Article III: “The Greatest Commentary on the Bible is the Bible”
Matthew 5: 17-19
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1. **The Bible is Explained—Learn It**
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I like lively worship. Dead services make me nervous. I have often been asked why I am so dead against dead worship, and the answer is simple: Jesus never hung around dead things. When Jesus showed up, dead things came to life.

I believe singers ought to sing by “Letter”—‘rare back and let-ter fly.” I believe preachers ought to preach by “Letter” (as we would say in the mountains of Eastern Kentucky)–“lean a’gin the collar and let-ter rip.” I cut my teeth on the kind of preaching where if a preacher’s shirt was dry, his tie straight, his socks not soaking wet, and he still had half a voice, then he hadn’t preached.

Adrian Rogers said, "We need God-called men who will take the Book of God and preach the Son of God with the anointing of the Spirit of God. We need men with warm hearts, wet eyes, clear heads, and tongues set on fire."

I think of Peter Cartwright, a circuit riding Methodist preacher of the 19th century. He was to preach to a large congregation, and right before the service, he was informed that President Andrew Jackson would be in attendance. They told Peter Cartwright, "We thought you would want to know so that what you say won’t be offensive to the President." Peter Cartwright said, "Thank you for telling me."
He got into the pulpit and said, "I've been told that President Andrew Jackson is in the congregation, and I've been asked to carefully guard what I am going to say. I want to begin by saying that Andrew Jackson will go to hell if he doesn't repent of his sin." You could have heard a pin drop. But, immediately after the service, President Andrew Jackson walked up to Peter Cartwright and said, "If I had a regiment of men like you, I could whip the whole world."

When it comes to preaching there was none greater than the Lord Jesus. When it comes to sermonic exposition and exegesis there is none greater than the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus preached without fear or favor. He preached without provocation, reservation and hesitation. He told it like it was to people like they were.

We are studying the Sermon on the Mount as the Constitution of Christianity. Jesus has just “let ‘er rip” regarding those who gain His approval, as well as the assignment we have in being the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world.”

In verses 17-19, we come to Article III of the Constitution and discover that “The Greatest Commentary on the Bible is the Bible.” An amazing thing is about to take place as He, who is the Word took the Word and expounded on the Word from the Word.

Notice the transitions of personal voice that take place in this great sermon.

In the first 8 Beatitudes (vv. 3-10), Christ speaks in the 3rd person: "Blessed are the...Blessed are they"

In the final Beatitude (vv. 11-12), as well as His use of the metaphor, “salt” and “light,” and switches to the 2nd person: "Blessed are ye... ye are the salt... ye are the light."
Then in the applications that follow, (vv. 17-44), He switches to the 1st person: 
"But I say unto you."

No scribe or rabbi ever spoke like this. They normally spoke only in the 2nd or 3rd person. Never a man spoke as Jesus would speak. It was radically personal and authoritative.

In His 1st person discourse, He begins speaking of the Law of God by explaining the Law of God.

**A) He CREATED the Law**

(17) “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”

When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount it was the beginning of His earthly ministry. Right off the bat, He makes it clear why He had come. He had not come to destroy the law, but rather to fulfill it.

The word “destroy” is the Greek word ‘katalyo.’ It means to “loosen down or dissolve.” It was used to speak of the disintegration of the body at death. It was also used to describe the taking down of a tent. Jesus was saying that He had not come to subvert, dissolve or annul the law.

What did Jesus mean when He spoke of “the law?” It’s important to note the specific gamut Jesus refers to.

(17) “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets.”

He specifically and intentionally mentions the 2 divisions of the Old Testament. He was speaking of the Old Testament as a whole. “The law” spoke of the moral law, and “the prophets” spoke of the rest of the Old Testament scriptures.
Now, it is easy to understand why some may have felt that Jesus had come to destroy the law. What He said and did often ran contrary to what many considered to be the law. He performed certain deeds on the Sabbath which seemed to defy what the law commanded. He broke many of the traditions of the elders whom many considered to be law.

Again, to many it seemed that Jesus was nothing more than a rebel who had come to dissolve, do away with, and destroy the law. However, it was not the law that Jesus contradicted; rather, it was the many man-made laws, customs and traditions, added to the law, that Jesus contradicted.

Jesus was not abolishing the Law when He said, “This I say unto you.” Rather, He was correcting the perversions that the scribes and Pharisees had made of the Law. He came to destroy the perverted law, but He came to do the pure law.

The Jews counted 613 separate edicts in the Mosaic Law and there never was a single moment when the Lord Jesus did not absolutely keep every detail of every commandment.

1) Ceremonial Law—it specifically related to the worship of Israel
2) Moral Law—it is the direct command of God (Ten Commandments)

To those 613 laws the scribes and Pharisees had attached many of their own interpretations and traditions. These traditions were held over the heads of the people and enforced as law.

For example, there were many traditions concerning the Sabbath that were viewed as law. Take the matter of working on the Sabbath. If you pulled a chair across a room and dragged the leg in the dirt resulting in a furrow, then you worked because you had been plowing. If someone broke a leg on the Sabbath you could bind it, but you could not set it for that would have been considered work.
It was these man-made traditions and additions to the law that Jesus often violated. As for the law of God, as God had given it, He never once dishonored, disrespected or disobeyed it. Thus, when they accused Jesus of being a law breaker, it was not the Law of God He had broken, but the laws of man.

R. Kent Hughes writes, "What Christ criticizes is not the law itself but man-made, religious, contemporary formulations of the law."

John Calvin comments, “He only restored the Law to its integrity by maintaining and purifying it when obscured by the falsehood, and defiled by the leaven of the Pharisees.” [1]

He did not, would not, and could not violate the law that He created. Who gave the law? God did. Jesus is God. Thus, He not only created this world, but He created the laws that govern this world. He did not come to “destroy” the very law He created. He viewed the law as the Word of God. He could never destroy the Word of God. To do so would be to destroy Himself.

The Book you hold in your hand is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of the Living God. Each of its 66 books is God’s Word. Every one of its 1,189 chapters is God’s Word. Each of its 31,373 verses is God’s Word. Each of its 773,695 words is God’s Word.

When you pick up your Bible, you are picking up God Himself. When you read it, you are reading God Himself. When you hear it, you are hearing God Himself.

Had Jesus come to destroy the Law, He would have destroyed the Word of God. To destroy the Word of God would have been to destroy Himself, and that He did not do and He would not do, because He could not do. With Jesus we say, the Bible, the Law of God, is the Word of God, because it is the Son of God!

B) He COMPLETED the Law
Jesus not only makes clear that He created the Law; and, thus, could not “destroy” it. But, He also completed the law.

(17) “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”

The word “fulfill” carries the idea of filling a vessel to the very top. Instead of destroying the law, Jesus came to complete or fill up what the Law declared, demanded and designed.

As one writer said, “He came to unfold the Law and to embody it in living form.”

Not only did He not destroy the Law, but He took the Law to the pinnacle of its height and fulfillment. Jesus was not only the embodiment of the Law, but also the End of the law. He fulfilled it. He completed it.

In His amazing life the Lord Jesus fulfilled the Demands of the Moral Law. In His death He fulfilled the Details of the Ceremonial Law. He fulfilled the precepts, prophecies, predictions, prefigures, and pictures of the law and the prophets.

He fulfilled the rich symbolisms of the sin offering, the trespass offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, and the burnt offering. Jesus was the goat that was slain on the Day of Atonement, whose blood was taken into the holy of holies; and He was the scapegoat upon which were laid the sins of the people before it was led away into the wilderness.

Jesus was the ram in the bulrush, and the Passover lamb slain in Egypt. Jesus was the bird that the cleansed leper brought to be slain in his stead. Jesus was the unleavened bread of the Passover, and He was the paschal lamb.

His were the ashes of the red heifer, and His was the blood that was shed for sin. The red rivers that poured from ten thousand times ten thousand sacrifices were but a feeble foreshadowing of His precious blood.
Thus, He was more than qualified to announce,

(17) “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”

With the authority of the author behind it, we can say, The Bible is a HIM-book. It’s all about HIM! In Genesis 1: 1, we find Him creating this world. In Revelation 22: 21, we find Him completing this world. At all points in between, we find Him controlling this world.

The Old Testament conceals Christ;
The Old Testament enfolds Christ;
The Old Testament promises Christ;
The Old Testament prophesies Christ;
The Old Testament symbolizes Christ;

That brings up an age-old point, “If Jesus fulfilled the law, are we still required to keep the law?” Again, Jesus did not “destroy” the law, but fulfilled the law. No one will ever get to Heaven by keeping the law, because it would require keeping the whole law, all 613 dictates of the Law.

The law is our “schoolmaster,” our teacher that leads all the way to Christ. Thus, a person can only go to Heaven by accepting Jesus. When a person accepts Jesus, they accept His fulfillment of the law. However, just because a person accepts Jesus’ fulfillment of the law does not mean that they are free to break the law, because it is the Word of God.
Simply put, we can’t get to Heaven by keeping the law, but we should keep the law because we’re going to Heaven. When it comes to the law, Jesus is the final answer!

I read about this preacher that announced that the next Sunday he was going to preach on Noah and his Ark. The next Sunday he got up to read his text not knowing that some boys had glued some of the pages of his Bible together. He began to read, "Noah took unto himself a wife and she was," he turned the page and continued to read, "three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high." He paused and then read it again. He then looked up and said, "You know, I have been studying the Bible for almost fifty years, but there are still some things in that are hard to believe."

There are still many things about this blessed old Book that are hard to believe, but one thing you can believe with absolute certainty is that the Bible is as eternal as Jesus Himself. We find two proofs of its eternal existence.

A) The POWER that GUARDS It

(18) “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.”

Whenever you find Jesus using the word “verily,” it’s time to sit up and pay attention. The word literally means, “Of an absolute truth or certainty.” In other words, the word “verily” puts the reputation of Jesus Himself on the line, because if He cannot lie, then what follows the word “verily” must be absolutely accurate.

What is Jesus saying of an absolute truth or certainty? He is saying, “You can take this to the bank. This is absolute truth. The Word of God is eternal. It shall never pass away.”
The word “pass” means, “To perish, or go away.” One thing is absolutely certain; the Word of God will never sway, because it is here to stay. One day, the heavens and the earth will be melted with fervent heat, but there is no fire hot enough to burn the eternal pages of the Word of God. It existed before the beginning, and it will endure after the end.

Other books come and go, but the Bible has been, and is here to stay. Empires have risen and fallen. Civilizations have changed and re-changed. Science has pushed back the frontiers of knowledge. And, yet, the Bible still stands.

Emperors have decreed the extermination of the Bible. Atheists have rallied against the Bible. Agnostics have sneered at the Bible. Liberals have moved Heaven and earth to remove the miracles of the Bible. Materialists have ignored the Bible. But, the Bible STILL STANDS.

(Psalm 119: 89)

“For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in Heaven.”

(Isaiah 40:8) “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.”

R. G. Lee said, “All of its enemies have not torn one hole in its holy vesture, nor stolen one flower from its wonderful garden, nor diluted one drop of honey from its abundant hive, nor broken one string on its thousand-stringed harp, nor drowned one sweet word in infidel ink.”

Millions of dollars have been made by publishing all sorts of different Bible translations. It is a huge money-making business in the Christian retail world. I’m humored every time I see a new translation hit the market. It’s as if man thinks He can improve on that which is eternal.

Man may revise the Word, but it does it reverse the Word or replace the Word. Man may deny the Word, but it does not discard the Word or destroy the
Word. Man may alter the Word, but it does not abandon the Word or alleviate the Word.

If I was a betting man I wouldn’t bet against the Bible. It will stand forever because of the power that guards it.

**B) The PROMISE that GUARANTEES It**

(18) “…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.”

Jesus gives us a language arts lesson to guarantee the very Word which He had given. He states that a “jot” or a “tittle” shall no pass until the Word of God is fulfilled.

A “jot” is the Hebrew word *‘iota.’* It is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and looks something like an apostrophe. It is the Hebrew “yod,” and there are approximately 66,420 yods in the Old Testament. [2]

A “tittle” is the smallest part of the “jot.” It is the smallest part of a letter. It was sometimes only distinguishable by a tiny mark. For example, in the English alphabet, a “c” is distinguished from an “e” by a small horizontal mark in the middle. That is a tittle.

What is Jesus saying? He is saying that down to the smallest detail, the smallest letter and the smallest part of the smallest letter, the Word of God will be fulfilled. In other words, every “jot,” every “tittle,” every word, every line, every sentence, every paragraph and every page will be fulfilled just like it was foretold.

There was a pastor who after service happened to notice that someone had left their Bible. Concerned that they may need it before the next service, he picked it up and began flipping through to find a name. It belonged to an older
lady in the Church, but he couldn’t help but notice the margins. Throughout the Bible he found in the margins the letters, TP.

His curiosity was peaked and decided he would return the Bible to the dear mother and ask her what TP meant. The next morning he knocked on her door and was invited in. He told her he’d found she left her Bible and was sure she would need it. He then proceeded to tell her he’d noticed the letter’s TP had been written in the margins throughout the Bible and was interested as to what that meant.

She said, “It is very simple, you see God is faithful and has never left or failed me through all these years. The letters TP simply means Tried and Proven.”

If God said He would save, He will save. If God said He would sustain, He will sustain. If God said He would supply, He will supply. You don’t have anything to worry about. He will take care of every “jot” and “tittle” of His Word to take care of every “jot” and “tittle” of our lives. Why? Because He said He would.

His power guards it and His promise guarantees it. The Bible is eternal—Love It!

The Bible that is explained and the Bible that is eternal, is the Bible that is essential to our daily lives. If we desire to experience and enjoy the contents of its pages, then we must embrace and embody its truths. Simply put, we must live it.

A.W. Pink wrote: "God has given us His word that under its guidance we may regulate our beliefs, renovate our hearts, and reform our lives."

I am the Bible.
I am God’s wonderful library.
To the weary pilgrim, I am a strong staff.
To the one who sits in gloom, I am a glorious Light.
To the one beneath heavy burdens, I am a sweet Rest.
To him who has lost his way, I am the Way.
To those hurt by sin, I am a healing Balm.
To the discouraged, I am a glad message of Hope.
To the distressed, I am an Anchor.
To the depressed, I am a cool, soft Hand resting upon a fevered brow.
Oh, child of man, to best defend me, ONLY USE ME!

To close this section of His discourse, Jesus describes our response and responsibility to use His Word.

A) A DEMOTION to AVOID

(19) “Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.”

These were fighting words to the scribes and Pharisees. When Jesus mention “break (-ing) one of these least commandment,” He was talking to some in the audience who prided themselves in devoting their lives to law keeping, not law breaking.

However, Jesus knew His audience. He knew their hearts. He knew their motives. He knew their intent. He also knew that the Pharisees, not only taught the law, but also many of their own additions and translations. They even taught that some laws were more important than others, and it was a trivial matter to break the smallest commands. They would divide sin into “mortal” and “venial” categories.

It is to those Jesus says, “If you break one of the least of these commandments, and teach others to do so as well, you will be the least in the kingdom of Heaven.”
You see someone who perverts the Word of God is deceived, and deception never flies solo. It also finds passengers to accompany them on the deceptive trail. The Pharisees had subverted the minds of many innocent people by their teachings; thus, Jesus pulls the mask off of their deception.

He doesn't say that they won't go to Heaven, but that they will the “least in the kingdom of Heaven.” There are many disobedient Christians who will go to Heaven, simply because they have been saved. However, their disobedience and deception will cause them to have no honor in Heaven, and forfeit their reward.

Joseph Parker comments, “He may get into the kingdom, but such a spirit will give him a very low spiritual rank.” [3]

Let me offer a word of caution. Be very, very careful who you listen to preach and teach the Word of God. In case you didn't already know, there are some kooks disguised as preachers who are deceiving the minds of many gullible, shallow Christians.

If what a man preaches/teaches deviates one point from scripture, you need to turn him off, tune him out and shut him down. He is a heretic. He is a deceiver. He is a worker of Satan, disguised as a “minister of righteousness.”

**B) A PROMOTION to ATTAIN**

To the deceiver and the deceived, a demotion awaits. But, to the devoted and diligent, who desire to know God’s Word, there is a promotion to attain.

(19) “But whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

The word “great” is the Greek word ‘megas.” It speaks of the superlative degree. It means, “Exceeding in rank and scope.”
Do you want to be great in the kingdom of Heaven? Then apply God’s Word to your own life, and then advertise God’s Word to others. Just do what His Word tells you to do, and then teach it to others in word, deed, or action.

The Word of God tells us to tithe, so if I desire to be great in the kingdom of Heaven, it would behoove me to tithe. The Word of God tells us to faithfully attend church, share our faith, live holy, separated lives from this world. Thus, if I desire to hear Him say “Well done,” I must have “Done Well.” And you cannot do any better than when we do what He tells us to do.

Many Christians remind me of an old sailor who repeatedly got lost at sea, so his friends gave him a compass and urged him to use it. The next time he went out in his boat, he followed their advice and took the compass with him, but he still got lost. Finally, he was rescued by his friends. Disgusted and impatient with him, they asked, "Why didn't you use the compass we gave you?" The sailor responded, "I didn't dare to! I wanted to go north, but as I hard as I tried to make the needle aim in that direction, it just kept on going south."

The old sailor was so certain he knew which direction was north that he stubbornly tried to force his own personal persuasion on his compass. Unable to do so, he tossed it aside as worthless and failed to benefit from the guidance it offered.

Augustine said, “If you believe what you like in the Bible, and reject what you do not like, it is not the Bible you believe, but yourself.”

George Washington Carver was born into slavery, but became a famous agricultural chemist and scientist. He is especially known for his work with the peanut. Once he was invited to testify before a Senate committee, and there he was asked, “Dr. Carver, how did you learn all these things?” He replied, “From a book.” The question came, “What book?” He answered, “The Bible.” The Senator asked, “Does the Bible talk about peanuts?” Carver replied, “No, but it tells me about the God who made the peanut. I asked Him to show me what to do with the peanut and He did.”
The Bible is explained by Jesus, so learn it. The Bible is eternal as Jesus, so love it. The Bible is essential to be like Jesus, so live it. I think you would agree, the greatest commentary on the Bible is the One who is the Bible!

**Endnotes**

1) J. C. Ryle, *“Expository Thoughts on the Gospels—Matthew”*
2) R. Kent Hughes, *“Preaching the Word.”*
3) Joseph Parker, *The People's Commentary.”*