

Did Jesus Practice Richard Rohr's "Jesus Hermeneutic"?

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Table of Contents

Introduction: What is the “Jesus Hermeneutic”?	1
Did Jesus Ever Ignore, Deny, or Oppose Scripture?	2
What Did Jesus Say About Scripture?	10
Conclusion	16

Introduction: What is the “Jesus Hermeneutic”?

Richard Rohr is a Franciscan priest, author of several books, and the founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The CAC website describes Rohr as “a globally recognized ecumenical teacher bearing witness to the universal awakening within Christian mysticism and the Perennial Tradition.”¹ Rohr’s teachings are gaining influence, especially among millennials who grew up in the Evangelical church.² He is particularly influential in the progressive Christian movement and is referred to as a spiritual father, hero, and mentor by well-known progressive voices.³ Rohr refers to the Jewish Scriptures as being filled with inconsistencies and falsehoods. He characterizes the New Testament Gospels as being accounts that conflict with one another, “with no one clear theology of God, Jesus, or history presented.”⁴ To better understand how Rohr can view and interpret the Scripture this way, he articulates what he calls the “Jesus Hermeneutic.” He writes:

¹ Center For Action and Contemplation, “Richard Rohr, OFM,” accessed November 11, 2020, <https://cac.org/richard-rohr/richard-rohr-ofm/>

² National Catholic Reporter, “For Millennials, Mysticism Shows a Path to their Home Faiths,” accessed November 11, 2020, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/millennials-mysticism-shows-path-their-home-faiths>

³ Progressive leader Jen Hatmaker referred to Rohr as such in a podcast episode. See: Jen Hatmaker, “Live Yourself into a New Way of Thinking: Richard Rohr,” accessed November 11, 2020, <https://jenhatmaker.com/podcast/series-16/live-yourself-into-a-new-way-of-thinking-richard-rohr/> Rohr is also praised by progressive thought leaders such as Rob Bell and William Paul Young, both of whom have worked with, appeared alongside, and produced content with Rohr. See examples here: The Bookstore At The CAC, “In the Beginning: Six Hours with Rob Bell and Richard Rohr ~ MP3,” accessed November 11, 2020, <https://store.cac.org/products/in-the-beginning-six-hours-with-rob-bell-and-richard-rohr-mp3>, Center For Action and Contemplation, “TRINITY: The Soul of Creation,” accessed November 11, 2020, <https://cac.org/events/conferences/trinity/>

⁴ Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 62-63.

Scripture is a polyphonic symphony, a conversation with itself, where it plays melodies and dissonance—three steps forward, two steps back. The three steps finally and gradually win out; you see the momentum of our Holy Book and where it is leading history. And the text moves inexorably toward inclusivity, mercy, unconditional love, and forgiveness. I call it the “Jesus Hermeneutic.” Just interpret Scripture the way Jesus did! He ignores, denies, or openly opposes his own Scriptures whenever they are imperialistic, punitive, exclusionary, or tribal. ⁵

In this paper I will analyze Rohr’s “Jesus Hermeneutic” and interact with specific passages he offers to support his thesis. I will demonstrate that Jesus did not, in fact, ignore, deny, or oppose the Old Testament Scriptures. Then I will evaluate other passages that establish what Jesus actually did say about the Scriptures. Finally, I will seek to expose Richard Rohr’s “Jesus Hermeneutic” as an interpretive tool that is sure to deceive Christians into making their own feelings, thoughts, and preferences their final authority for truth, rather than the Word of God.

Did Jesus Ever Ignore, Deny, or Oppose Scripture?

Rohr never defines what he means when he uses the words “imperialistic, punitive, exclusionary, or tribal” as the criteria Jesus supposedly used to justify contradicting the Scriptures. For our purposes, we will take them at face value, focusing on “punitive” (having to do with punishment) and “exclusionary” (relating to the exclusion of someone or something). The only biblical data Rohr gives is in a footnote with four Scripture passages to support his theory: Luke 4:18-19, Matt. 5, Matt. 12:1-8, and John 5:1-23. ⁶

The first example, Luke 4:18-19, is where Jesus reads from the Isaiah scroll in the synagogue in Nazareth. The portion of Scripture Jesus quotes is found in Isa. 61:1-2: “The Spirit

⁵ Richard Rohr; Mike Morrell, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation*, (New Kensington: Whitaker House, 2016) Kindle Location 2825 of 4529.

⁶ Rohr; Morrell, Kindle Location 2875 of 4529.

of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” Rohr points out that Jesus stops mid-sentence, ignoring the next eight words from the Isaiah prophecy: “...and the day of vengeance of our God.” He notes that rather than condemning those outside the house of Israel, Jesus points out Old Testament examples of God passing over widows and lepers of Israel to send sustenance and healing to Gentiles. He argues that rather than declaring foreigners to be God’s enemies, Jesus includes them. According to Rohr, the people attempted to throw Jesus off a cliff because they became “so angry at his selective reading.”⁷

Rohr is correct that Jesus did not read the Isaiah prophecy in full. Jesus read the above noted portion and then said, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (verse 21). Jesus is communicating that the primary purpose for his first coming is to bring salvation and hope to the world. John 3:17 supports this idea: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” This does not, however, contradict the idea that the Jewish Messiah would eventually usher in this “day of vengeance.” Jesus didn’t include the entire prophecy in his commentary because the day of vengeance hadn’t happened yet. It wasn’t the prophecy he was fulfilling in the present tense. New Testament scholar Darrell Bock writes, “The ultimate time of God’s vengeance is not yet arrived in this coming of Jesus (9:51–56; 17:22–37; 21:5–37). The deliverance of judgment in God’s plan,

⁷ Rohr; Morrell, Kindle Location 2875 of 4529.

alluded to in the omission, is sorted out later in Luke.”⁸ Bock goes on to explain that this is a part of the “already-not yet tension” of the eschatology found in the New Testament.

Bible scholar Alec Motyer puts it this way: “What Isaiah sees as a double-faceted ministry the Lord Jesus apportions respectively to his first and second comings, the work of the Servant, and of the Anointed Conqueror.”⁹

Jesus did make the point that Gentiles would be included in God’s plan of salvation. However, it’s important to note that this is in harmony with the Scriptures, not in contradiction. The Old Testament is peppered with hints of Gentile inclusion. Gen. 12:3 describes “all the families of the earth” being blessed by Israel. Gen. 18:18 and Gen. 22:18 tell us that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through Abraham. Isa. 42:6 describes Israel as being a “light for the nations.” Isa. 60:10-14 predicts that other nations will bring work, resources, and wealth to Israel. Exod. 12:48-49 gives instructions about how to integrate non-Jews into the community to celebrate the Passover: “If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land.” Num. 9:14, Num. 15:13-16, 1 Kings 8:41-43, and Isa. 56:6-8 all describe Gentiles being welcomed among God’s people when they submit to his rules and worship him alone.

Specific Old Testament examples of Gentiles being included among God’s people are Melchizedek, the non-Jewish worshiper of YHWH (Gen. 14), Moses’ father-in-law Jethro (Exod. 18), and Caleb, a Kenizzite (Num. 32:12). (The Kenizzites were listed among the

⁸ Darrel L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Luke: 2 Volumes*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 166.

⁹ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2015) p. 499

Canaanite tribes in Gen. 15:18-21.) Other examples include Caleb's brother Othniel (Judg. 3:9), Rahab the prostitute (Josh. 2), Jael the Kenite housewife (Judg. 4-5), and Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 1:4). This is not to mention the entire population of Nineveh, who repented after Jonah preached to them (Jon. 3:10). In fact, the case for Gentile salvation is so strong, the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul in Rom. 9:25-26 to quote from Hos. 1:10 and 2:23 to refute those who were opposing God's message: "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.' And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people, there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

Despite Old Testament passages about Gentiles, the Jews of Jesus' day were deeply offended by his suggestion that Gentiles would be included in God's plan. Commenting on the attitude of Jews toward Gentiles in the first century, Bible scholar F.F. Bruce noted, "For centuries the Gentiles had been looked upon by the chosen people, with but few exceptions, as 'vessels of wrath made for destruction'; and certainly, God had 'endured' them 'with much patience'"¹⁰ It is not difficult to imagine, then, why the Jewish crowd reacted with such anger toward Jesus' suggestion that God's mercy would be sent to the Gentiles. Perhaps they were hoping he would continue to quote the Isaiah prophecy and condemn the Gentiles as the victims of "the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa. 61:2) as Rohr suggests. Commentator Leon Morris wrote, "Now that he appealed to God's dealing with Gentiles, that was too much. Anger swept over the whole congregation ('God for the Jews'!) and they set out to lynch Jesus."¹¹

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *Romans: an introduction and commentary*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 191.

¹¹ Leon Morris, *Luke: an introduction and commentary: Vol. 3*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 128.

So, Rohr is correct that Jesus quoted a portion of the prophecy, was making the point that Gentiles would be included in God’s plan, and that the people were angry about it. However, to suggest that Jesus was ignoring or contradicting the Scriptures is erroneous and foreign to the text. Jesus was correcting the Jew’s misunderstanding of the Scriptures, not correcting the Scriptures themselves. Therefore, Rohr’s claim that Luke 4:18-19 is an example of Jesus openly opposing the Scriptures is false.

The second example Rohr offers to support his thesis is from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, chapter 5. He writes, “He [Jesus] begins a series of teachings with, ‘You have heard that it was said...,’ summarizing a key, accepted part of the Law, and contrasting it with ‘But I say to you...,’ bringing his own—often subversive—take on it.”¹²

It is of utmost importance to note the context within which these sayings of Jesus are located. Just before the first “You have heard it said...” statement, Jesus makes a bold claim about the Old Testament Scriptures. Matt. 5:17-18 records Jesus as saying, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” If that isn’t clear enough, in verse nineteen he continues, “Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” The word translated as “fulfill” in English is the Greek word *plērōsai*. New Testament scholar and Matthew commentator R.T. France noted that *plērōsa* is a complicated and nuanced word. He sums up the meaning as,

¹² Rohr; Morrell, *The Divine Dance*, Kindle Location 2887 of 4529.

“Jesus is bringing that to which the Old Testament looked forward; his teaching will transcend the Old Testament revelation, but far from abolishing it, is itself its intended culmination.”¹³ So, Jesus could not be clearer. He has not come to ignore or oppose the Scriptures. He tells us plainly that he came to fulfill the Scriptures, not deny them, even outlining the penalty for teachers who relax the commandments of the Word of God.

Then Jesus goes on to make six statements in the form of, “You have heard it said...But I say to you...” In the first, found in Matt. 5:21, Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.” Here Jesus refers to Old Testament commands regarding murder, but rather than denying them, he makes them even more difficult to uphold. In this way, he is not subverting the Old Testament moral law, but actually strengthening it. While affirming that murder is a sin, Jesus exposes the fact that this sin festers in the heart of every man. His next five statements follow a similar pattern, dealing with the issues of lust (Matt. 5:27-30), divorce (Matt. 5:31-32), taking oaths (Matt. 5:33-36), retaliation (Matt. 5:38-42), and the treatment of enemies (Matt. 5:43-48). Of these six statements, France wrote, “It is in each case more demanding, more far-reaching in its application, more at variance with the ethics of man without God.”¹⁴

The only two statements of the six that could potentially be mistaken as being subversive or in contradiction to the Old Testament are the final two, dealing with retaliation and the treatment of enemies. However, as we’ll see, these supposed contradictions are resolved when we take a deeper look at the context. In Matt. 5:38 Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said,

¹³ R. T. France, *Matthew: an introduction and commentary: Vol. 1* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 120.

¹⁴ France, 123.

‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil.” The Old Testament does teach the concept of “an eye for an eye” in Exod. 21:24, Deut. 19:21, and Lev. 24:20. However, the original intent of the law was not to give individual Israelites permission to exact revenge on their enemies, but to give the authorities the jurisdiction to impose a just sentence. This kept the punishment from exceeding the crime. In other words, it ensured that a just outcome would be secured in the case of a violent dispute.

New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg remarked, “This law originally prohibited the formal exaction of an overly severe punishment that did not fit a crime as well as informal, self-appointed vigilante action. Now Jesus teaches the principle that Christian kindness should transcend even straightforward tit-for-tat retribution.”¹⁵ France noted that by the time of Jesus, financial penalties had replaced physical damages, so Jesus wasn’t necessarily talking physical retribution. Jesus was making the broader point that we should not demand our just due, but should show mercy.¹⁶ So, rather than opposing or denying the Old Testament, Jesus is, once again, calling people to go above and beyond what was technically permitted by Old Testament case law. In a culture in which many Jews were using these Old Testament passages as a free pass to take revenge on their enemies,¹⁷ Jesus calls his audience to an even higher standard.

In Matt. 5:43-44, Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” This statement of Jesus is a bit unique in this series, because in this case, he is not quoting solely from Old Testament Scripture, but rather from the traditions of the Pharisees

¹⁵ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew: Vol. 22*, (Nashville: Broadman & Homan Publishers, 1992), 113.

¹⁶ France, *Matthew: an introduction and commentary*, 130.

¹⁷ S. K. Weber, *Matthew: Vol. 1* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 69.

and scribes. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” is found in Lev. 19:18. But there is nowhere in the Old Testament Scriptures where God instructs his people to hate their enemies. In fact, Prov. 25:21 says, “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.” Exod. 23:4-5 instructs the Israelites to go out of their way to help an enemy when their ox wanders away or is lying helpless under its load. Lev. 19:18 declares that you should not take vengeance but should love your neighbor as yourself. There are complicated passages in which God commands Israel to go to war against an enemy nation, exacting his judgment for their sin (Deut. 7:2), and the Psalmist declares that he hates those who God hates (Ps. 139:21-22). But here, Jesus isn’t denying or opposing the Scriptures; he’s actually denying and opposing the Pharisees’ misinterpretation of the Scriptures. It wasn’t the Scriptures that recommended hating our enemies, but human tradition. Therefore, Rohr’s claim that Matthew 5 illustrates a point in time in which Jesus is ignoring, denying, or openly opposing the Scriptures is, once again, false.

The final two passages of Scripture Rohr proffers to support his thesis are Matt. 12:1-8 and John 5:1-23, both listed without commentary. In the Matthew 12 passage, the Pharisees criticize the disciples for plucking heads of grain to eat on the Sabbath, accusing them of breaking the law. However, the disciples did not break the law. In fact, Deut. 23:25 states of the Sabbath, “If you go into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor’s standing grain.” What the disciples broke was the traditions and misinterpretations the Pharisees had added to the law. Therefore, Jesus did not ignore, deny, or oppose the Scriptures, but rather the interpretations of the Jewish leaders.

In the John 5 passage, Jesus heals a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. He performed this miracle on the Sabbath, which the Jews categorized as breaking the law.

According to the Jewish leaders, healing constituted “work,” which was forbidden on the Sabbath, according to Exod. 20:10: “But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.” But once again, we find Jesus correcting the misinterpretation of the Jewish leaders over what constituted “work.” According to Matthew, this was an example of the Jews “persecuting” Jesus (John 5:16), not an example of Jesus breaking the law. In fact, we find Jesus in complete agreement with the Old Testament Scriptures.

When examined within their cultural and biblical contexts, not one of the passages Rohr offers to support his thesis holds water. Jesus never ignored, denied, or opposed the Scriptures. He held them as being the highest authority and often corrected the religious leaders on their traditions, faulty interpretations, and additions to the Word of God.

What Did Jesus Say About Scripture?

If we are going to look to Jesus to inform our hermeneutics, we should understand what he actually taught about the Old Testament Scriptures, and during his life on earth, he had quite a bit to say. First, he affirmed many times over that the Scriptures are the Word of God. In Matt. 15:3, he chastises the religious leaders for breaking the commandment of God. He continues in verse 4, “For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’” Here he is referring to prophecies from Exod. 20:12, Lev. 19:3, and Deut. 5:16. Notice that Jesus quotes three different Old Testament books and states, “For God commanded.” In Mark 7:8-13, he criticized the Pharisees for leaving “the commandment of God,” and adding their own traditions to Scripture. He told them that they

"void the *word of God* by your tradition." In Matt. 22:31-32, just before quoting Exod. 3:6, he said, "Have you not read what God said to you?" Compare this with the criteria Rohr uses in his "Jesus Hermeneutic," claiming Jesus contradicted Scripture whenever it was "imperialistic, punitive, exclusionary, or tribal." Here in Matthew 13 we have a clear example of Jesus affirming a section of Scripture that is both exclusionary and punitive, by affirming that God commanded the punishment of death for reviling father or mother.

Jesus also indicated that the Old Testament Scriptures were inspired by God. One day, Jesus was teaching a large crowd in the temple courts, and he encountered some Pharisees with whom he had an exchange of words. Jesus appealed to the inspiration of Scripture to help them understand that the Messiah is more than just a descendant of David. He said, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, called him [the Messiah] 'Lord'?" Here Jesus himself gives a definition for divine inspiration. He affirmed that David, along with the other biblical writers, was "speaking by the Spirit" when they wrote Scripture. Biblical scholar John Wenham noted that whenever Jesus said, "It is written," he was also appealing to the inspiration of Scripture. He wrote, "It is clear that Jesus understood 'It is written' to be equivalent to 'God says.'" ¹⁸ In fact, Jesus and his apostles quote the Old Testament by using the phrase "It is written" (or its equivalent) over 90 times in the New Testament. ¹⁹

Jesus also believed that the Old Testament Scriptures are authoritative for Christians as the objective source for truth. When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, he appealed to the authority of the Scriptures to fend off the attack. As God incarnate, Jesus could

¹⁸ John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 28.

¹⁹ Norman L. Geisler; Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 357.

have called down a legion of angels or employed any means of defense to ward off the temptation of the enemy. Instead, he chose to quote Scripture. New Testament scholar Leon Morris notes that when Jesus responds to the devil with “It is written,” this “Points to the reliability and unchangeability of Scripture. For Jesus, to have found a passage in the Bible that bears on the current problem is to end all discussion.”²⁰ Jesus’ high view of the authority of the Scriptures stands in contrast with Rohr’s claim that Jesus ever opposed them.

Jesus also affirmed that the Scriptures were historically reliable. He continually referred to Old Testament characters as actual people who lived in real times and places throughout history. He spoke of Abel (Luke 11:51), Noah (Matt. 24:37-38; Luke 17:26-27), Abraham (John 8:56), Lot (Luke 17:28-29), Isaac (Matt. 8:11), Jacob (Luke 13:28), Moses (John 7:22), David (Matt. 12:3-4; Matt. 22:43; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42), Solomon (Matt. 6:29; Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31; Luke 12:27), Elijah (Luke 4:25-26), Elisha (Luke 4:27), Jonah (Matt. 12:39-42; Luke 11:29-30-32), and Zechariah (Luke 11:51).

He also described events such as the institution of circumcision (John 7:22), the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:15), the miracle of manna (John 6:31), Moses lifting the snake in the wilderness (John 3:14), and David eating shewbread (Matt. 12:3-4, Mark 2:25-26, Luke 6:3-4), as real history. If that were not enough, Jesus affirmed two of the most disputed Old Testament stories. Some skeptics claim that the great flood and the story of Jonah and the whale never actually happened—and yet, Jesus affirmed that both were historical (Matt. 24:37-38, Matt. 12:40). In fact, he compared the historicity of the story of Jonah with the historicity of his own resurrection, a historical event that the Apostle Paul claimed could support or discredit Christianity based on its veracity (1 Cor. 15:14).

²⁰ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 75.

It is also common for skeptics to claim that Daniel could not have really been a prophet because some of his predictions were too accurate to have been written before the events they describe. Jesus affirmed that Daniel was an actual person and a real prophet (Matt. 24:15). In Luke 11:50-51, Jesus described world history as being from “the foundation of the world” to “this generation,” and then paralleled that to the first and last prophets in the Hebrew canon: “From the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah.” This demonstrates that he believed the Scriptures accurately described history and predicted future events.

Jesus also introduced the idea that the Scriptures are inerrant, or without error. In Matthew 22, the Sadducees, a group that did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, tried to trap Jesus with a question about the afterlife. Jesus corrected them in verse 29 by stating, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.” It is clear that Jesus viewed the Scriptures as the inerrant standard for truth by comparing the perfect Word of God with the errant conclusions of the Sadducees. This is further supported by a statement Jesus made when he was about to be stoned by the Jews for claiming to be one with the Father. In John 10:35, he said, “The Scripture cannot be broken,” thus claiming that the Scriptures were the infallible standard for truth. The very statement, “The Scripture cannot be broken” should be sufficient to refute the “Jesus Hermeneutic,” because it demonstrates that Jesus believed the Scriptures were never to be ignored, denied, or opposed.

Jesus also affirmed the idea that God’s Word will never pass away, a common theme found in both the Old and New Testaments. He could not have endorsed this tenet more plainly than he did in the passage we analyzed on page six, which is Matt. 5:17-18. He said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets [the Old Testament]; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For I assure you: Until heaven and earth pass away, not the

smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass from the Law until all things are accomplished.” This speaks to the imperishability of the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus also said, “It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law” (Luke 16:17). Once again, this is Jesus asserting that he did not come to ignore, deny, or oppose the Scriptures, but to fulfill them completely.

Just after his resurrection, we find Jesus on the road to Emmaus where he encountered two of his followers who didn't recognize Him (Luke 24:13-35). They began talking about how disappointed they were that Jesus had been crucified and how they had hoped he would have been the one to redeem Israel. In verse 25 Jesus scolds them for being “slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.” Then verse 27 explains, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” It is important to note that the first thing Jesus wanted these followers to know following his resurrection is that everything Moses and the prophets recorded in Scripture was about him. He placed utmost importance on the reliability of the Old Testament Scriptures and the events they prophesied.

In contradiction to Rohr's “Jesus Hermeneutic,” the Gospels record Jesus himself using language that is highly exclusionary and punitive. Luke 12:51 records Jesus saying, “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.” In Matt. 10:34, Jesus says, “Do not think I came to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” He continues in verses 35-38 that he has come to “set man against his father, and a daughter against her mother.” He describes what life will be like for those who choose to follow him. He predicts that following him will cause enemies to be found in the same household. He

requires believers to deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow him—even going so far as to say that anyone who does not do this is not worthy of him.

In several of the parables Jesus tells that describe his kingdom, he ends with people being excluded. In Matt. 25:1-13, Jesus tells the parable of the ten virgins who were all invited to meet the bridegroom for a marriage feast. Five were wise and brought oil for their lamps, but five were foolish, bringing no oil to replenish their lamps. When the bridegroom came to open the door, the five foolish virgins had gone to buy oil and missed the opportunity to go into the marriage feast. At that point, Jesus explains that the door closed, leaving the foolish virgins excluded from the feast. Even after they came back and pleaded to be let in, the bridegroom sent them away.

In Matt. 25:14-30 Jesus tells the parable of the ten talents, which ends with a similar exclusion of the servant who hid his talent in the ground. In this case, the wicked servant is not only excluded from “entering the joy of your master,” but was cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Just after the parable of the ten talents, Jesus describes the final judgment, in which he will separate people into two groups: sheep and goats. To the sheep on his right, he will say, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” But to the goats on his left, he will say, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Just these three parables alone demonstrate that not only did Jesus never ignore, deny, or oppose the Scriptures whenever they were punitive or exclusionary, he commonly used language himself that was not only exclusionary, with many people being excluded from his kingdom on judgment day, but also punitive, with people being cast into outer darkness and eternal fire.

In addition to using punitive and exclusionary language, Jesus performed punitive and exclusionary acts. In Matt. 21:12-17 and John 2:13-22, He physically drove the money changers out of the temple for making God's house a "den of robbers," even using a hand-made whip, according to John's account. In Luke 10:13-15, Jesus pronounced "woe" on the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for not repenting even after mighty works had been done in them. He compared these cities to Sodom and Gomorrah, which were destroyed by God for their blatant rejection of God's ways and for their immorality. Jesus told them that judgment day would even be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than it would be for them. In the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 7:21-23, Jesus states plainly that not everyone who says to him, "Lord, Lord," will be allowed to enter his kingdom in heaven. To those who do not do the will of his Father in heaven, he will exclude by saying, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

One often overlooked source for Jesus' words is the book of Revelation. In his letter to the church in Pergamum, in Rev. 2:12-17, Jesus urges the Christians to repent for their sin of eating food sacrificed to idols and for their sexual immorality. If they do not repent, Jesus promises to "war against them with the sword of my mouth" (verse 6). To the church in Thyatira, Jesus declares that he will cast the woman Jezebel on a sickbed and strike her children dead for leading Christians into sexual immorality. These are hardly the words of someone seeking to ignore, deny, or oppose anything that is punitive or exclusionary.

Conclusion

Rohr claims that Jesus ignored, denied, or openly opposed his own Scriptures whenever they were imperialistic, punitive, exclusionary, or tribal. The passages of Scripture he uses to

defend this view are Luke 4:18-19, Matthew 5, Matt. 12:1-8, and John 5:1-23. As I have demonstrated, Luke 4:18-19 fails to support Rohr's thesis because Jesus wasn't ignoring the rest of the Isaiah prophecy by ending his reading where he did. In fact, his next statement, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," communicates that he was currently fulfilling the prophecy he had just read. The next part of the Isaiah prophecy would be fulfilled later in history, at his second coming.

The six "You have heard it said...But I say to you..." statements of Jesus in Matthew 5 also fail to support Rohr's point because Jesus was not contradicting Scripture. Rather, he was making the Old Testament commands more difficult to uphold. The final two passages depict Jesus and his disciples being confronted by the religious leaders for breaking the Sabbath. However, according to Old Testament law, they were not breaking the Sabbath, but simply breaking the misinterpretations and traditions the Jews had added to the law. All four passages fail to support the idea that Jesus ever contradicted the Scriptures.

When I investigated what Jesus actually said about Scripture, I found that he affirmed the Old Testament to be the inspired, authoritative, historically reliable, inerrant, infallible, imperishable Word of God that was all about himself. Not only did Jesus never ignore, deny, or oppose Scripture, but he also did and said things that were exclusionary and punitive. He said on more than one occasion that he did not come to bring peace, but a sword, promising that even family members would be divided against each other because of him.

His parables present a picture of his heavenly kingdom that not only excludes people, but also doles out eternal punishment to those who reject him. He physically drove the money changers out of the temple and pronounced "woe" on three cities. In Revelation, he urges Christians to repent for their sins to avoid punishment.

It is clear that Richard Rohr's "Jesus Hermeneutic" not only fails to offer any Scriptural support, but taken as a whole, the biblical data gives us an entirely opposite view of how Jesus handled the Scriptures. If I were to construct an accurate "Jesus Hermeneutic," it would go something like this: "Just interpret Scripture the way Jesus did! He acknowledges, affirms, and openly declares his own Scriptures even when they seem to be imperialistic, punitive, exclusionary, or tribal." The truth is that Jesus never once declared or implied that the Scriptures were anything but fully truthful and should be obeyed.

If a Christian were to adopt Rohr's hermeneutic, they would be left with nothing but their own personal conscience, moral compass, thoughts, feelings, and preferences to guide them as they tried to discover what in Scripture is true and what is false. This would no doubt lead to a God constructed in their own image. But Scripture warns in Jer. 17:9 that the human heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" Christians would be wise to reject Rohr's Jesus Hermeneutic in favor of what Jesus really thought about Scripture: that it is the inspired and authoritative Word of God.