

The Pitfalls of Biblical Misinterpretation, Part 3

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 2:17

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If you believe the Bible is God's Word—that it's His revelation of Himself and His plan for redeeming sinners, and that it supplies all the instruction and encouragement believers need for life, spiritual growth, and godliness—then getting the message right is of the highest importance.

However, the emphasis in many churches has shifted away from careful, disciplined Bible study to more intuitive and internal methods of spiritual formation. People who profess to love the Lord treat His truth carelessly, or disregard it altogether. Others simply lack the training and wisdom to get beyond the most basic, surface understanding of God's Word.

Over the past few days, we've been looking at some key mistakes people make when it comes to interpreting and understanding God's truth, and today we want to look at one more. In order to get the message of Scripture right, **don't spiritualize or allegorize unless the text itself calls for it**. Some people use the Bible as a flexible fable to back up some point or platform they want to put across. Instead of seeking the true meaning of Scripture, they make it an allegory to support whatever they want to teach.

An extreme example of the perils of allegorizing is the young couple that came to one of our assistant pastors to get counseling about their marital problems. He began talking with them, and after about thirty minutes he asked them, "Why did you ever get married? You are miles apart!"

"Oh" said the husband. "It was the sermon the pastor preached in our church."

"And what was it?"

"Well, he preached on Jericho."

"Jericho! What does that have to do with marriage?"

"Well, he said that God's people claimed the city, marched around it seven times, and the walls fell down. He said if a young man believed God had given him a certain young girl, he could claim her, march around her seven times, and the walls of her heart would fall down. So that's what I did, and we got married."

"That can't be true," said our assistant pastor. "You're just kidding, aren't you?"

"No, it's true," said the husband. "And there were many other couples who got married because of the same sermon!"

Some people believe their marriages were made in heaven. Here was a marriage made in an

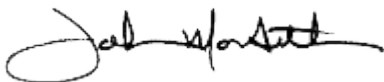
allegory—and a silly one at that!

That kind of interpretation has gone on since the early days of the church, and it continues today. A well-known charismatic preacher did a sermon series on the book of Nehemiah. As he taught, just about everything in the book represented something else or meant something symbolic. These are among his points:

- Jerusalem's walls were in ruin, and that speaks of the broken-down walls of the human personality.
- Nehemiah represents the Holy Spirit, who comes to rebuild the walls of human personality.
- And when the pastor got to the king's pool (Nehemiah 2:14), he said it referred to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and from there he went on to teach the importance of speaking in tongues.

The book of Nehemiah has *nothing* to do with the walls of human personality, the baptism of the Spirit, or speaking in tongues. But when a preacher reads that kind of application into the story, some people think it is marvelous Bible teaching. I say it isn't. It's hucksterism. It makes the Bible say what we want in place of what God is saying to us (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:17).

The real danger of that kind of teaching is that it teaches believers to use the same approach in their personal study. It robs God's Word of its true meaning, supplanting the original intent with all kinds of freewheeling, unhinged interpretations. It treats Scripture as if it can mean anything and everything. That kind of approach cuts you off from the original, objective meaning of God's truth, and therefore cuts you off from the true source of spiritual growth.



(Adapted from [Charismatic Chaos](#).)

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