

The Sermon on the Mount
What Your View of Scripture Says About You (Part 4)
Matthew 5:17-20

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Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher

Countryside Bible Church

www.countrysidebible.org

I was reminded this past week that we as Americans spend millions, literally billions of dollars every year to maintain our physical health. We all want to be physically healthy and we all want to know if, in fact, we are. Unfortunately many of the tests that would tell us that—that would give us some measure of assurance that we are in fact healthy at this moment—are extremely intrusive, and are highly expensive. But I read recently that doctors are working on a new kind of test—on a simple diagnostic tool that will provide a window into your overall health. And it may be as simple as testing your saliva. As it turns out your mouth may provide the most accurate diagnosis of your physical health. Researchers at M D Anderson have been able to identify certain kinds of cancers from a simple mouth swab. Scientists at UT Austin believe that they are now able to predict future heart attacks by simply studying your saliva. Eventually, your mouth may be the window into your overall physical wellbeing. And, let's face it, if that happens, won't it be great? I mean, I don't think any of us are going to miss colonoscopies.

But did you know that there is already a simple diagnostic tool to discern your spiritual condition and health? One simple tool that will give you a window into your spiritual condition. Jesus explains exactly what that diagnostic tool is, in the paragraph that we're studying in the Sermon on the Mount. I invite you to take your Bible and turn with me to Matthew 5. For those of you who are visiting with us, you find us many weeks, now, into our study of Jesus' most famous sermon—the Sermon on the Mount, and if you didn't have the opportunity, maybe you want to catch up with us. You can go online and do that.

But this morning, we're looking at a paragraph that begins in 5:17, and runs down through verse 20. Let me read it for us to again set the context for our study this morning. Matthew 5:17 Jesus says to us:

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then, annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to

you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven”

Essentially, we have reduced the teaching of this paragraph to a simple statement. It's this. A true subject of Jesus' spiritual kingdom will always have a right relationship to the scripture. Or we could put it differently. You can always identify a true Christian by how he responds to the scripture. In this paragraph Jesus identifies three responses to scripture that should characterize every believer.

We've already studied two of them. Let me just briefly remind you. First of all, we learn in this text that we must understand Jesus' relationship to the scripture. That's in verse 17. There was potential misunderstanding. At that point, all the scripture they had, of course, was the Old Testament. Jesus refers to the Old Testament here as the Law and the Prophets. That was shorthand in the first century for the content that makes up the 39 books of our Old Testament. It was constructed a little differently, but it was the same content as our 39 books of the Old Testament. Jesus says of those, that He did not come to abolish it. Jesus says, I don't want you to believe the common misperception that I have come to (literally the word is to *demolish*) to tear down with My life or with My teaching, the authority of the Old Testament scripture. In fact, He goes on in verse 17 to say, I came to fulfill the Old Testament. We talked about, at length, what that means. How does He fulfill it? Just to remind you, there are three ways Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. First of all, He fulfills it by bringing out its complete meaning. We're going to see this in the rest of Matthew 5. Jesus picks six passages from the Old Testament that had been abused and misunderstood and He correctly explains them. Jesus brings out the true meaning of scripture in His teaching. Secondly He fulfills it by perfectly obeying it in His life. Jesus did everything God commanded. He perfectly loved God every moment of His life, and He perfectly loved His neighbor as Himself, with out one even small violation of God's requirements. That's why He could die in our place, because He kept the law that you and I haven't. The third way He fulfilled the Old Testament was by bringing its message, which pointed to Him, to fruition in His own person. We could put it like this. Jesus explained the Old Testament in His teaching. Jesus obeyed the Old Testament in His life. And Jesus embodied the Old Testament in His own person. He was that to which it all pointed. He fulfilled it.

Now, last week we looked at the second response we should have to scripture. Not only must we understand Jesus' relationship to the scripture. He is the fulfillment of it in every sense. But we also need to believe Jesus' own view of the scripture. If we're going to be His disciples (when a disciple is fully trained he'll be like his teacher, right?) Jesus said that. That means we need to believe about the scripture what Jesus believed about the scripture. And He makes that transparently clear to us in verse 18. In one monumental verse, Jesus explains His high view of scripture. Look at it again, verse 18. “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter shall pass from the law until all is accomplished.”

Here in this incredible statement Jesus tells us what He believes about scripture. Again, at the time, it was the Old Testament. Jesus affirmed what we call the Old Testament in this statement. And as I've already mentioned to you, He pre-authenticated the New Testament by choosing the men who would write it, or under whose auspices it would be written. But here, He's talking about the Old Testament which was all that had been written at the time.

Notice what He says about scripture. Jesus believed in its permanent authority. Until heaven and earth pass away. That's a proverbial way of saying: never. Not going to happen, it's never going to happen. It's permanent in its authority. Secondly He believed in its verbal inspiration. The word inspiration means *God breathed*. That's how we use it. That's how its used in 2 Timothy 3:16. God breathed out the scripture. Just as the words I'm saying right now are the product of my breath, the words of scripture are the product of the breath of God. God spoke them out just as truly as if He opened His mouth and through the product of breath passing across His vocal cords from His lungs. If, in fact, God weren't Spirit, that's how it would be. They are as much the product of His mind as the words I'm speaking now are the product of mine. And notice He says, not only the words but even the smallest letters, the smallest Hebrew letter, *yod*. There're 66,000 of them in the Old Testament. And He says not one of those is going to pass away, or the smallest stroke. That's the distinguishing stroke on a letter that distinguishes one Hebrew letter from another. It's like, in English, the difference between a capital O and a capital Q, that little stroke that distinguishes them. That's what He's talking about. Not one of those, Jesus says, is going to fail.

He also believed in its plenary inspiration. That is, all of it. Notice the end of the verse says "until all is accomplished" Not only every little part, but the entirety, the whole. He believed in its complete inerrancy. It's completely without error in everything it speaks to. He says down to the letter and the stroke, it's all going to be done. It's all true. You can put your confidence in it. Obviously He didn't mean that it's perfectly transmitted in the copying process, error free, but in the originals it was error free. But that brings us to the final point he makes here, and that's its careful preservation. Because Jesus didn't have, in the first century, the original autographs. That is, the pieces of parchment on which Moses wrote, or on which the prophets wrote. He had copies, and yet He consistently called those copies the scripture, and He told people to put their confidence in them. He was implying that it had been carefully preserved, that God had carefully preserved His word. Again, not without error in those copies. We have to compare them and put them together. But remarkably preserved for any ancient document. We talked about that last time.

Now, today we come to verses 19 and 20 and to the third response toward the scripture that characterizes all true believers. It is that they accept Jesus' diagnosis with the scripture. In other words, they accept the diagnosis that Jesus makes by using simply the scripture. Now, I want you to know, first of all, that Jesus specifically connects verses 19 and 20 with His statements

about the scripture in verses 17 and 18. Notice the second word in verse 19: *then*. What Jesus says in verses 19 and 20 is the practical implication of what He had said about the scripture in verses 17 and 18. In fact, the word that's used here is the Greek word that in the epistles is often translated *therefore*. You see that word a lot in the epistles. It's when Paul wants to say, here are the practical implications of what I've just taught you. That's what Jesus is saying here. Let me give you the practical implications of what I've just taught you, Jesus says. In light of the fact that I did not come to abolish the Old Testament but to fulfill it, and that I affirm the eternal authority of the scripture, *therefore*: verse 19. "Whoever annuls one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven". The point that Jesus makes in verses 19 and 20 is that your relationship to the scripture reveals your true spiritual condition. Let me say that again, and listen carefully. Jesus maintains in verses 19 and 20 that your relationship and response to the scripture is a perfect spiritual diagnostic tool to discern your true spiritual health. In fact, verse 20, we'll learn next week that it even tells us whether or not we are Christians at all—whether we are part of His kingdom.

Now, in these two verses, Jesus diagnoses the spiritual condition of three different categories of people. And the sole diagnostic tool He uses is their relationship to the word of God. Now remember, as we work our way through these verses, that all three categories of people claim to have relationship with the true God. That's really important for you to understand. They all claim to have a relationship with the true God. But in each case their response to the scripture shows their true spiritual condition. Now look at the three categories. Verse 19--the first part of verse 19--we meet the first category. Notice, they are people who are in the kingdom, or will be in the kingdom, but are called least. The second half of verse 19 we meet another category of people—those who are in or will be in the kingdom and will be called the greatest. And then in verse 20 we meet the third category, those who will not enter the kingdom at all. You see those three categories? In the kingdom but least, in the kingdom and great, and not in the kingdom at all. And Jesus diagnoses that based solely on their relationship to the word of God.

Now, in preparation for communion this morning, I just want us to look at verse 19 and the first two categories of people that Jesus describes and diagnoses here. The first category, let's call the dishonorable disciple. Here is a man or a woman who is in the kingdom but not worthy of Jesus' honor. Look at the first half of verse 19. "whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven."

Now, I've already pointed this out, but just look again at this person's spiritual status. They are in the kingdom of heaven. In fact, notice the exact wording. This person shall be, or will be in the kingdom. Now, that's an important shift in Jesus' message in this sermon. So far, in this sermon Jesus has spoken of His kingdom, His realm, the place He rules, as a spiritual kingdom to which people belong right now. If you're a Christian today, you are in Jesus' spiritual kingdom.

You are under His spiritual rule. He is the Lord of your heart and life. Go back to Matthew 5:3. You remember how the beatitudes began? Blessed is the person who is a beggar in spirit for theirs (what?) is the kingdom of heaven. It belongs to them right now. They're in the kingdom. The last beatitude comes back to that in verse 10. "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It belongs to them right now. He frames the beatitudes with those statements. In other words, those qualities that we call the beatitudes are in fact descriptions of those people who are already in Jesus' spiritual kingdom, who are real Christians, we could say, who really belong to Jesus. And so, we've gone through those qualities, we won't do that again. But that's the current spiritual reality of His kingdom.

But in verses 19 and 20, Jesus changes tenses on us. Notice again verse 19. He uses it twice. This person shall be, *shall be* called least in the kingdom. Shall be called great in the kingdom. And then in verse 20, this person will not enter the kingdom. Notice all of those point to the future. In these two verses Jesus is referring not to the present aspect of the kingdom, that spiritual kingdom over which He rules which all true Christians are a part of, but rather the future aspect of His kingdom, when He literally, physically reigns on this planet. So, He's looking to the future. When Jesus establishes His future kingdom, this person will be in the kingdom. Now, you understand that to get into the future kingdom, you have to be a part of Jesus spiritual kingdom today, so both are true. But Jesus is looking to the future. Clearly, then, the person Jesus is describing in the first half of verse 19 is a true Christian. That's very important for you to remember. This is a true Christian.

But notice what distinguishes this category of Christian is his treatment of the scripture. Notice how he treats it. He feels free to annul one of the least of these commandments, and he teaches others to do the same. Jesus describes his treatment of scripture, (this category of Christian) in two ways. First of all, he annuls even one of the least of these commandments. What does that mean? Well the Greek word *annul* literally was used to loose something or untie something. If you had an animal, you tied it to a hitching post or whatever. And you came up and you loosed it. You untied it. It means to undo something that is used to tie up an animal. That's how it was used literally. It came to be used figuratively to mean to loose in the sense of have a document no longer have authority in your life. Or to loose yourself from one of the commands. That's what Jesus is saying. It's like, you untie yourself from the responsibility to obey something in scripture, including even one of the least of the commandments. This person, this Christian, this kind of Christian *annuls*, or does away with, or unties himself from, the responsibility toward one of the least of these commandments.

Now what is Jesus talking about? In context, He has to mean the least significant Old Testament command. It's essentially equivalent to the smallest letter and the smallest stroke of verse 18. So the Christian in the first half of verse 19, then, is one who minimizes or downplays any portion of scripture, even the portion that is least significant. You say, wait a minute—hold that

thought! Are there insignificant parts of scripture? Yes there are. First of all, the rabbis certainly believed so. In fact, the rabbis had taken the Law, now we're talking about the first five books of the Old Testament, the writings of Moses. They had taken the Law, and they had broken it down into 613 commands. 248 they said were positive. 365 were negative. One for every day of the year. And they engaged in endless debate over which of those 613 commands were the heaviest and which were the lightest. You may or may not be interested to know that many of the rabbis considered Deuteronomy 22:6 the lightest commandment in all the Old Testament. I know you're curious, what is it, right? Listen to this Deuteronomy 22:6 "if you happen to come upon a bird's nest along the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young;" That's the lightest, they said. They believed the heaviest was Deuteronomy 6:5. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your strength and with all your might." Jesus affirmed that to be true. Jesus himself regarded the Laws of the Old Testament to be different in weight. Did you know that? Look at Matthew 23. When He was giving His woes on the spiritual leaders of Israel, He said this to them in Matthew 23:23. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe (*your garden herbs*) mint and dill and cumin, (*and at the same time*) you've neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness." In other words, Jesus was saying, it's true. There are some commandments that are lighter and some that are heavier. But notice what He says at the end of verse 23. "but these things you should have done without neglecting the others."

In other words, Jesus is saying, listen, if God commands it, whether it's a heavy command or whether it's a light command, you should do it. You should take it seriously. So what Jesus is saying to us in Matthew 5 and in Matthew 23 is that every command, even the insignificant, is important and must be kept. Now, if you're a thinking Christian, and I hope you are—I hope you're thinking along with me, you have a question. And that question is, every Old Testament command? Let me give you an important caveat. Jesus is not saying that today a New Testament believer must keep every Old Testament command without exception. For example. All of the men here who have become believers in the true God—we don't go to Jerusalem three times a year for those required annual feasts for all of those who are connected to the worship of the true God in the Old Testament. At least I assume you don't. I don't. Jesus doesn't mean every command without exception. So what does He mean? Listen carefully. This is crucial. Jesus means that we cannot disregard the least significant portion of scripture (here's the caveat) without having been authorized to do so either by Christ or by His apostles. There are portions of the Old Testament that Christ and His apostles told us we do not have to keep. We don't have to keep those. But we cannot on our own authority just decide what we're going to keep and not keep.

Now, I need to step back here and take an aside, because I know you have questions. I need to explain something. There is a long-standing tradition of distinguishing between three parts of

the Old Testament. The Old Testament Law, particularly the Mosaic Law, is usually divided into three parts. The moral law, the civil law, and the ceremonial law. The moral law being those eternal timeless principles that are always part of what is required of those who believe in the true God. It's never, and will never be acceptable to have other Gods before the true God. It will never be acceptable to take His name in vain. Now, in the past, or in the future, and into eternity, and so forth. There are timeless moral truths in the Old Testament Law that are binding on all men everywhere in every time. Secondly there are civil laws in the Old Testament Law. That is, laws that were for the functioning of the nation of Israel. There were specific judgments that were to be rendered, death penalties in certain cases. Those are civil laws for the functioning of the nation. And then finally, there were ceremonial laws. That's the third category. Laws that were a part of the system, the picture of Christ who was coming, the feasts and the festivals and the Old Testament sacrifices and so forth. Although it's impossible to distinguish in every case between those three categories. Do not ask me to go back and tell you every verse; this falls into this category and this falls into this category. That's impossible. At the same time, it is clear that categories like those do exist. Because when you come to the New Testament, the New Testament clearly maintains the permanence of the moral law while at the same time transferring the civil law to secular government, and setting aside completely the ceremonial law.

Let me briefly show you that so you are not just taking my word for it. Through the commands of Christ and His apostles, we know that we must no longer obey the ceremonial laws of the old Testament. There are number of texts; let me just call a couple to your mind. In Mark 7:19, Jesus makes this statement, in which He says it's not what goes into a man (it's not the food a man eats) that contaminates him, that makes him unclean before God. Instead, it's what comes out of his heart. That's where our sin comes from. Our sin doesn't come from our environment and our circumstances. It's an expression of who we are. That's what Jesus was saying. That's why we have to be changed at the heart level. But then He makes this statement. Mark writes this. Remember Mark was writing with Peter, and Mark says, in Mark 7:19 "Jesus, by saying this declared all foods clean." All those dietary laws--when Jesus made that statement, they went away. So you and I don't have to keep them.

And by the way, can I, just as an aside say, brothers and sisters, don't get sucked into the *Christian diet*. Oh you know, you'd be so much healthier if you'd just live like the Jews did in the Old Testament. Don't eat the stuff they didn't eat, and--listen, what do you need to know? Jesus declared all foods clean in Acts 10. You remember the picture of the acceptance of the Gentiles was with the unclean animals. Three times God gave Peter a vision in which he saw these unclean animals, and God said arise, kill and eat. And he said I can't. Those are unclean. I've never done anything like that. And God said, don't call what I have cleansed unclean. In fact, (I know I've stopped preaching and gone to meddling here) you go to I Timothy, and guess what those who prohibit certain foods are called? "those participating with the doctrines of

demons.” Listen, if God has rendered everything clean, it’s clean. You can eat it. So don’t buy all that stuff. Alright, that’s an aside.

Look at Colossians 2. Still talking about this ceremonial law. The food laws are gone. We don’t keep those. Colossians 2, all of that system of festivals and feasts—those are gone too. Look at Colossians 2:13. When Jesus died, He forgave us all of our transgressions. That’s a legal word. All of our violations of the Law. How did He do that, verse 14. “He cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us,” Listen, you and I owed God obedience but we didn’t give it to Him. So we accumulated debt; debt we could never pay. When Jesus died, God took our violation of all that we should have done, the whole document that showed our debt, and He nailed it to Jesus’ cross. And He paid it in full. That’s what He goes on to say, verse 14.

. . .having nailed it to the cross. . . Therefore (*verse 16*) no one is to act as your judge in regard to food (*there’s the dietary laws*) or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day (*the annual festivals, the monthly new moon feast, or the weekly Sabbath days because those festivals and feasts*) things which are a mere shadow but the body belongs to Christ.

In verse 17 of Colossians 2, Paul completely wipes away our responsibility to keep any of those special days, or the dietary laws. It’s done. That’s our authority for doing it though. It’s not our own authority. If I had time I’d take you to Hebrews. Read Hebrews 7, 8, 9, and 10. There, the writer of Hebrews sets aside all of that sacrificial system. In fact listen to what he says in Hebrews 10:10. He took away the Old Testament sacrificial system and replaced it with the once-for-all death of Christ. That’s in Hebrews 10:9 and 10. He took away the first to establish the second. He took away that system of sacrifices and He replaced it with the once-for-all death of the perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ. And the writer of Hebrews just immediately says that entire system is passe because it was fulfilled in Christ. So, we don’t have to obey the ceremonial laws.

And let me quickly touch on the other two. Although we do not have to keep the ceremonial laws, we do have to keep the civil laws in this sense. Read Romans 13. The responsibility for carrying out all those civil laws is no longer Israel or the church. It’s each nation. Romans 13 says you and I are to submit to the authority of the secular government God has set over us. So the civil responsibility has been transferred to the secular government—to our government. We are responsible to them. They now have that authority.

What about the moral law? It is clear in the New Testament that there were moral aspects of the Old Testament Law summarized in the Ten Commandments. In fact, it’s interesting. Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated and reiterated in the New Testament. The only one that’s not

is the Sabbath command. And we just saw in Colossians 2 why that one's not—because that was set aside. The principle is still there. We're to set aside time to worship God and we're to work six days. But the specific requirements of the Sabbath have been set aside according to Colossians 2:16, 17. But the laws are repeated. The other nine are repeated and reiterated. In Ephesians 6, kids of Christian parents are called to obey the fifth commandment—honor your mother and father. In James 2, James reiterates several of the commandments and calls Christians to obey them. In fact, in Matthew 5 we're going to see Jesus chooses six Old Testament laws and He brings those laws to bear on New Testament believers. He explains and applies to His disciples those six Old Testament Laws that were neither civil nor ceremonial, but are moral.

So understand, then, that when Jesus speaks of annulling one commandment, He does not mean that the New Testament believer must keep every Old Testament Law including the ceremonial Law. He means, and this is key, without His authorization we must not downplay or disregard any portion of the Scripture. And the eternal moral law that served as the foundation to the Mosaic Law is still binding on the consciences of both unbelievers and believers. If you're an unbeliever here this morning, you know God's law. He wrote it on your heart. You have it in His word. And your conscience accuses you when you break it. And that is intended to show you your guilt and the impossibility that you could ever earn acceptance with God. It is, as Paul says in Galatians 3, to drive you to Christ because He's your only hope.

If you're a believer that law doesn't gain you acceptance with God, but it becomes a pattern for your holiness and your obedience. Jesus says that the disciple who feels free to annul some portion of God's word either in theory or in practice is not worthy of His honor. Notice this dishonorable disciple not only annuls the commandment for himself, but verse 19 says he teaches others to do the same. He uses his influence to convince others to downplay the scripture in their own lives. How? Well by his example, by his attitude, by his conversation, or perhaps even by his formal teaching. So his spiritual status—he's in the kingdom. His treatment of scripture—he feels free to annul at least the least Old Testament command, perhaps others, and he teaches other to do the same. In other words in his life and through his influence, he downplays some portion of the scripture without Christ's authority. Now on the basis of that, Jesus diagnoses his spiritual condition. Look again at verse 19. "he shall be called (*that's a divine passive. It's not that other people are going to call him this, it's that God is going to say this. And in fact, in context, probably Christ Himself. He will be called*) least in the kingdom of heaven." The word least means lower in status, lower in quality, inferior. It's a shocking statement really. Jesus says that the true Christian who downplays or minimizes any portion of scripture, I myself will call him least in My future kingdom. John MacArthur writes "Jesus declares that He will hold those in lowest esteem who hold His word in lowest esteem. Greatness is not determined by gifts, success, popularity, reputation, or size of ministry, but by a believer's view of scripture as revealed in his life and teaching."

So here's a true Christian, but one who downplays the scripture or some portion of it in his own life and in his teaching, and therefore merits dishonor from Christ. You want to evaluate your own spiritual condition? Ask yourself some simple questions about your relationship to the scripture. What is the level of your love for the scripture? Are you committed to read it, to study it, to meditate on it, to try to understand it? And are you equally committed to obeying it, whatever it says, however much it cuts across your own desires or the designs of the culture? If the answer is yes, then Jesus says you are spiritually healthy and an honorable disciple. To whatever extent your answer to that question, or to those questions has to be no, to that extent you are a dishonorable disciple, unworthy of His honor.

There's a second category of people in this passage—the second half of verse 19. We'll call this group the honorable disciples. This person is in the kingdom and is worthy of Christ's honor. Look at the second half of verse 19. "but whoever keeps and teaches (*notice 'them' is supplied by the translator, probably better 'it' meaning the scripture*) he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Again, and I've already pointed this out, but notice that this person, too is or will be in the kingdom. He's a real Christian. But his response to scripture is different than the group in the first half of the verse. Notice how he responds. He keeps it. The Greek words translated *keeps* is the normal Greek word for *do*. He does it. He responds to the scripture in obedience. He does it. He doesn't even set aside the least Old Testament command. Instead he commits himself to personally obeying all of the scripture, even those commands that seem insignificant. This is reiterated in the Old and the New Testaments. In Deuteronomy 12 verse 32 we read "God says whatever I command you (*whatever I command you*) you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to it (*which some Christians are tempted to do*) nor shall you take away from it". Just do what I said the way I said to do it. Jesus says the same thing in the New Testament. You remember at the great commission in Matthew 28. What does He say to his disciples? I want you to go, make disciples, baptize them, and once you've made disciples and baptized them, I want you to teach them what? All that I have commanded you. Don't leave anything out, and don't add to it. So they keep it, they do it.

Notice the other way that the honorable disciple treats the scripture. He teaches it. This Christian not only endeavors to personally obey all scripture but he uses his influence to magnify and exalt the scripture in the minds of others. He honors and exalts the scripture in his life and in his teaching. And in light of that, notice Jesus' diagnosis of his spiritual condition. He shall be called, by Christ himself, great in the kingdom of heaven. *Megas* in the kingdom of heaven. Christ will honor the believer who exalts and honors the scripture. William Hendricksen, the great Presbyterian commentator writes "although all is of grace and nothing whatever is earned by the citizen of the kingdom, yet his rank or position in that kingdom will depend on and be commensurate with his respect for God's holy law." Wow. The main point in Matthew 5:19 is this. The one whom Jesus will honor in the future will be the one who honors His word now.

You say, why is this so important to God? Listen to Psalm 138:2. And, I think the ESV best captures the Hebrew of this verse. Here's how it reads. "you have exalted above all things your Name and Your word." God, you have exalted above everything else Your character and Your word. You know what that says? God's revealed word is equally important to Him as His own character. So to dishonor His word is to dishonor Him. And to honor His word is to honor Him.

Now, obviously, those of us who know God as father—we don't want to dishonor Him. We want to honor Him. We don't want to downplay His word. This is pretty important. So the question is, how do we normally do that? How are we tempted to downplay the word of God in our lives. Very quickly, let me give you some things to think about. Several examples. Here's how we downplay the word of God.

Number one. Replacing scripture with another authority. Maybe it's tradition, maybe it's like in the Roman Catholic Church, the Magisterium which sits above the scripture and determines its meaning. Maybe it's like the men at BioLogos who use science to determine what Genesis 1 and 2 means, rather than the other way around. But some authority becomes more important in your life than scripture. Has that happened to you? Is there something that you allow to sit in judgment on the scripture versus the scripture sitting in judgment on everything else?

The second way is downplaying the scripture for personal experience. There're so many people in today's church—I don't mean necessarily in this church although I'm sure it true in here as well—but in the church at large there are so many Christians who care more about their experience than about the scripture. I have had people tell me they are doing something or they believe something, and I'll say well, let's look at the scripture together and see, I'm not sure that exactly meshes with what God says here. I've had them say to me, listen, don't bring up the scripture, I know what I've experienced. That is to downplay the role of the scripture in their lives.

Another way is to emphasize personal revelation over scripture. There are those, particularly in the charismatic community, who believe God still reveals things to them personally and directly today. God told me. God said this to me. That always undermines the scripture, because if you have to choose between God speaking to you in a 3,000 year old book—2,000 to 3,000year old book—or God speaking to you personally today, which are you going to choose? I'll tell you which you'll choose every time. And they do too. It undermines the scripture.

Another way that the scripture is undermined is by abusing it in the corporate worship of the church. Folks, this is happening across the metroplex today. There are other good churches. I'm not saying ours is the only one. But there are plenty of churches where the word of God is being abused. How do they abuse it? Well, sometimes they replace the scripture largely with self-help talks. I hate to mention this to you, or admit this to you, but periodically, I watch some

of the messages of the megachurches in our area to see kind of what's going on. And I'm amazed at how little scripture you can fit into 20 minutes. I watched a local megachurch. Apparently the pastor was away and a woman spoke for him that day, which is contrary to 1 Timothy 2 by the way. But she spoke, and she spoke on "you know, our real problem is that we're perfectionists. That's our problem" Well, okay it's true. There are people who don't understand grace and that can be an issue. But I think the larger problem is not understanding what Jesus says (we're going to get to it in Matthew 5:48)" be perfect as your Father is perfect." Our problem isn't that we're perfectionists. Our problem is that we're not!

Others abuse the scripture by dumbing it down, assuming that people can't understand it or don't want it. Even refusing to use biblical language, words like justification and sanctification. Other's abuse the scripture by taking texts out of their context.

A fifth way that we can downplay the scripture is by neglecting it to make time to pursue our own personal activities. I think this is the biggest way Christians downplay the scripture. It just gets pushed out by other activities. There are countless activities that Christians allow to push the scriptures out of their lives. Might be career. Ask yourself this question. Is it your career? Is it your school? Is it hobbies? Sports? Entertainment? Television? For some people it's even video games. Just ask your self this question. Do you spend more time pursuing your own entertainment and amusement every day than you do in the timeless eternal word of God. If that's true, then in a very real sense you are guilty of what Jesus is talking about in this text.

A final way that I think we downplay the scripture is by re-interpreting it to fit popular cultural ideas. We just kind of tweak it so that it doesn't sound quite so out of step. For example, replacing biblical creationism with theistic evolution. Or replacing the historical Adam of Genesis 1, 2, and 3 with a metaphor or an analogy. Replacing the biblical role of women in the home and in the church with Christian feminism. Replacing the sin of homosexuality with the choice of a sexual preference. Listen, the Bible doesn't mumble about these things. It speaks very clearly. But what Christians are tempted to do is to re-interpret it so that it doesn't make them feel so uncomfortable in their culture.

Let God be true and every man a liar. We must accept the scripture for what it says. Jesus says your ultimate status in His future kingdom will be based on how you treat the scripture. If you downplay or minimize even a portion of it, even the least significant portion, without His authorization, you will be the least in His kingdom. If on the other hand you exalt and honor the scripture even in its insignificant parts, if you let God speak and you listen to His voice from the pages of scripture, then Jesus Himself will exalt and honor you in His future kingdom.

Now, I want you to turn to Hebrews as we transition to communion. Hebrews 8. Because I want to transition by asking this question. Why do you desire the scripture? Why do you love it?

Why do you desire to do it? Why does this even matter to you? Is it because you are just smarter than everybody else? No, it's because you have been swept up in an eternal covenant that God has made. Look at the end of Hebrews 8. The writer of Hebrews is talking about the New Covenant, and that you and I are participants in it. And that New Covenant—a covenant is simply a legally binding promise. God has made a legally binding promise with you. It includes several things but I want you to see the middle of verse 10, what it includes “This is the covenant I will make with house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts.” Listen, the reason you love and delight in the scripture is because God promised He would give you that desire and delight. The reason you will sit for a 45-50 minutes (whatever it's been this morning this morning) and listen to the word of God taught isn't because of me. It's because God has written the love for and the desire for His word upon your heart. And the desire and ability to obey it. And He promised to do that. But here's the good news. You and I still live in the flesh and we still fail to obey it. Look at the final promise in this New Covenant. Verse 12. When we don't keep it: “I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will *choose not to remember*” That's what it means, I will choose not to remember their sins. And that'll be true forever. I will not remember their sins forever. That's really what we celebrate in the Lord's table. It's that you and I have come to participate, through the death of Christ, in that New Covenant. We are beneficiaries of those promises.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank You for the blood of Christ, that He poured out His life in violent death, suffering the penalty of sin, not His own but ours. O God, we thank You that in Him we find a right standing before You. In Him we find forgiveness. In Him we find the power to obey, we find a changed heart, new desires, a changed life. Father we thank You for Your grace to us in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, help us to live in response to that, in obedience to Your word. May we honor and exalt it in our lives, in our obedience, and in our influence. And may we never bring dishonor upon ourselves or upon You by downplaying Your word in any way. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.