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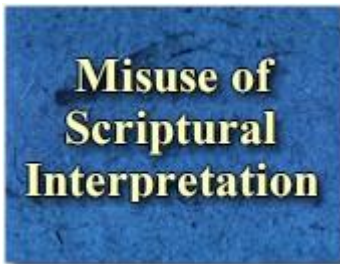
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Misuse of Scriptural Interpretation

by Ernest L. Martin, Ph.D., 1978¹

Edited by David Sielaff, July 2023

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A great injustice is often done to the biblical revelation by some who claim to be its friends. Gross and glaring malpractices are used to interpret the Bible. It is no wonder critics scoff at what Scripture is supposed to teach. Many major misinterpretations are simple to correct, yet vast numbers of preachers and laity refuse to give up their erroneous ways. They energetically persist in them, and the result is mass confusion. However, most of the teachings of the Bible are so straightforward and uncomplicated that a child can understand them. The information in this article may change your approach to studying the Bible.

The Bible is a book of teachings. Each of its writings was produced to convey various divine principles which were thought necessary for readers to understand. They were reckoned as messages from God, inspired by His Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible itself is a compilation of writings regarded by early Christian communities as divine scripture. The Protestant world normally accepts 66 books as found in the King James Bible to be the official canon for Christian teaching. [See Dr. Martin's "[Restoring the Original Bible.](#)" DWS]

From these books all doctrinal, moral, prophetic, and ethical principles were written to reflect God's wishes for mankind to follow. This is certainly the position of fundamentalist believers. What is perplexing is the fact that there are literally hundreds of conflicting denominational beliefs on almost all issues. There is one Bible, but it seemingly spawns countless teachings that are often contradictory to one another. Why is this? Is there a way out of the confusion?

I do not claim to have infallible answers to all subjects of the Bible. But one principle we do know, and have constantly tried to adopt it into our study of the Bible is this: let the words speak to you as intended. A great deal of clarity would come on the scene if two simple but related educational truths are put into action.

- The **FIRST** truth is that one must find out to whom the message is directed; or whom the teaching is supposed to instruct. This is the most crucial factor to comprehending what the Bible really means.
- The **SECOND** truth is related to the first. Always follow the context of the writer! Whatever one does, do not interject another context from some other part of the Bible (or from some other source),

¹ This article was originally published in 1978 when Dr. Martin was Director of the Foundation For Biblical Research. DWS

into the context of the subject being studied!

These two points are of fundamental importance! These two methods of education are being aggressively abused today — and have been abused over the centuries. People think nothing of recklessly applying to themselves scriptures never intended for them, and quite frequently we find preachers and lay teachers wrenching verses from their contexts to support private opinions of their own. It is no wonder that such a hodge-podge of interpretations is found in the Christian world today.

Some Examples

Look at a verse that hardly anyone at present uses correctly. It is from the third epistle of John:

“Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers.”

• 3 John verse 2

In almost all fundamentalist circles, those who practice the laying on of hands for healing, this scripture is used to prove that God wishes each Christian on earth today to be in [good] health and to have prosperity. The truth is, however, not every Christian is experiencing both circumstances — neither health nor prosperity in some cases. It is evident that many are ill and quite a number are poor of material goods (which this verse is talking about). By the indiscriminate use of this section of Scripture by preachers, they have actually come to make out God, supposedly, to be a liar!

But if one looks closely at this verse, not even God is always wishing people to be in [good] health and to prosper. That is right! If a person simply reads what the text says, and believes it, then the proper interpretation would be available for all in the world to benefit. It plainly says that it was John the apostle (not God in this case) who wished his friend Gaius (not me, you, or anyone else) to be in [good] health and prosperity. That is what it says and that is the simple meaning to the verse. The statement has absolutely nothing to do with some kind of general promises to all Christians for all time.²

What a travesty of justice to the words of John when we try to make him mean something that he never intended, and stretch meanings to include others the writer did not have in mind. The procedure is not only wrong, but also not being fair with the biblical revelation. Yet such methods of interpretation are used on a wide scale today. No wonder there is such confusion and contradictory teaching about what the Bible is supposed to say to its readers. The Bible is not at fault. The blame belongs on those who utilize such fallacious practices.

I do not apologize for belaboring our discussion of the issue, because if there is anything that needs emphasizing, it is the error of this false type of teaching that permeates Christian indoctrination today. Such inaccurate methods of instruction need to be quickly eliminated from the pulpits, Sunday and Sabbath schools, seminaries, and universities over the Christian world. The trouble is the error is usually not obvious at all to the very ones who utilize it the most: preachers and Christian lay teachers. This is a sad thing, but it is true.

A Prime Example of Misuse

Let us now look at other scriptures that are often used as applying to all individuals professing Christianity though the Bible makes no such claim.

² Note also what the apostle Paul wrote to the *ekklesia* at Philippi that was undergoing great persecution from the city and provincial officials. Philippians 1:29–30:

“For unto you it is given on the behalf of Christ,

[1] not only to believe on Him, but

[2] also to SUFFER for His sake;

Having the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.”

See also Dr. Martin’s article “[The Use and Abuse of the Holy Scriptures.](#)” DWS

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believes on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father.

And whatsoever you shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask any thing in My name, I will do it.”

• *John 14:12–14*

All of us are familiar with these promises given by Christ to the eleven apostles (Judas, the twelfth apostle who betrayed him, was not in His presence when Christ gave these promises to the others). And there is one point that needs to be made! The promises from the full context of John chapter 13:31 to 17:26 were intended **ONLY FOR THOSE ELEVEN APOSTLES!** They were not given to me, you, or anyone else! This is an important distinction that must always be kept in mind if one hopes to know what the teaching and responsibilities from Christ entail.

If one would simply pay attention to the context which the biblical author reveals (and restrict the application to that context and subjects being discussed), no problems of interpretation would emerge. But most people are not content with that. They want every one of the promises to those particular eleven individuals to have direct reference to them also. It is an egotism that has the effect of **“making God out a liar”** even when Christ was telling the truth without the slightest error being shown.

When Christ said: **“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believes on me ...”** He did not mean EVERYONE INDISCRIMINATELY WHO WOULD BELIEVE ON HIM! He meant [paraphrasing]:

“... (each one of you eleven apostles,) if any of you truly believes on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works shall you eleven do, because I go to my Father. And whatsoever you eleven shall ask in My name, that will I do for you, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

If any of you eleven shall ask in My name, that will I do for you, [why?] that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

If any of you eleven shall ask anything in My name, I will do for you” (John 14:12–14).

That is the proper teaching of Christ in a nutshell, as far as the five chapters of John 13:31 to 17:26 are concerned. Look how plain and sensible (and understandable) the whole matter becomes when this simple truth is recognized. Other “difficult” scriptures that all Christians have struggled with (because they did not apply to every Christian), can now become unmistakably clear.

“And in that day you [you eleven apostles] shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever you [eleven apostles] shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you [to you eleven apostles]. Hitherto have you [eleven apostles] asked nothing in My name: ask, and you [eleven apostles] shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

• *John 16:23–24*

Notice what most Christians have done today. They have appropriated to themselves all of those promises given specifically to those eleven men. Preachers have often said to every Christian they talk to: “You can pray for whatever you want, and Christ has said He will answer you.” Christ said nothing of that kind! He did say that those eleven men back at that time could ask for anything in order to accomplish their responsibilities (as long as their requests were in the name of Christ), but Christ did not give that type of authority to every Christian at that time — or for all Christians at any time!

A Modern Illustration

It should be easily seen why so much confusion enters the doctrinal field when people start applying to themselves things that belong to others. Imagine what this means if we use a modern illustration. Let us say that the Chairman of the Board of Sears & Roebuck Company appoints eleven new vice-presidents to take the sales campaign of Sears into various parts of the world. The Chairman could gather them together to explain that he will be behind their efforts 100% to do the job that needs to be done.

He could say “whatsoever you shall ask in my name will I do” — just as Christ told his eleven apostles in John 14:13. Now, what does that word “whatsoever” mean? Does it signify that they will obtain every and anything that might come to their minds? Could they have their heart’s desires?

The point is those eleven vice-presidents would have enough sense to realize that the Chairman of the Board meant they could be given anything in the Chairman’s power in order to carry out the jobs assigned to them. In no way did the Chairman mean that each of them could ask for ten Rolls Royce automobiles or something similar. What would that have to do with carrying out their work for which they were being paid?

Suppose one of the vice-presidents was unmarried and met a nice woman he liked very much but she did not care too much for him. Does it mean he could go to the Chairman of the Board and say, “try to influence this woman to care for me?” Is that what the Chairman meant when he said, “whatever you ask, I will do it”? Of course not! It ought to be obvious that the “whatever” refers only to the work to which the Chairman employed them. It did not reach outside those boundaries!

And so it is with Christ when He appointed His eleven apostles to the task of evangelizing the world back at that time. He meant that whatsoever they thought was essential in order to carry out their mission, all they had to do was to ask Him and He would do as they requested. That was what those five chapters in John’s Gospel (John chapters 13 to 17) meant! They were instructions and promises to those eleven apostles for their particular assignments.

The vast majority of preachers and students of the Bible are not content with this plain teaching of Christ. They have the childish (actually absurd) opinion that every one of Christ’s commands to those eleven apostles are theirs as well. That is like 10,000 customers of Sears & Roebuck appropriating to themselves instructions that the Chairman of the Board gave only to his eleven regional vice-presidents. No doubt the 10,000 would probably want the same salary and benefits that those vice-presidents also have. But this is wrong!

Notice! Christ (the Chairman of the Board of the family of God) picked eleven men back at that time to do a job (the number was again increased to twelve with the admission of Matthias — Acts 1:26). They were promised that “**whatsoever you shall ask in my name**” (John 14:13) to carry out their task would have afforded them at that time. And as a reward for their earthly efforts, they would be able at a later time, to sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28).

Yet, people today are not only usurping the specific jobs designed only for those apostles, but some may even want to sit on one or more of those twelve thrones reserved for them in the Millennium. There are literally millions of Christians being told by preachers that they have all the same roles as the early apostles. What nonsense! In no way is this true.

Look at what has happened. There is the command of Christ found in Mark 16:15–18. I quote it in full, because it is so often used today as a command for present day preachers and Christian laity to accomplish. You are no doubt familiar with the emphasis being placed on it today.

“And he said unto them,

‘Go YOU into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He [of YOU] that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but HE that believes not shall be damned.

And these signs shall follow THEM THAT BELIEVE; In my name shall

they cast out devils;

they shall speak with new tongues;

they shall take up serpents; and if

they drink any deadly thing,

it shall not hurt them;

they shall lay hands on the sick,

and they shall recover.’”

• Mark 16:15–18

How many times have you heard this specific command of Christ being applied to the generality of Christian people today? You have heard it scores (really hundreds) of times! Many have probably never heard it applied otherwise. It is a common assumption that these commands of Christ refer to every Christian who has ever

lived, and especially to the leaders of the Christian church. There are only a few lone voices crying in the wilderness telling people the simple truths about this matter. Most do not want to hear the truth that is so evident if one will but read what the biblical revelation says.

Let us note the context of Mark 16:15–18 carefully! It could be startling to some who may be new to [ASK], but it is time that the simple truths be made known. The first verse is an introductory statement of Christ to the apostolic commission. (Note that Matthias had not yet been elected to fill out the number to twelve.)

“Afterward He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, [Why?] because THEY BELIEVED NOT THEM which had seen Him AFTER He was risen.”

• **Mark 16:14**

Yes, some of the apostles themselves disbelieved the report of Christ’s resurrection. And Christ countered them with a stinging rebuke, yet at the same time He gave them one of the most outstanding commissions ever given to eleven mortal men!

Let me make clear what Christ actually told His own apostles when He said:

“HE THAT BELIEVES [of you eleven disciples] and IS BAPTIZED [of the Holy Spirit] shall be saved; but HE [of you eleven] THAT BELIEVES NOT shall be damned [condemned].

And these signs shall follow THEM [you eleven] THAT BELIEVE; In my name shall they [of you eleven] cast out devils ...”

• **Mark 16:16–17**

True, there will be some who will dispute this interpretation, but the context shows that it is the apostles who were disbelieving (note the prologue in verse 14 which gave rise to the command). Christ was saying that if each of the eleven start believing, they will see marvelous signs and wonders in their ministries.

The apostles were then living in what they considered to be **“the end of the age”** — upon those of that generation **“upon whom the ends of the world [eons in Greek, ages in English] are come”** (1 Corinthians 10:11).

1 Corinthians 10:11	Commentary
“Now all these things happened <u>unto them</u>	the historical events of the PAST that happened to the people in the Old Testament
for examples:	to those in Paul’s day, and to us by extension
and they are written for our admonition,	in the Old Testament
upon whom the <u>Ends</u>	“Ends” is PLURAL in Greek
of the <u>world</u>	“world” (singular in English) is <u>the plural Greek word “eons”</u>
<u>are come.</u>”	present tense, in Paul’s time

Even the apostle John said in his first epistle (before they were aware of the fullness of biblical chronology): **“We know that it is the last time [hora, “hour” in Greek]”** (1 John 2:18).

The appearance of Christ back in the 1st century AD was considered by the early Christians as **“the end of the world [eons, ages]”** (Hebrews 9:26). There was no epochal period more significant to them! It is not so much what we moderns think of the matter, but to the early apostles and the generality of Christians it was truly **“the end of the world”** [Greek, *eons*] back in the 1st century AD.

With this in mind, notice the parallel commission given by Christ to His eleven apostles recorded in

Matthew 28:16–20. It is important enough to reproduce the full commission to those eleven after His resurrection from the dead.

“Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but SOME DOUBTED [Yes, some of the eleven apostles still did not believe, as the Gospel of Mark states]. And Jesus came and spoke unto them [only to the eleven], saying,

‘All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

- [1] **Go you therefore, and**
- [2] **teach all nations,**
- [3] **baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]:**
- [4] **Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world [*eon*, age, singular]. Amen.”**

• **Matthew 28:16–20**

What a remarkable statement! Christ was to be WITH THOSE ELEVEN unto the end of the age! What is not understood by the vast majority of people today is that the early Christians believed that **“an end of the age”** took place in the 1st century! Of course, it was not the end of the world system that continued from pre-Christian times unto the present, but within the 1st century the culmination of a major (and profound) “age” took place! There can be no doubt that this was the belief of the early Christians. And we believe the year that the age ended — and another began — was 63 AD!

We do not want to be utterly dogmatic about the matter because it could well have been a year before or the year following, but there can hardly be a doubt that the history of the period, both from the New Testament and secular records, will show that near the year 63 AD, the apostles and early Christians considered **“an end of the age”** to have occurred.³

The point I wish to make is that the eleven apostles (later increased with Matthias to twelve) believed Christ would give them the unqualified power and authority to preach the Gospel to the world until the **“end of the age”** would occur. **“And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world [*eon*, age, singular]”** (Matthew 28:20). Indeed, Christ was with them, and Paul and Barnabas, **“until the end of the age”** — which occurred near 63 AD.

The Commission Was Fulfilled

So, what did those apostles (with Paul and Barnabas) do? In that thirty-year period, they carried the Gospel to the world that was assigned to them. They did it thoroughly and completely. If anyone has any doubt about the matter, one should listen to the testimony of the Bible.⁴ ... [The year] 63 AD was a most important year for understanding early Christian expectations regarding the time for the Second coming of Christ to this earth.

When all of this historical and prophetic understanding is comprehended, we can see that “The Great Commission,” which so many appropriate to themselves today, was completely fulfilled within the generation following Christ’s death on the tree of crucifixion — by the year 63 AD! Recall what the apostle Paul said to the Colossians in 63 AD about the preaching of the Gospel that was commanded of the eleven (later twelve) apostles — with Paul — that they were to take the Gospel **“to every creature [creation]”** (Mark 16:15). Paul considered the commission finished and completely fulfilled.

³ Dr. Martin’s later research confirmed 63 AD as the year that a transition occurred of an end to one eon, and the beginning of another. See my February 2018 Commentary, [“How the Eons Were Made”](#) and my article, [“When The Eons Began.”](#)

⁴ See Dr. Martin’s 1979 article [“The Expectation of Christ’s Second Coming in Apostolic Times,”](#) updated in 2003, DWS

“... the gospel, which you have heard, and which was preached TO EVERY CREATURE [the exact and precise phrase as found in the Great Commission of Mark 16:15] which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister.”

• **Colossians 1:23**

The command to the original apostles to preach the Gospel to all nations was fulfilled back in the 1st century — by the year 63 AD! It was meant for the Gospel to be preached to all the nations Christ intended it to go. And it went to all those nations! Even the apostle Paul when he wrote the addendum to his letter to the Romans knew that the “Great Commission” was practically fulfilled. Look at what he said. It is so often overlooked by theologians today.

“But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets [Greek: ‘prophetic scriptures’], according to the commandment of the everlasting [eonian] God, [is] made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.”

• **Romans 16:26**

Ernest L. Martin, 1978
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Addendum by David Sielaff

In Dr. Martin’s book [*Essentials of New Testament Doctrine*](#) he wrote the following in Chapter 16, “[Resurrections from the Dead](#),” footnote 10:

“The length of each age under discussion must be determined by the context of the narrative. Paul even said there were ages [plural] in the past when animal sacrifices were the way to attain an atonement for sin, but those ages came to an end with the sacrifice of Christ on the tree of crucifixion (Hebrews 9:26, see the Greek). Paul understood there were sacrifices for sin in the age before the Flood. There were also different types of sacrifices during the age of Abraham. The sacrifices differed again in the age of Moses, which lasted to Christ’s death. In other words, animal sacrifices were looked on divergently in the various ages before the time of Christ. ...

I plan to write a book on the subject of the ages. I can prove, without doubt, that we are experiencing at least seven different types of ages for mankind (all simultaneously) at this very moment. God has given a multitude of ages to perform His work of salvation for the human race. The apostle Paul called them God’s ‘own time periods’ (1 Timothy 2:6, see Greek). You need to recognize these periods or ages. This book [on the ages] will be an evaluation of the biblical texts that explain the dispensations in which God determines the times and the seasons for saving the entirety of humanity to Himself.”

Dr. Martin was not able to write that book on the ages before his death in January 2002. But the following articles are available, and they all relate to the interpretation of Scripture for both doctrine and prophecy:

[“The Ten Commandments”](#)

[“The Antichristian Doctrine of the Trinity”](#)

[“How to Interpret Biblical Signs”](#)

[“Signs of the Times in the First Century”](#)

[“The Importance of First Century History”](#)

[“The Intertestamental Period”](#)

See in Dr. Martin’s book, [*Restoring the Original Bible*](#), Chapter 14 “[The Prophetic Environment of the First Century](#).” (The text and full audio of this book are free online.)

In Dr. Martin’s book, [*Secrets of Golgotha*](#), Chapter 16 “[Visions, Dreams and Signs](#)” and Chapter 23, “[The Real Jesus of the Bible](#)” give additional information about the apostolic period of the 1st century AD. (For this book also, the text and full audio of this book are free online.)

Another early article by Dr. Martin gives excellent examples of biblical interpretation and methods of analysis. It is titled, “[Did Jephthah Sacrifice His Daughter?](#)” Enjoy. DWS