

A Light in the Valley

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

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Rightly Dividing...

by: Kris Brewer

It has been said that a person can use the Bible to prove anything. A person can look to the scriptures and develop a complete doctrine based upon a single passage drawn out of context. Sometimes, several passages can be pieced together, also out of their contexts, and used to develop a whole doctrine. This has been illustrated by putting together passages such as the following:

Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. (Matthew 27:3-5)

... Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:37)

This can be a rather macabre, yet humorous example of misusing passages

to form a faulty conclusion: that Jesus intends for all people to go out and hang themselves! Certainly, no one would seriously make such an argument, but this illustrates the procedure that far too many people go through to defend a position that they hold.

What often happens is that a person will hold a particular belief, and then use the scriptures to support this belief. This is not an indictment against the honesty of those who do this, as it may be done completely innocently or without intent. There are many who may do this without ever realizing that is what they are doing! In fact, most of us may be guilty of taking this approach at one time or another. We certainly would not do it intentionally, but we sometimes develop a deeply held belief that we are convinced is founded in our understanding of scripture, and we then have to try and defend it from those same scriptures. Whether we like it or not, this is a challenge that we all need to

face, and recognize when we are working backwards in our Bible study! Instead of having a position and then seeking to defend it from scripture, we need to examine scripture and then develop our beliefs based on what is written. It can be very difficult for us to shuck off our preconceived notions and beliefs to accept only that which is actually written in the scriptures, and yet that is exactly what God expects us to do! We often ask those we study with to do just that. Are we willing to do so ourselves?

Paul's Admonition...

As Paul wrote to the young evangelist Timothy, he warned him to be very careful with the handling of God's word.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

There is a lot that rides on "rightly dividing the word of truth." By doing so, one can "present [himself] approved to God," and he "does not need to be ashamed." If we fail to handle the word of God correctly, then neither of these descriptions fit us!

Handling the scriptures the right way will mean avoiding agenda driven study. If we are studying scripture to prove what we already believe to be true, or what we hope or desire to be true, then we are studying with an agenda. Such an approach will cause us to express serious fallacies in our study and in our teaching. Chances are, we will find what we are looking for when we start with an agenda!

Respecting Context...

One of the greatest problems that arises when a people are agenda driven in their study is that they will grasp on to any passage that appears to support the doctrine that they have proposed, ignoring the context in which it is found. Several years ago, this was made painfully obvious in an episode of *The West Wing*, a television show that dramatized the workings of the president and his staff. This was a very politically liberal show, and they pushed a very liberal social agenda. One episode was going to force the homosexual agenda, and targeted Bible believers as being ignorant of the very scriptures they appealed to. The character employed to "put the Bible believer in her place" appealed to all manner of Old Testament passages, referencing how God specified that the Israelites were to deal with homosexuality, and then drew parallels to other specific instructions that God gave to the Israelites, such as not wearing clothing made of mixed materials, not eating shellfish,

and punishing disobedient children with death. Of course, no mention was made that these were not Christian beliefs, and the picture was painted that to take such passages as literally applicable today would be ludicrous. Advocates of homosexuality raved about the genius of the response, and clips of that scene still circulate on the internet as a definitive response to Bible believers on the subject.

The problem is, the writers of this scene had no concept of how to respect a context within the scriptures. The passages cited (very loosely) were drawn from the context of the Old Testament, a physical nation that was a theocracy (i.e., Ultimately ruled by God). Many of the principles cited were rescinded under the New Testament covenant. There are no food restrictions or mixed fabric restrictions under the New Covenant. Nor does God give Christians any instruction to punish those who violate His will. That will be His prerogative! This line of argument did not fairly represent Christians, and even more importantly, it did not fairly represent God's written word.

There are many Christians who were incensed by the representation of Bible believers in that episode of *The West Wing*, declaring that the approach to scripture was not sound. Unfortunately, we sometimes commit the exact same fallacy. We turn to passages that seem to support our preconceived notion, and ignore the limitations that context may place on our study.

For example, one cannot cite the blessings that God specifically gave to the children of Israel as a physical nation as being applicable to Christians today, and yet ignore the curses that were also declared in the same passages. If one cites Deuteronomy 7:14 as a blessing applicable to Christians today (that the women would be blessed with fertility), he cannot ignore the remainder of the context that offers many more blessings, like the removal of all sicknesses from among the people. These were the promises made to faithful Israelites for their obedience to God. One cannot ignore the negative side of God's equation either. The curses that were declared were the opposite of the blessings. If one applies, then the other must apply to us as well! We simply cannot ignore the context of these passages!

Recently, the debate over the acceptance or rejection of Syrian refugees to the United States has spurred discussions between many Christians. As with the previous topics, there is room for discussion on what one thinks is the best solution to this issue. However, some have fallen for this same fallacy. One author sought to defend her position for accepting the refugees by compiling a plethora of passages

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Armageddon At Hand?

by: Greg Gwin

Many so-called ‘prophecy experts’ are convinced that political developments in the world today are indicators that the great Battle of Armageddon is about to take place. Armageddon, of course, is described in the Book of Revelation. Many think the description there is of a literal battle between the forces of evil and good. Their thinking is that it will usher in the millennial kingdom of Christ. This is becoming an increasingly popular view.

What about Armageddon? The only place the word is found in the Bible is in Revelation 16:16. It refers to Megiddo, a large hill near the plain of Jezreel. It was well known to inhabitants of the region because of the many battles that had been fought there throughout history. The context has absolutely no reference to an actual future assembly of nations or armies to fight a literal war.

Is the end near? Those who are making predictions about the return of Christ and the end of the world are doing so in direct contradiction to what the Bible says. The Scriptures teach that “the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night” (2 Pet. 3:10), implying that there will be no sign or advanced warning.

What should we do? Considering the present political turmoil in the world, Paul’s instructions seem appropriate: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Tim. 2:1,2). And, of course, constant and faithful service to the Lord is essential so that, whenever the Lord returns, “that day should (not) overtake you as a thief” (1 Thess. 5:4).

***But the day of the Lord
will come as a thief in the
night, in which the heav-
ens will pass away with a
great noise, and the ele-
ments will melt with fer-
vent heat; both the earth
and the works that are in
it will be burned up.***

2 Peter 3:10

“Love” According to Paul

by: Justin Brewer

Studying through 1 Corinthians can be an eye-opening experience in many ways. Throughout this text, we learn much concerning doctrinal issues, proper worship of God, self-denial in non-essential issues, dealing with erring brethren, putting aside pride, not being envious of one another, and many other things. What we find in Corinth is a group of Christians in which pride and an excessive sense of self-worth seems to have taken over; while there were some working hard at getting things correct (the covering, the Lord’s supper, etc), the vast majority seems to have been caught up in their own so-called “knowledge” (also evidenced by the misuse of the covering, the Lord’s supper, etc). Most of all, what we learn is that Paul utilized an array of approaches to deal with the issues within the church, from praising them (1 Corinthians 11:2) to not praising them (1 Corinthians 11:17) to using sarcasm to express his point (1 Corinthians 4:7-8). It seems that in nearly every case in this letter (if not EVERY case), Paul mixes what many people today would consider the positive with the negative (such as in 1 Corinthians 11 where he praises them, yet he still deals with the contentious, or his noting of the brethren seeking to partake of the Lord’s supper in a worthy manner while there is essentially chaos surrounding them in 1 Corinthians 11:19). In other words, Paul does not simply keep the praise separate from the condemnations, nor does he keep the condemnations separate from the praise. Rather, he uses one to juxtapose the other!

Many people in modern America, including Christians, absolutely adore Paul’s description of “love” in 1 Corinthians 13, and with very good reason. Paul paints a picture of “love” in its perfect form; Christians caring for one another, suffering with and for one another, etc. Often, this passage is printed in brilliant calligraphy, but have we considered the context? Yes,

Study Opportunities

Sunday Bible Study: 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship Assembly: 11:00 AM

Meeting At

Homewood Suites of Bozeman
1023 E Baxter Ln,
Bozeman, MT 59715

Everyone Welcome!

Paul absolutely paints a wonderful picture of love, but why does he do so? Why was it necessary in the midst of his discussion concerning spiritual gifts to shift his focus to love? As with the aforementioned examples from 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is mixing the positive (perfect love) with the negative (addressing once again the pride and envy of the Corinthian Christians).

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul discusses the necessity of all spiritual gifts to the establishment of the church in the first century. All spiritual gifts served a purpose, even if they were less desirable by man's standards. It seems likely that the Corinthians had created an arbitrary hierarchy of spiritual gifts, and that they had placed the gift of tongues at the very top of it. This should not be surprising to us since we know that pride was a very serious issue among the brethren there and the ability to speak in a tongue would be apparent to all. However, Paul explains that all gifts were necessary, as were all members of Christ's body who had such gifts. The Corinthians seemed to have lost sight of the reason the gifts were given because they were so focused on obtaining the best spiritual gifts ("best" in their own opinions).

Thus, when we get to 1 Corinthians 13, Paul is showing them that they needed to go back and work on their brotherly love. Note how he ties together many of the previous rebukes into this description of love:

"...love does not envy..." - the Corinthians were envious of the "best" spiritual gifts

"...does not behave rudely..." - the Corinthians had made a mockery of the Lord's supper and disrupted those trying to partake appropriately (1 Corinthians 11:17-34)

"...love does not parade itself, is not puffed up..." - the Corinthians were puffed up in their lack of diligence do put sin away from among them, which they did under the guise of "love" (1 Corinthians 5)

"...does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in truth..." - the Corinthians were at the very least accepting of sins of a sexual nature, if not condoning of it (1 Corinthians 6:12-13)

The list goes on...

And so, what we have in 1 Corinthians 13 is Paul explaining that all the things for which the Corinthians were envious of or over which they were prideful would pass away or would cease to be of use. All the spiritual gifts, whether prophecies, tongues, etc, would fail (cease to be of use), but love would never cease to be of use. God never meant for those things to remain, but He always meant for broth-

erly love to remain, which is what Paul means in 13:10-11; childhood is necessary for proper human development, but eventually you have to stop being a child and become an adult.

While we need to strive to fulfill the depiction of love in chapter 13, we must also remember the context and the purposes for which it was written. This is an instance in which Paul's rebuke is rather subtle, but it is still a rebuke nonetheless, as well as an encouragement to love one another appropriately. Such love is not "unconditional" as the world sees it, but rather it requires accountability.

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from the Old Testament that discussed how the Israelites were to treat strangers among them. She failed, however, to note any of the passages that declared that the Israelites were to slaughter all of their enemies, leaving no one alive (Deuteronomy 7:1-8, 20:16-20). She also failed to note that all of these Old Testament passages were written to a physical nation, which had to make specific policies, or implement God's policies, for a that physical nation. Such instruction is not applicable for a spiritual nation, which has no real control over the physical nation in which they happen to live!

"But," some say, "the New Testament tells us that the Old Testament was written for our learning!" That is indeed what Paul wrote in Romans 15:4. What we need to keep in mind is that there is a difference between learning something in principle from the Old Testament (i.e., "for our learning") and drawing specific practices from those passages (i.e., drawing our authority from the Old Testament). We can, for example, learn that children should be taught to honor their parents, but we do not learn that we are to stone a child which is not obedient. We can learn to love our neighbor as ourselves, but we cannot learn how to implement some national policy on immigration. When we try to force specific practices from the context of the Old Testament, we do a disservice to the scriptures!

We have a responsibility to "rightly divide the word of truth." With that responsibility comes a warning of great caution. We need to make sure that we are only taking what God intends from the scripture, and not looking to scripture just to prove the conclusion we already have in our minds. Sometimes it is difficult to leave our prejudices behind, but we have an obligation to do so!

Daily Bible Reading

January 2016

January 1	Psalms 1-6	January 18	Psalms 41-44
January 4	Psalms 7-10	January 19	Psalms 45-48
January 5	Psalms 11-16	January 20	Psalms 49-51
January 6	Psalms 17-18	January 21	Psalms 52-55
January 7	Psalms 19-22	January 22	Psalms 56-59
January 8	Psalms 23-25	January 25	Psalms 60-63
January 11	Psalms 26-29	January 26	Psalms 64-67
January 12	Psalms 30-32	January 27	Psalms 68-69
January 13	Psalms 33-35	January 28	Psalms 70-72
January 14	Psalms 36-37	January 29	Psalms 73-74
January 15	Psalms 38-40		

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