

How Jesus Viewed The Scriptures

For many years it has been the contention of religious liberals that the Bible is not the very word of God, but that the existential moment that one has with that word can sometimes make it God's word to him for that time. They have historically viewed the scriptures as the product of man's search for God, setting forth man's ideas about God rather than God's will for him.

In more recent time liberals among God's people have contended that Jesus is our pattern instead of New Testament scriptures. This contention has been born out of the crucible of religious controversy, which also have produced a call for a "new hermeneutic." It is for the benefit of all, particularly those who insist that He is our pattern over scripture, that we here address the idea that Jesus viewed the scriptures in a certain way. Of course, the scriptures available to Him were those of the Old Testament. A later article will examine His use of the scriptures, in relation to the recent call for this "new hermeneutic."

First, Jesus viewed the scriptures as the word that came from God. In Mark 7:10-13 it becomes clear that this is Jesus' understanding of them. He dealt with the Jewish practice of neglecting parents in need by a dedicating of their means to God. In the context He referred to what Moses had said in the accounts of Exodus and Deuteronomy, and He then accused the Jews of making void the word of God through their tradition in this matter and in other matters. Jesus obviously said that the writings of Moses were equivalent to God's word. He did not here refer to its becoming God's word to them at some time when their awareness of its impact suddenly dawned. It was God's word even while they were guilty of rejecting it in their lives.

Second, Jesus viewed the scriptures as the inerrant and verbally inspired word of God. By "inerrant" the writer means "free from error," and "verbally inspired" means the very words employed by the writers were endorsed by the Spirit as the product of God's mind. In Matthew 22:31-32 Jesus replied to the enigmatic case of the woman married seven times, as presented by the Sadducees to overcome any idea of a resurrection from the dead or of a spirit surviving death. His reply began with a citation of what God said to Moses at the burning bush: "I am the God of Abraham," because Jesus desired to stress the present tense of the verb "am". His point was that God is eternally existent, and He based this contention upon the tense of a verb. If Jesus did not believe in the inspiration and inerrancy of the words used in the scriptures, then His argument falls flat. A similar instance occurs in Paul's explanation of Jesus Christ as the singular seed of Abraham through whom the entire world can be blessed. He built his case on the singular (as opposed to plural) number of the noun used. So not only did the Lord view the scriptures in this way, but the apostles did as well.

Third, Jesus understood the scriptures to be authoritative and obligatory. In John 10:35 He declared, "The scripture cannot be broken." The traditions of the fathers did not begin to approach this same level. It is quite impossible to deny successfully that Jesus accepted the scriptures absolutely as the word given by the Father — undiluted and

undiminished. Before anyone trifles with the word of truth found in the Bible, he must first contend with Jesus' teaching that it bears the authority of God on its face and is incumbent upon all human beings in its declarations, promises, and warnings. In this connection He often said that either certain events in His life or His entire ministry fulfilled various Old Testament passages (Matthew 4:14; 21:5; Luke 4:21; 24:27).

Fourth, Jesus believed the scriptures to be historically true. How else can anyone explain His use of the Old Testament incidents in efforts to teach people? He obviously accepted the historical accuracy of Moses and other Old Testament writers without reservation. His allusions to the creation in Matthew 19:4, to the flood in Noah's day in Matthew 24:37-38, to the incident of Jonah and the great fish in Matthew 12:40, and to the repentance of the people in Nineveh in Matthew 12:41 all depend upon His acceptance of the historically accurate accounts of which they are a part. Other Old Testament events/persons (Abel, Elijah, Elisha, and Daniel) could also be cited in His teaching as sharing in this endorsement.

Fifth, Jesus believed that the scriptures were divine teaching in their entirety and vitally beneficial in their effect. Jesus said that people should live by the words coming from God; life is dependent upon them. Matthew 4:4 says, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." In the immediate context we see Satan's misuse of the scriptures pitted against Jesus' correct employment of them, forcing the conclusion that there are right and wrong ways of interpret and to use the scriptures. Satan obviously wrongly construed them in some instances, whereas Jesus interpreted them correctly and used them accordingly.

The view that Jesus held of the scriptures — a high and lofty one — should dictate our view. Such a high regard for the words that God has given will affect our interpretation of them, our use of them, and our response to them.

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