

Basic Hermeneutics: "Scripture Twisting"

As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

(2 Peter 3:16)

Author James W. Sire covers twenty ways cults misread the Bible.¹ In this lesson, we will only cover eight of them. Although Sire would more than likely consider us a cult, partly because we do not adhere to his view of traditional Christianity, let's see what we can glean from someone that defines a cult as:

"...any religious movement that is organizationally distinct and has doctrines and/or practices that contradict those of the Scriptures as interpreted by traditional Christianity as represented by the major Catholic and Protestant denominations, and

¹ Sire, James W. *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1980.

*as expressed in such statements as the Apostles' Creed."*²

1. Misreading No. 1: Inaccurate Quotation. People often misquote scripture. It is vitally important to quote the Bible accurately. We should read and know our Bible.

Psalm 119:11 says, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

2. Misreading No. 2: Twisted Translation. Translations abound. Some cults have their own translations and books that they consider sacred. A reliable word-for-word translation is key. Some translators are theological atheists. They do not believe the Word of God is trustworthy.

2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"

² Sire, 20.

3. Misreading No. 3: The Biblical Hook. Cults use certain verses in the Bible that seem to back-up whatever the particular group in question is trying to promote. The writer of the verse cited may not even have had in mind what these cultists are now alleging it to mean.

2 Peter 2:1 says, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

4. Misreading No. 4: Ignoring the Immediate Context. Context is king. Context is crucial to a real understanding of the text. The author states, "the simplest error of reading is the failure to consider the immediate context of the verse or passage in question."

Psalm 119:130 says, "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple."

5. Misreading No. 5: Collapsing Contexts. This misreading occurs when verses of the Bible are

connected or collated together to prove a doctrine or point, but in actuality, these scriptures are not related to the specific topic in this way.

2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

6. Misreading No. 6: Overspecification. This twisting of the scriptures happens when a particular part or aspect of a verse is overly-emphasized and given meaning that is a total misrepresentation.

2 Corinthians 4:2 says, "But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

7. Misreading No. 7: Word Play. To avoid the word play trap, we must remember always to seek the meaning of a word based on the definition of the original biblical language.

2 Corinthians 2:17 says, "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ."

8. Misreading No. 8: The Figurative Fallacy. The reader must be able to identify the way language is being used by the biblical writer. Some words can have both a literal and figurative meaning, but the author asks the question, "is the figurative meaning always the same?"

2 Peter 1:20 says, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation."

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