

Matthew
Every Stroke Inspired: Embracing Jesus' High View of Scripture (Part 4)
Matthew 5:17-20
January 4, 2026

Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

As we begin the new year, there are so many New Year's resolutions that people make that pertain to our health. If you doubt that, just watch some of the football games that are on now and how many commercials there are for gyms. You know, here we are, millions of people who desperately need exercise, watching twenty-two on the field who desperately need rest—that's the reality! You know, we want to be physically healthy, and we want to objectively know that we are physically healthy. And so this year before us, many of us will have various tests taken. We'll have our physical and tests will be taken for that, maybe specific tests related to our genetics or to issues we've already had. Unfortunately, many of those health tests are either extremely intrusive or highly expensive. That's why I'm fascinated with the reality that doctors worldwide are working, even as we speak, on a simple diagnostic tool that will provide an easy, uncomplicated window into our overall health.

Believe it or not, that window will come, they believe, through your saliva. It turns out that your mouth may provide the most accurate diagnosis of your physical health. For example, researchers at MD Anderson have been able to identify certain kinds of cancers from a simple mouth swab. In addition, scientists at the University of Texas in Austin, believe that they can now predict future heart attacks by studying your saliva. Eventually, your mouth may be the window into your health. A simple swab of your saliva will give them all the information they need. And won't that, if it happens, be great? I don't think any of us are going to miss colonoscopies. I'm showing my age in that comment, aren't I?

But did you know that there's already a simple diagnostic tool of your spiritual health? It already exists. There is a tool that will tell you exactly how spiritually healthy you are, or not. And Jesus explains exactly what that test is in the text that we're studying in "The Sermon on the Mount." Let's read it again together, Matthew, chapter 5. This is really, as He begins the body of His sermon, this is the heart, this is the text, if you will, of which the rest of the sermon is an exposition. Matthew, chapter 5, I'll begin reading in verse 17 and read the paragraph that reaches down to verse 20. You follow along. These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ 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.

Now the point of this paragraph, that we've read together, is that a true subject of Jesus' spiritual kingdom, that is a genuine believer, will always have a right relationship to the Scripture. You can always identify a true Christian by how he responds or is on the path to responding to the Scripture. In this paragraph, Jesus identifies three responses to Scripture that should and do characterize every genuine believer.

Let me just remind you of what we've learned so far. The first response we learned together is that we must "Affirm Jesus' Relationship to Scripture." That's verse 17. In the first half of the verse, we're reminded that He did not come "to abolish" the Old Testament. Jesus said to His disciples, and He says to us, "Don't believe the common misconception that I have come to undermine in some way the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures, of the Old Testament" (Paraphrase). Instead, the second half of verse 17, He says that He came "to fulfill" the Old Testament. What did He mean, "He came to fulfill it?" Well, as we saw, it means that "He perfectly explained its meaning in His teaching," "He perfectly obeyed its commands in His life," and "He embodied its message in His Person," its sacrifices and the prophecies about the Messiah. That's how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament.

Now, last time that we studied Matthew together, we considered a second response. We actually looked at it on a couple of different weeks because it's huge. It's in verse 18, and that is every true disciple of Jesus must "Adopt Jesus' View of Scripture." Verse 18 tells us just how high His view of Scripture was. Look at verse 18 again. "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law (from the Old Testament, from the Scripture) until all is accomplished." We noted that Jesus, in this verse, makes it clear that He believed in "Scripture's Permanent Authority," its permanent authority. He believed in "Its Verbal

Inspiration,” that is, every word breathed out by God, even down to every smallest letter and even the stroke that distinguishes one letter from another. He believed in “Its Plenary Inspiration,” that is, that all of it in its entirety was breathed out by God. He believed in “Its Complete Inerrancy,” that in the original autographs it was totally and completely without error of any kind. And He believed, as we noted the last time we studied together, in “Its Careful Preservation.” They didn't have any of the original autographs in the first century. They didn't have the scroll that Moses actually wrote on. They had copies. And yet Jesus affirmed those copies as the Word of God. He affirmed the Greek Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, as the Word of God. And in so doing, He affirmed its careful preservation.

Today, we come to the rest of this passage and to a third response to Scripture that characterizes all true believers. Not only must we affirm “Jesus' Relationship to Scripture” and “Adopt Jesus' View of Scripture,” but thirdly, we must “Apply Jesus' Diagnosis with the Scripture.” That's the point of verses 19 and 20. He uses the Scripture as a diagnostic tool. Now, first of all, it's important to note that Jesus connects verses 19 and 20 with His previous statements about Scripture in verses 17 and 18. Look at verse 19. You see the second word there, the word ‘then?’ That is actually the Greek word that is often translated ‘therefore’ in our New Testaments. So verses 19 and 20 then provide the practical implications of what Jesus taught about the Scripture in verses 17 and 18. So we can put it like this. Jesus says:

In light of the fact (verse 17) that I did not come to abolish the Old Testament but to fulfill it, and in light of the fact (verse 18) that I affirm the Scripture's Inspiration, its Permanent Authority, in light of all of that (Paraphrase); (verse 19) Whoever therefore 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.

The point that Jesus makes in verse 19 is that how you treat Scripture determines whether you are an honorable or dishonorable disciple. Think about that for a moment. Let me say that again. “How you treat the Scripture, Christian, determines in the mind of Christ whether you are an honorable or dishonorable disciple of His.” And according to verse 20, how you respond to Scripture will also ultimately reveal whether you are a true disciple of His at all. Look at verse

20, “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” So in these two verses, verses 19 and 20, Jesus diagnoses the spiritual condition of three different groups, and his sole diagnostic tool is their relationship to the Word of God.

Now, what's key to remember, as we work our way through these verses, is that those in all three of these groups claim to be followers of Jesus. All three groups claim to be in His spiritual kingdom. However, their response to Scripture shows their real spiritual condition. Notice the three groups, verse 19, the first half of verse 19, there are those who will be “in the kingdom” but called “the least.” The second half of verse 19, there are those who will be “in the kingdom” and called “great.” And verse 20, there are those who will not be in the kingdom at all; they're not true believers. And yet all three of these groups claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. Now this morning, I want to examine just the first two groups that are found in verse 19. Let's look at it together.

Jesus' first diagnosis concerns “The Dishonorable Disciple,” the dishonorable disciple. This is 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, that's an amazing statement. I want to take it apart and look at it more carefully. So let's start first with “This Person's Spiritual Status.” Notice the first half of verse 19 says this person will be “in the kingdom of heaven.” But notice the exact wording, this person “shall be (or will be)...in the kingdom.” Now that's a change because so far in this sermon, Jesus has spoken of His kingdom as a current spiritual reality. Go back to chapter 5, verse 3. The first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs (What?) is the kingdom of heaven.” They belong to His kingdom right now, His spiritual kingdom. Look at verse 10, the final beatitude, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Right now they're in Jesus' spiritual kingdom. Every Christian, every true Christian belongs to Jesus' spiritual kingdom right now. But in verses 19 and 20, Jesus changes the verb tense to the future tense. Notice verse 19, they “shall be called least...or great in the kingdom.” Verse 20, “you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” So in these verses, verses 19 and 20, Jesus is referring now to the future aspect of His kingdom, His literal physical reign on earth.

Now we know from eschatology, the doctrine of last things, that His future physical reign has two expressions. When He comes back at the Second Coming, He will initiate a period of a thousand years in which will reign on this earth renewed—we call that “The Millennium.” That's the first part of that future literal kingdom, physical kingdom. That will then usher in, when He destroys the present heavens and the earth, as we saw in Revelation, when that happens, He will then create a new heaven and a new earth, and we will live with Christ forever on a new earth, and that is the eternal kingdom. Both of those are the future physical kingdom of Jesus, the thousand years on this earth renewed, and eternity, the eternal kingdom on a new earth forever, that's what He's talking about here. When Jesus establishes His future physical kingdom, this person will be in that kingdom.

Now, to get into Jesus' future physical kingdom, you have to already belong, in this life, to His current spiritual kingdom. You have to be one of His disciples; you have to have repented and believed in Jesus Christ. You have to have experienced the new birth. So, clearly then, the person that Jesus describes in the first half of verse 19 is a true Christian. That's “His Spiritual Status,” true disciple. But what distinguishes this Christian is his treatment of Scripture. Notice how he or she treats the Scripture, verse 19, “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same.”

Now, you'll notice that Jesus describes this “Dishonorable Disciple” and how “He Treats the Scripture” in two ways. First of all, he says, “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments.” The word ‘annuls’ literally means ‘to loose’ or ‘to untie.’ When it's used figuratively, as it is here, it means ‘to do away with, to destroy, to bring something to an end.’ So, this disciple then ‘does away with, annuls,’ notice, “one of the least of these commandments.” Now, in context, what commandments would Jesus be talking about? Well, in the previous verse, He's talking about the Old Testament; He's talking about the Hebrew Scriptures. So, He must mean here, when He says, “one of the least of these commandments,” one of the least significant Old Testament commands. So, the disciple then, in the first half of verse 19, is a disciple, a true follower of Jesus, who minimizes or downplays any portion of Scripture, even the least significant.

Now, if you're thinking with me, and I hope you are, I know it's the new year, you've all had lots of carbs over the last couple of weeks, but I hope you're focusing. If you're thinking with me, you should ask yourself this question, "Wait a minute, Tom, are there insignificant parts of Scripture?" Well, the rabbis thought so. They divided the Old Testament law into 613 commands, corresponding to each letter in the Ten Commandments. And they taught that there were 248 positive commands, something you should do, and 365 negative commands, one for each day of the year. They endlessly debated then which were the lightest of the commands, and which were the heaviest, which were the most significant, and which were the least significant. Many of the rabbis actually considered Deuteronomy 22:6 to be the lightest Old Testament command. You say, "Really, what is that?" Here it is, "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." The rabbis said that was the lightest command in the Old Testament. They believed the heaviest command in the Old Testament was "The Shema," Deuteronomy 6:5, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." And oh, by the way, Jesus agreed with them on that. You remember in Matthew 22:37-38, Jesus says, "Here is the greatest commandment," and he quotes that very command. You see, clearly Jesus agreed and taught that some commands in Scripture are more important than others.

Let me show you this. Turn with me to Matthew 23. Jesus is dealing with the scribes and Pharisees and pronouncing His woes on them. And as He does so, He makes a very interesting statement, Matthew 23, verse 23, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" Now watch what Jesus says here. "For you tithe mint and dill and cumin," in other words, "You tithe, you give back to God some portion of your garden herbs." That was required under the Old Testament Law because it was produce. And yet, He goes on to say, you "have neglected (Notice this word.) the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness." So, Jesus acknowledges that in the Scriptures there are weightier and less weighty commands. But notice what He goes on to say. He says, "these are the things you should have done (those heavier commands) without, (What?) neglecting the others." So Jesus acknowledges there are lighter and weightier commands, but all of them we're responsible to obey, to take seriously. Jesus taught that every command, even the most insignificant, is important and must be kept.

Now, I need to step back from our text for a moment and deal with this with a theological issue that's very important. You see, there's an important caveat we need to understand. Jesus is not saying here in our text that New Testament Christians must keep every Old Testament command without exception. For example, we aren't required to gather three times a year in Jerusalem for the required festivals. Jesus meant we can't disregard even the least significant portion of Scripture unless, here's the caveat, unless we have been authorized to do so by Him or His Apostles, because that's what happens in the New Testament. Now, again, let me give you the full view here. There are three kinds of laws in the Old Testament, and I've argued this in different places; I'm not going to argue it with you today but let me just give you the summary. There are three kinds of laws in the Old Testament; there are "moral laws," there are "ceremonial laws," and there are "civil laws." So moral, they have to do with our moral behavior. Ceremonial, the sacrifices, all of the food and drink laws, all of the festivals, etc. And then the civil law, the laws that concern the governing of the nation, penalties for crimes, etc.

Now, it's impossible to know where every Old Testament command, what category it explicitly fits into, but it is clear that those three categories exist. How do we know that? Because the New Testament deals with them separately. The New Testament clearly sets aside the ceremonial aspects of the Old Testament law. It transfers authority for civil laws to government, and it argues for the permanence of God's moral laws. Let me show you that, okay? Because of the commands of Christ and His Apostles in the New Testament, we as "New Testament believers are no longer required to obey the Old Testament ceremonial laws." Mark 7, verse 19, I love this verse, "Jesus declared all foods clean." Listen, if you find somebody on the internet telling you that, as a New Testament believer, you need to keep the food and dietary laws of the Old Testament, run, don't walk. Jesus declared all foods clean. It happens again in Acts 10:9-16. Turn over to Colossians, chapter 2. I've brought you to this text many times because it is so seminal, so foundational. In Colossians 2, verses 13-15, Paul deals with the fact that Jesus died for our transgressions, our breaking of God's law. And then he says this in verse 16, "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink (They are the dietary laws of the Old Testament. No one is to act as your judge.) or (to judge you) in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day." Now, when those three expressions occur together in the Old Testament, they're always the same thing—the annual festivals, the monthly new moon feasts, and the weekly Sabbaths. Always! Check me out on it. You'll find, that's what convinced me, by the way, of what we teach about the Sabbath,

it's because that's always true. And Paul says here, "Let no one act as your judge in regard to those dietary laws or the ceremonial celebrations" (Paraphrase.) Verse 17, "things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance, (literally, the body) belongs to Christ." You don't need the shadows anymore; the body is here. In other words, Paul here, in this text, explicitly sets aside the Old Testament ceremonies, the food laws, the weekly, monthly, yearly festivals, all holy days, he sets them aside. Again, if you're following someone on the internet who says you ought to be doing those things, realize they are disobeying and disregarding the commands of Christ through His Apostles—Run!

Hebrews, chapter 10, verses 9-10, it's in the middle of a context about Jesus' sacrifice, and the writer of Hebrews says, "He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Now, in context, if I had time, I could take you through chapters 8, 9, and 10, and show you that the writer of Hebrews is arguing that God took away the Old Testament sacrificial system because it had been completely and totally fulfilled in the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ. So, we don't sacrifice animals anymore. Why? Because we've been explicitly authorized by Jesus and His Apostles to disregard those ceremonial laws.

Secondly, back to the categories, because of the commands of Christ and His Apostles, "The overarching responsibility for the civil law has been transferred away from Israel explicitly to the government of each nation." That's Romans 13, 1-5. If you weren't here when we studied Romans, go back and listen, because that's Paul's point there. He's saying to the Christians in Rome, "Submit to the secular Roman government." That's now how the civil law that God wants us to obey is mediated to us through the civil governments that are over each of our nations. Now, don't misunderstand, there's a group out there today saying that, as believers, we ought to try to get every Old Testament law that had to do with civil government instituted in our country. That's not what the New Testament teaches; that's not what the early church did. Go again, listen to Romans 13:1-5. we are to submit to our secular government and its laws. That doesn't mean we can't do our best to see righteousness define our nation, of course, but it's not our mission to convert our country to a Christian nation under Old Testament civil laws. No, they have been transferred to the government of each nation.

Number three, the New Testament makes it equally clear that “The moral aspects of the Old Testament that are summarized in the Ten Commandments have never been set aside and are still required of all.” In other words, those moral commands that reflect the unchanging character of God are still very much in play. It's never right to take God's name in vain. It's never right to have another god before Him. It's never right to commit adultery. It's never right to take another life. Those things stay in place, the moral laws of God. In fact, it's interesting, nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated and reiterated in the New Testament. The only exception is the Sabbath law, and that's a different message for a different time, but I believe it's still in place, but the duty to work six days a week and to worship God on one day a week remains. But now that day is the Lord's Day, Sunday because of our Lord's resurrection, but not with all of the baggage of the Old Testament Sabbath. But the principle is still very much in play, but the other nine commands are all repeated and reiterated in the New Testament. For example, in Ephesians 6, verses 1-3, Paul quotes, “HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER” as still binding on the children of believers. In James 2, verses 8-13, there are the commands against murder and adultery. As we're going to see in Matthew 5, beginning in verse 21 and through the end of Matthew 5, Jesus explains and applies six Old Testament laws that are neither civil nor ceremonial; they are moral laws, and He applies them to His disciples and says, “We have a responsibility to obey them.” So, clearly then, we know what Jesus is teaching.

Understand this, when Jesus speaks of annulling one commandment, back in our text, He does not mean that the New Testament believer must keep every Old Testament Law, including the ceremonial law. He means that without His explicit authorization in the New Testament, we must neither downplay nor disregard any portion of Scripture. And the eternal moral law of God, those laws that are based on His character, His unchanging character, those laws that served as the foundation of the Mosaic Law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, those are still binding on all humanity. In fact, according to Galatians 3, for unbelievers, God's moral law restrains their sin, convicts them of their sin, and drives them to Christ. For believers, it serves as a pattern for our holiness, for our sanctification.

So, back to Matthew 5, Jesus says, in the first half of verse 19, that “The disciple who feels free to annul, to downplay, to disregard some portion of God's Word, whether in theory or in practice, will not be worthy of honor in His future kingdom” (Paraphrase). But notice that the dishonorable

disciple not only annuls the commandment for himself, but he “teaches others *to do* the same.” In other words, he uses his influence to convince others to downplay the Scripture in their own lives. How does he do that? By his example, by his words, his conversation, and even by his formal teaching. So then, we've seen “His Spiritual Status,” “He's in the kingdom.” We've seen “His treatment of Scripture,” “He annuls one of the least of the Old Testament commands, and he teaches others to do the same.” In his own life and through his influence, he downplays some portion of the Scripture without Christ's authority.

Now, because of that, Jesus diagnoses “His Spiritual Condition.” Look at verse 19, he “shall be called,” be called. Notice the passive; that's a divine passive. In other words, he will be called this by God, in context, by Christ himself. Verse 19, Jesus says, “I will call him least in the kingdom of heaven.” Now, the word ‘least’ means ‘lower in status, inferior.’ That is a shocking statement by Jesus. Don't miss this, Christian, Jesus says that the true Christian, who in his life here downplays or minimizes any portion of Scripture, Jesus says, “I myself will call him least in my future kingdom.” It's an astounding comment! By the way, being called ‘least’ means they actually are least. John MacArthur writes this: “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.” That's a pretty powerful diagnostic. You see, beloved, when we downplay or minimize anything in Scripture, without our Lord's authorization in the New Testament, we risk occupying the lowest possible place in Jesus' future kingdom. If you want to evaluate your spiritual condition, if you want a simple diagnostic of your spiritual health, then ask yourself these simple questions. “What is the true level of my love for the Bible?” “Am I committed to read it faithfully?” “Am I committed to study it, to seek to understand what God has said, to meditate on it?” And then, “Am I truly committed to obeying what I learn from the Word of God?” Now, if your answer to those questions is “Yes,” then Jesus says you are an honorable, spiritually healthy disciple. But to whatever extent your answer to those questions is “No,” if you're a Christian at all, to that extent, you are spiritually unhealthy, and from Jesus' perspective, you are a dishonorable disciple. That's what He says here.

There's a second group in this passage, second half of verse 19, “The Honorable Disciple.” Look at it with me, “But whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of

heaven.” Now, again, first note “His Spiritual Status.” He is “in the kingdom.” He will be in the kingdom; that means he's a real Christian. But his response to Scripture is different than the Christian in the first half of the verse. Notice “His Treatment of Scripture,” “Whoever keeps and teaches *them*.” First of all, he keeps them. In Greek, the word for ‘keeps’ is just the normal Greek word for ‘do.’ This disciple responds to the Scripture with obedience; he does it, even the least command. His response to Scripture goes beyond lip service. He doesn't just say, “Oh yeah, the Word of God, that's God's Word and I love it.” No, he's committed to do it; he keeps it. He doesn't set aside even the least command. He commits himself to obeying all the Scripture, even those commands that seem insignificant. It's like Deuteronomy 12:32, “Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; You shall not add or take away from it.” Or this is what Jesus says in the great commission, right, in Matthew 28, verse 20. He says, “Once you have made someone My disciple, teach them (What?) to observe, to obey all that I have commanded” (Paraphrase). The Old Testament and the New Testament, we are to obey. Listen, the Scripture is not a buffet line. You don't get to come to Scripture and go, “Oh, I like that part; that's great. Yeah, loving people around me, that's good. But I'm going to disregard this part because I don't like it.” No, a true disciple has the same view that Jesus does of Scripture, and because we have the same view of Scripture, we are committed to obeying it all.

The other way the honorable disciple treats even the insignificant portions of Scripture, not only does he keep it, but notice he “teaches” it. This Christian endeavors to obey all of Scripture and uses his influence to honor the Scripture in the minds of others. He honors the Scripture in his life and in his teaching, whoever is under his influence. In light of that response, notice Jesus' diagnosis of “His Spiritual Condition.” “He shall be called (by Christ) great in the kingdom of heaven.” In other words, Christ will honor those who honors Scripture in his obedience and his influence. William Hendrickson writes this: “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 Word.” You see, the main point of verse 19 is this, the one that Jesus will honor in His future kingdom will be the one who honors His Word now—that's what He says.

Now, my first question is “Why does this matter so much to God? Why does it matter?” I want you to go back with me to Psalm 138. There is an amazing passage here. In fact, I borrowed from

this passage in the song that I wrote on Scripture. Psalm 138, and look at verse 1, Psalm of David, Psalm 138:1:

I will give You thanks with all my heart;

I will sing praises to You before the gods.

I will bow down toward Your holy temple

and give thanks to Your name for Your lovingkindness (steadfast love) and Your truth (or Your faithfulness);

For (Now notice the end of verse 2.) You have magnified Your word according to all Your name.

Now, that's the translation we have in the NAS. The Hebrew literally reads, look at the end of verse 2 again, let me read it for you, this is how it reads in Hebrew, "You have made great over all Your name, Your word." "You have made great over all Your name, Your word." Because of that, a couple of modern translations, the English Standard Version, the Holman Translation, translate it like this, "You have exalted above all things Your name and Your word." In other words, this verse is making this profound point, "God's word is equally important to Him as His own name, as His character, as His person." So to honor His Word is to honor Him, and to dishonor His Word is to dishonor God—that's why it matters so much!

Now, none of us who knows the Father through the Son, none of us wants to dishonor Him; none of us wants to downplay His word. So that raises the question, "How do we do this?" What are the "Common Ways That Christians Downplay God's Word?" As I go through these, just kind of take a little test, see how you're doing. Here are some common ways that Christians in today's world downplay God's Word. Number one, by "Trusting another authority more than Scripture." Let me ask you, is there anything in your life that, if it disagrees with Scripture, you go with it? If you have another authority that you have exalted above the Scripture, then you are downplaying the Scripture, and you will be least in Jesus' spiritual kingdom. This is our authority, the Scripture. It may be an extra biblical tradition; Jesus deals with that in Mark chapter 7. Today, that can be explicit, right? I mean, there's the extra biblical tradition of the Roman Catholic Church where they teach that the oral tradition passed down through the last 2,000 years has equal weight to the writing of Scripture. That's to put another authority over Scripture. But it can also be more informal than that. For a lot of Christians today, if science disagrees with the Bible, they are like, "I know that the first two chapters of Genesis, interpreted literally in the flow of their context

narrative, say that God created the world in six ordinary days, but that's a little uncomfortable for me with my friends and family, that's a little hard at school. So I'm going to let science trump what the Bible teaches.” If you have another authority other than the Bible, then you are downplaying the Word of God.

Number two, “Elevating personal experience over Scripture.” Now, this takes different forms. I've had people sit in my office and say this to me, and none of them are sitting here, so I can say this, okay? You don't have to be uncomfortable. But I've had people sit in my office and say this to me, “You know, Tom, I don't care what the Bible says. I know what I've experienced.” Really? That is downplaying the Scripture. We can do that ourselves; we can be tempted to say that in less explicit ways, more subtle ways, where our experience trumps the Scripture. “Well, Tom, I just think God wants me to be happy, and I know this isn't really what His Word teaches, but He wants me to be happy.” Don't let your personal experience be elevated over the Scripture.

Number three, “Emphasizing personal revelation over Scripture.” This is huge in the charismatic circles. You know, “Well, God told me, God spoke to me, I had a vision, I had a revelation.” Unwittingly, they are exalting their own “personal revelations” over the Scripture. God gave us His Word. You know, Hebrews 1:1-2, God's final Word came to us through Jesus and His disciples, His apostles.

Number four, “Abusing Scripture in corporate worship.” Sadly, this is happening across DFW and in our country today. Many pastors have largely replaced Scripture in the corporate worship with inspirational self-help talks, TED Talks, in church. You know, periodically, I watch a message from one of our local megachurches just to kind of get a feel, see what's going on. And can I say it? I don't mean this to be unkind, but it's just true, “I am always amazed at how little Scripture you can fit into a 20-minute message.” Some abuse Scripture by dumbing it down. You know, they treat people like they're stupid. I listen to some messages and it's like, “You know, I'm really smarter than that. You could not talk to me at like a sixth-grade level. I can do better than that.” Others refuse to use biblical words, words like ‘sin’ and ‘redemption’ and ‘propitiation.’ Still others abuse it by taking the biblical text that they're supposedly teaching out of its biblical context and making it say, not what God said, but what they want it to say. They are downplaying, minimizing the Scripture.

Number five, and now I'm getting personal, "Neglecting Scripture for personal activities." I know, you know, most of us here, the first four, we're going, "Yeah! Get 'em Tom, tell them," you know! Well, neglecting Scripture for personal activities as Christians allow countless activities to push Scripture out of their lives. For example, many Christians don't spend regular time in God's Word because of their careers, their schoolwork, their hobbies, their sports, even entertainment, streaming services or video games. "Well, Tom, you know, I'd love to spend more time in Scripture, but I just don't have time." Years ago, when I was a young Christian, I was challenged by Job's words. Job said (23:12), "I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." So let me just challenge you, "You don't have time to fit God's Word into your every day?" Just make this simple covenant with God, "God, no food will hit my lips until I spend time feeding on your Word." And guess what will happen? You will find time every day!

Number six, "Reinterpreting Scripture to fit popular cultural ideas." This happens constantly. Christians, well-meaning Christians in some cases, often not so well-meaning, make Scripture fit popular cultural ideas. For example, replacing biblical creationism with theistic evolution. Replacing the historical Adam, a true historical man, the first man, according to Jesus in the Gospels, with a metaphorical Adam. Replacing the biblical role of women with feminism. Replacing the biblical role of men with a cultural, toxic masculinity that has more to do with cigars and alcohol than it does with likeness to Jesus Christ. Replacing the sins of homosexuality and transgenderism with secular gender identity theory, which many Christians are embracing because that's what the culture is embracing. When we reinterpret Scripture to fit popular cultural ideas, we are downplaying and minimizing the Word of God.

Number seven, "Undermining its authority in the lives of Christians." This happens in a variety of ways by questioning its certainty. "Well, we just can't be sure that that's the truth." "We don't know if it's God's Word." "We don't know if that's what Jesus said." "We can't be certain about interpretation," by questioning its eternal relevance, by doubting its sufficiency.

But I think number eight is probably the most common in our world, in our circles, and it is "Failing to obey Scripture's commands." We know what the Bible says, we study it, we have Bible studies, we go to BSF, we go to women's Bible study here at Countryside, we go to the Men's Institutes of Theology, we sit in services every week and somebody teaches the Bible for 45-50

minutes, we go to Sunday school classes, and we accumulate a lot of information. But notice Jesus says the honorable disciple does what? “Keeps them”—does them. Jesus says, “Your ultimate status in His future kingdom (Don't miss this.), your status in His future kingdom will be based on how you treat the Scripture in your lifetime here.” If you downplay or minimize even the least significant portion without His explicit authorization in the New Testament, He will call you “least in his kingdom.” But if you honor the Scripture, even its insignificant parts, in your own life, by your loving it and reading it and studying it and obeying it, and you honor it in your influence with those in your life that are under your influence, Jesus says He will honor you in His future kingdom. That's what He teaches in this passage. So let me just ask you, “What is the real nature of your relationship, Christian, with the Word of God?” He has magnified His Word even as he has His name.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for our Lord's words. Thank You for the treasure that is Your Word to us. Thank You that You've given us this Book. Lord, I pray that You would help us not to be dishonorable disciples who minimize it in our own lives and in the lives of those around us> But Lord, may we be honorable disciples, worthy of Christ's honor by loving the Scriptures, reading it, studying it, meditating on it, and most of all, seeking to obey it. Father, I pray that You would help each of us, individually and us collectively as a church, to be honorable disciples so that one day we can hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” And Lord, help us to remember that's measured by how we treat Your Word.

Lord, I pray for those here this morning who don't know You. Even as they've studied this text with us this morning, they've seen themselves in the mirror of Your Word, and they realize they have no love for Your Word, they have no appetite for it, no interest.; this is all boring stuff to them. Father, help them to see they are lost and on their way to hell. May they cry out to You, even today, to change them at the heart level, to write Your law upon their hearts where they love it, they desire it, like babies desire milk, they long for Your truth, and they long to do it. Father, may You produce that change today for their sakes, but Lord, even more for the sake of Your Son who deserves the reward of His suffering. It's in His name we pray. Amen.