

The Pitfalls of Biblical Misinterpretation, Part 1

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:15

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Whenever you're speaking on behalf of someone else, it's important to get the message right. Even in simple matters, accuracy is critical. Forgotten details and sloppy summaries can lead to confusion, mistakes, and frustration.

In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul exhorts Timothy to be careful to get God's message right: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth." Clearly, handling Scripture involves diligence and care. It must be treated accurately. Those who fail to do so will be ashamed.

Over the next few days, I want to bring to your attention some common mistakes people make when it comes to interpreting God's Word.

First, God's people must **refrain from making a point at the price of proper biblical interpretation**. It is easy—and often tempting—for a pastor or teacher to sneak a foreign meaning into a text to get a desired response. Even in your personal Bible study, it can be tempting to contort Scripture to fit the point you want it to make.

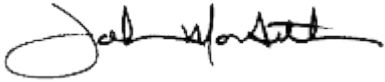
A good illustration of that error is found in the Talmud (commentaries on the Jewish Scriptures). A rabbi is trying to convince people that the primary issue in life is concern for human beings. He uses the stones of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 to support his contention, telling us that the builders of the tower were frustrated because they put material things first and people last. As the tower grew taller, it took several hours to carry a load of bricks to the bricklayers working at the top. If a man fell off the tower on the way down, no one paid any attention—it was only a workman who was lost. But if he fell off on the way up, they mourned because the load of bricks was lost too. That, said the teacher, is why God confused their language—because they failed to give priority to human beings.

That teaching simply cannot be found in the Bible. In fact, it completely skews the lesson of Genesis 11. While it is true that people are more important than bricks, that's not the point of the Tower of Babel. That chapter says nothing whatsoever about the importance of people over bricks. The point is that *God* is more important than *idols*, and that He judges idolatry. Babel was a judgment on proud men who were defying God.

It is never good, right, or helpful to come up with a message—even a good one—by ignoring the real lesson and intent of a passage of Scripture. Reaching a conclusion about a passage without intensely examining its context essentially says to others that you don't think it means anything apart from the insight, wisdom, and cleverness you bring to it. In fact, that's not true interpretation, since it ignores rather than investigates the author's original intent.

Just as hunting and pecking through Scripture can't produce mature believers, twisting it to fit and support a predetermined point robs God's Word of its true, sanctifying power.

Tomorrow we'll look at another interpretive pitfall—superficiality.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joel Osteen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a stylized "O".

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

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