just as well as another...* and so on and so forth. That wasn't Jesus's attitude toward the scriptures. Jesus saw the scripture as a divinely revealed rule and pattern for God's people to follow. He upheld Moses the lawgiver as being the authority in the

worship and life of the Jewish nation before the new covenant was ratified and the church was established. He taught that in the age to come, His will was to be followed in our worship and service as well. He told the Samaritan woman at the well, **“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (John 4:23).**

Jesus even believed that divine truth was conveyed by example and implication. He upheld His own life as an example to follow. He set examples in worship. For example, when He established His supper as a memorial to His death, He selected three simple elements: a loaf of bread, a cup, and fruit of the vine. He shared that loaf and that cup with the disciples who had gathered with Him and He said, **“This do in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19).** You see, He set a pattern. He set an example. He didn’t say, *Remember me in some way or Here’s one way you can remember me.* He commanded them, saying ***This do.*** What? What He had just done. He set an example and told them to follow it.

Some say that Bible examples are not binding but that’s not how Jesus viewed them. He even showed us that divine truth is often implied within scripture. That is, scripture leads us to a logical and sound conclusion which is to be accepted and believed as truth. Again, in that conversation with the Sadducees concerning the resurrection in **Matthew 22**, Jesus uses necessary inference to teach them one of the most pivotal doctrines of sacred scripture. He didn’t point to a scripture that said, *there shall be a resurrection.* He pointed to one that said that God is the God of the living and not the dead and that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; therefore, it must be necessarily inferred that there is life after death. That is necessary inference and Jesus used it. He acknowledged it. Some today would say that you can ignore such teaching because He didn’t just come out and say that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are alive. No, He didn’t say that, but He necessarily implied it. And God necessarily implied it when He originally made the statement through Moses in **Exodus 3:6.**

Friends, Jesus believed that every word of scripture is important. That every word proceeded from the mouth of God. That the scriptures furnish God’s people with rules by which to live and a pattern by which to serve Him. Do you have the same attitude towards the Bible that Jesus had, or do you loosely approach the scriptures? Do you see the Bible as just a vague revelation that has no authority in the lives of the church? Do you believe that Bible authority is unnecessary for your practices and traditions in worship and that it’s being too picky to try to worship as the apostles taught the early church to worship and to preach exactly what they preached? Then friend, you don’t share Jesus’s view of scripture. He respected and obeyed scripture. He exalted scripture as the authority for belief and practice and may we have the same love, respect, and high view of God’s holy and precious word.

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