

The Danger of “Proof-Texting”

Barry O'Dell

Please, read and understand the following definition before you go any further! Proof-texting is defined as “*the practice of using isolated, out-of-context quotations from a document to establish a proposition in eisegesis.*” Here are some examples of how people proof-text with the Bible. “*John 3:16 says that we are saved when we believe in Jesus.*” “*Ephesians 2:8-9 doesn't say anything about being baptized - just grace and faith.*” On and on the examples could go! The definition given above includes the word *eisegesis* which means, “*the process of interpreting a text in such a way as to introduce one's own presuppositions, agendas, or biases.*” This is the danger of proof-texting. Man is not permitted to introduce his own biases into the word of God (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19) and to do so is the height of arrogance! At the same time, however, we must do all things “in the name of the Lord” (Col. 3:17). We must “speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). In other words, we must have Bible for what we teach and practice. So, how is that accomplished? How can we use the Biblical text without proof-texting?

There are 66 books in the Bible - 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New. Questions must be asked when studying each. Who was the author? Who were the recipients? What was the occasion of writing? When was it written? What genre of literature is this book? If these simple questions are not answered, the danger of proof-texting can creep in. Another concept that must be understood and applied in Bible study is found in Psalm 119:160. The KJV reads, “*Thy word is true from the beginning...*” The NKJ renders it, “*The entirety of Your word is truth...*” In other words, if a person were studying about salvation, he would need to consider all that the Bible has to say about that subject - not just one or two verses. Consider this: the Bible states that man is “*justified by faith*” (Rom. 5:1) while at the same time saying, “*by works a man is justified, and not by faith only*” (Jas. 2:24). Which is it? The proof-texter might agree

“God does not need my presuppositions, agendas, or biases!”

with Romans 5:1, but then James 2:24 contradicts what he believes. Biblically, all men are saved by faith, but no man can be saved by faith only. The New Covenant of Christ tells us also that “*baptism doth also now save us*” (1 Pet. 3:21). That is not a contradiction to Romans 5:1 or James 2:24. When studying God's word, we must take the totality of Scripture on a subject and not just a verse from here and there.

When Paul went to Thessalonica we are told that he went into the synagogue of the Jews and *reasoned* with them from the Scriptures (Acts 17:2). The Greek word for *reasoned* is where we get the English word *dialogue*. He had a back-and-forth with his hearers and he *opened* and *alleged* from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ (v. 3). The child of God today must be able to have a dialogue with people, from the Scriptures, about the Christ! He must know *how* to do that! The only way to have an effective discussion about God's word is through thorough study and by not pulling verses out of their context in an effort to prove a point. God's word is living and powerful (Heb. 4:12). The gospel is God's power for salvation (Rom. 1:16). The law of the Lord is perfect (Ps. 19:7). Man does not need to misuse and abuse it by proof-texting. God does not need my presuppositions, agendas, or biases! Peter wrote of those who would twist the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16). The cure for that terrible sin is to grow in our knowledge of God's word (2 Pet. 3:18).

Properly Using the Old Testament

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Why study the Old Testament? We know that the Law of Moses is no longer binding (Col. 2:14). We also understand that only the gospel of Christ has the power to save a person from sin (Rom. 1:16). So, why not dedicate all our time to the study of the New Testament? In order to properly understand the New Testament a person must first be able to discern the Old Testament. The apostle Paul stressed to the church at Rome the need to understand the Old Law. He wrote, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Failure to distinguish between the Old and New Covenants is one of the greatest sources of error in the denominational world.

In Paul's second letter to the young evangelist, Timothy, he stressed the importance of studying both the Old and New Testament. The apostle wrote, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16). The word *inspired* (God breathed) is never used in the Bible in reference to a purely human document. It is used principally in the New Testament in reference to the Old Testament writings (1 Tim. 5:17-18). Timothy did not have a New Testament from which to read and study, but Paul said that from childhood Timothy had known the Holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15). How did the study of the Old Testament help Timothy to develop faith in Jesus? The answer: "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24).

Those who properly understand the Old Testament know that Jesus is found throughout its pages. Concerning the prophesied Messiah, Philip proclaimed to Nathaniel, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets wrote" (John 1:45). Jesus also used the Old Testament to prove He was the Christ. Regarding the Lord's ministry Luke wrote, "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Lu. 24:27).

In order to properly use the Old Testament one must first accurately understand its message. It is more important to understand God's plan of salvation than it is

to win a trivial pursuit game by answering the most Bible fact questions. The Bible is a book of progressive development. Anyone taking a random approach in studying the Old Testament, without a basic understanding of its historical progression, will be confused. There is a reason Genesis is the first book and Malachi is the last. God planned the layout of His writings. Genesis, the first book of the Bible, is a book of beginnings: The beginning of earth and outer space (Gen. 1:1). The beginning of biological and human life (Gen. 1:26-27). The beginning of sin and death (Rom. 5:12). The beginning of an answer to sin (Gen. 3:15). Every book of the Old Testament points directly or indirectly toward the coming of the Lord. Old Testament scholars refer to this as "Christological thrust," or, "Christ centered." Understanding this flow allows a person to comprehend God's plan of redemption through Jesus which involved the Hebrew nation. To properly study the Old Testament one must understand that we do not live under the legislation of the Old Covenant. But, it is invaluable in understanding man's need for a Savior and provides prophetic proof concerning His identity.

The Old Testament can be divided into four divisions: Law (5 books), History (12 books), Poetry (5 books), and Prophecy (17 books).

These 39 books span a history of approximately 3,600 years. Most of the Old Testament is a record of the relationship between God and the Hebrew nation. God promised Abraham, the first Hebrew (Gen. 14:13), that he would be the father of a great nation and that through his seed the Savior of the world would be born (Gen. 22:18; Mat. 1:1). From the time man sinned until the day Jesus was born approximately 4000 years passed. Why did God wait so long to send a Savior into the world to redeem man from his sin? The apostle Paul tells us that "the fullness of time" had to come (Gal. 4:4). That is, when everything was exactly right by God's timing, Jesus would be born. In man's journey through time his understanding of sin, and therefore a need for a Savior, matured. God also addressed the Gentile nations during this time frame proving He cared for all people. The Gentiles would eventually be grafted into the family of God (Rom. 9-11). This would occur during the Christian dispensation. The Old Testament should be loved and studied. The best place to start in your study of the Old Testament is "in the beginning" (Gen. 1:1).

***"Wherefore the law was our
schoolmaster to bring us unto
Christ, that we might be
justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24)***

New Testament - Law or Love Letter? John Sales - Dexter church of Christ - Dexter, KY

For far too long the question asked in the title has puzzled many. As in all things of a spiritual nature, let us strive to learn and apply Bible answers to Bible questions. Let us put off preconceived notions, opinions, and doctrines of man and rush head and heart towards that inspired word which is able to save the soul. Let us begin in the Old Testament. One cannot grasp or understand the New without a working knowledge of the Old (Rom. 15:4). Isaiah 2:1-4 prophesied of a new law that would come out of Zion and a new word from the Lord that would go forth from Jerusalem. Very quickly we can deduce that this cannot be a reference to the Law of Moses, as it was brought in at Mt. Sinai. This first law, a law of sin and death, was given in the wilderness. The new law spoken of by Isaiah is one of peace and life and its place of origin was Jerusalem. Luke wrote of this same law in 24:46-49. Consider Luke 24:47, *“that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”* But even then, this new law, was yet in the future. Hence, in Luke 24:49 Jesus, after clearing up any question of authority, gave the eleven the command to tarry in Jerusalem until they would be “endued with power (authority) from on high.” This is also spoken of in John 16:7-13.

Next, consider Acts 1:8, *“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”* Remember Isaiah 2:1-4 - the location is right, the time is right, and the new law was about to come. Acts 2:4 records the pouring out of the Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus and prophesied by Joel. Upon being accused of drunkenness, Peter referenced Joel’s prophecy (Acts 2:14-21). The crowd heard the gospel, was cut to the heart, *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:38). Notice verse 41, *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”* And the account does not end there! In the following verses we see that they “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, and in fellowship and in the breaking of bread and in prayers.”

“Law is not without love, nor is love without law, because God is just.”

They “continued daily with one accord,” there was a “singleness of heart” as they praised God even growing in favor of all the people (Acts 2:42-47). There are no coincidences in scripture. There is a very distinct reason Luke waits till now to mention their addition to the church. Those of whom we have been reading heard, believed, repented, confessed, and were baptized. They then continued in the doctrine given by the apostles. They were in fellowship one with another, both in the breaking of bread as well as in singleness of heart. This new law, the Messianic age, the kingdom of Christ and His church was no longer in the stage of prophecy. It was ushered in, proclaimed, and began right where Isaiah told us it would. Over and over in the book of Acts we see the giving and obeying of the new law (2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1; 8:6; 12:24). These terms are non-negotiable and binding. Indeed there is a new law! A new command. The old law was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14) Christ fulfilled the Old (Matt. 5:17) Jesus took away the first in order to establish the second (Heb. 10:9).

We should be thankful and shout from the rooftops concerning the love of God in the bringing in of this new covenant/law. Not a law given to Moses for a particular physical nation, but a perfect law given by the apostles. They spoke by the authority of the Holy Spirit and we can understand it boldly and without confusion. Also, we cannot fail to mention that this new law is not written on tablets of stone, but in the hearts of men. It is a law of faith (Rom. 3:27) It is the law of Christ (Gal. 6:1-2). We today are under it (1 Cor. 9:21). As Paul wrote, if we are to be among those who desired “to be complete,” we must walk by the same rule/standard (Phil. 3:15-16). Law is not without love, nor is love without law because God is just. Solomon wrote, *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole of man”* (Ecc. 12:13). Man has not changed. God has not changed, but His law has. However, we have assurance that His law will not change again (Heb. 1:1-2; 13:8). The question is, are you willing to change? Be a doer, and not just a hearer (Matt. 7:21-23; Lk. 8:19-21; Jas. 1:22-25). The New Testament is both law and a love-letter. I am thankful beyond words for it and that I can obey it. All made possible by the love of God and the sacrifice of my Lord.

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- **Lord's Supper** (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-24); **Prayer** (Acts 12:5; Phil. 4:6-7)
- **Vocal music only** (Eph. 5:19; Heb. 13:15); **Giving** (1 Cor. 16:1-2)
- **Preaching** (Acts 2:42; 20:7)

The Churches of Christ

- Bible only (Rom. 1:16; 2 Pet. 1:3); Name of Christ (Rom. 16:16)
 - Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18); Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
 - Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Body of Christ and Christ alone is the Head and Savior (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23)
 - Added to the church today just as in the 1st century (Acts 2:41, 47)

Salvation

- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
 - Hear, belief, baptism (Acts 18:8)
 - Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
 - Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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