

The Problem of Eisegesis

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Acts 17:11; 2 Corinthians 4:2; and 2 Timothy 2:15; Revelation 22:18-19

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. Revelation 22:18-19

Do you read from the Bible or read into the Bible? Do you know the difference?

How is the Bible delved into by your eyes, mind, and church? Do you seek to read into it what you want? Or, do you seek to glean what God actually has for you and the people He has called you to teach and reach? Are the views you have based on hard evidence and careful biblical study? Or, do you just take for granted what a favorite mentor or teacher or theological position has to say?

We have a big crisis in the conservative and evangelical churches in America! The problem was once just isolated to fringe, uneducated pastors and churches who had no regard for a good Bible education and careful learning. There is a mindset of anti-intellectualism, not wanting to be knowledgeable in the language, history, or tools of the Word, thinking it would be better to just be led by the Holy Spirit, when in fact, laziness and pride were the reasons for ignoring the real moving of God. As a result, many sermons are based merely on felt needs without Bible instruction or proper interpretation. Such thinking has given birth to a watershed of false doctrines and inept Christians with weak faith and a lack of Fruit and maturity in their lives. As I have researched the question "why do churches fail" during the past twenty years, I have found a growing crisis that has shown how the Bible is viewed and used in the pulpit, and the problem has gotten worse and worse.

If you are a fairly well-read pastor or church leader, you have seen the results of *Barna* polls and the *Time* magazine cover story in 2007 that showed that only half of American adults could name just one of the four Gospels, and even fewer could identify the first book of the Bible, Genesis. We have seen Jay Leno and Ted Koppel make fun of and draw concern that Americans can't name more than two of the Ten Commandments correctly. But, did you know our research has shown something even more abysmal with pastors?

· Seventy-two percent (72%) of the pastors we surveyed in the last ten (10) years stated that they only studied the Bible when they were preparing for sermons or lessons. This left only 38% who read the Bible for devotions and personal study.

- Twenty-six percent (26%) of pastors said they regularly had personal devotions while eighty-two percent (82%) of all those surveyed felt they were adequately fed spirituality.
- Seventy-one percent (71%) of pastors said when they read the Bible for study, they regularly just looked for what they wanted and did not read it in context.
- Sixty-two percent (62%) of pastors said when they prepared Bible studies or sermons, they rarely looked up what they did not know or understand and just "winged-it." The same percentage also said they regularly read into a passage what was not there in order to make their point.
- Fifty-nine percent (59%) of pastors said when they prepared Bible studies or sermons, they did not think it was necessary to make sure their teaching was based on the text or biblically correct. It was more important to connect with their people.
- Keep in mind these are the "conservative," Reformed and Evangelical pastors, not the mainline liberals or the left wing of the emerging church! And thus, they took their tainted information, considered themselves prepared, and sought to feed their flock spirituality, discounting their people from real, biblical truth!

Even those who identified with Bible inerrancy tended to take their minds and good theology offline so to engage the text of God's Word the way they saw fit, forcing their ideas and reading in their notions while standing on their conceit. Thus, hungry sheep were created who chew on one another rather than love one another as they feast on garbage, remaining anorexic to the vital, spiritual things of God. Our churches have gone from a view of the Bible as the magnificent, glorious container of God's Word to using it as a cheap buffet. They think they can just dig in what they want, skip what they do not like, and even insert their own entrees to God's table.

In addition, there are lengthy views regarding what one thinks a passage may mean, centering on what is speculative, ignoring what is nourishing, and missing out on essential doctrine. Thus, theories and pride take center stage by taking a whole bunch of passages out of their context, stringing them together, and ignoring the actual meanings of the words. Pastors, even seminary trained and in conservative churches, more and more seek to create their own "customized" word meanings and theology while ignoring the culture and context of a passage. There is becoming a greater disregard for the Old Testament, the council of Scripture, and the original languages in order to create skewed views or majoring on a minor and skipping out on the majors. I am not sure how Christ would feel about that, are you? Perhaps, a look into 2 Peter should cause us to tremble if we dare seek to twist and/or read in our own ideas to His Word. We must always be careful not to read into the Bible what we want it to say; rather, we must seek what the Word actually says, even if it goes against our personal thinking!

What is Eisegesis?

Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 2 Corinthians 4:2

Eisegesis or *Isogesis* is basically reading into or forcing into the Bible or a text what isn't there, thus forcing a meaning that does not exist in that passage to satisfy one's idea, belief, or a whim. This is in opposition to good "Exegesis" that means "to lead out" or "draw out" what the Bible is actually saying. One way, we take what we want and then insert it; the other way, we take from it what it actually says for our edification. One way, we say what we want it to mean; the other way, we take away what God has to say. Eisegesis is interpreting Scripture by one's personal rules rather than a logical, consistent, and reverent understanding from the Bible. This is using a presupposition or a pretext as in what we want so we can arrive at the meaning we want by ignoring the language, context, and culture in which it was used. Thus, "eisegesis" lends one "to lead in" or "read into the Scriptures," in contrast too, good biblical interpretation takes out what is really there whether we like it or not. Eisegesis means we input and plant the seeds of what we want it to say, gleaning just weeds later on, when with good exegesis, we harvest the good crops of what God is plainly saying.

How do we do Eisegesis? We do this by introducing into the text our own assumptions, thoughts, and opinions while ignoring what is actually there in the text. Most people do this to facilitate their own agendas and opinions. In practice, this is using our personal interpretation as center point rather than what the text plainly states, including even some critical doctrines of the faith that often get confused and skewed. For example, taking a key word like *Baptism* or looking for words and ideas that do not even exist and then jumping to the assumption of what we think it means. This allows us to justify our agendas or conjectures, inserting or forming our own ideas and preconceived notions by seeking what we want it to mean rather than the actual, intended meaning of the passage. Thus, we miss what God is stating and replace it with what we want it to say, giving us the mentality of *don't confuse me with the facts; I have already made up my mind, I want to think my way and/or lead my life my way, not His Way*. This is further aggravated by ignoring the language, context, and culture, leading us to incorrect conclusions, inconsistent understandings, as well as to heresies and false teachings. In addition, we end up with weak faith, spiritual confusion, and a lack of Fruit and maturity in our personal lives and in our church.

Consider this: Eisegesis gives us the "lust" of what we want and Exegesis gives us His Word, what He wants! God wants us to live lives that are worthy of being given grace, and to show excellence in our character for His glory and our contentment in Him. In 2 Peter, we are given a call to be *stimulated and stirred up*, and this applies to how we delve into and respond to His most precious

Word. God is showing us a problem and asking us to seek His and others' help to remember who we are in Christ and the wonders of Him, not the lusts and desires of the flesh that seek to manipulate our whims into His Bible. Peter is calling us to think back to what the Lord has done for us, so we don't forget His grace, His provisions, His blessings and His answering our prayers. If we use the Bible as a cheap buffet, we can't do that! Nor would we be able to overcome the struggles of the moment and the problems of life if we can't see how He can bring and has brought us through them. We are to refresh our memory in Him by refreshing the way we dig into and respond to His Word. Because, reading into the Bible and not reading from the Bible is *eisegesis*, and it is evil (2 Peter 3: 1-9)!

What is Exegesis?

It is to draw out, extract, and harvest what God has planted, what is in the text, and the way it was written. It is finding the true meaning of and explaining the passages of Scripture from their context, what the words mean in that language, culture, and setting, not what they may mean today. Exegesis is extracting objectively from the Bible in a logical, systematic manner, discovering what a text is actually saying by careful reading of the Bible. It also helps to seek what was said to the originally intended readers in the way they used their words, with their customs, and in their situation before we can fully discover what it means in ours. In contrast, *eisegesis* is also bad biblical interpretation, seeking a meaning from modern vernaculars, theological agendas, or hearsays, because in this, we will twist and slant the intent that God has for us, that is, we will read into the Bible what God is not saying to us!

Now, if you love God, and want to please Him and if your church is about worshiping Him and disciplining others, then, you will practice good Bible study and interpretation. Thus, you would never ever want to do *eisegesis* to God's most precious Word. Now, if the Bible is not important and church is all about you and the platform to display your feelings, ideas, frustrations and just a show or seeking the latest trends, then *eisegesis* will be your prime game plan. Of course, this would be heinous at best and blasphemous at worst! Because, this will skew one's understanding of God, pass on this false teaching to others, and we will not see or apply His precepts, thus, leading us to an improper life and a dead or useless church.

An Example of Eisegesis

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Acts 17:11

So many Christians and denominations have done this-inserting their ideas and wishes or skewed understandings or assumptions into God's Word and then

proclaiming their word as His! Such as with *Baptism*, assuming what it means and not realizing what it actually means. Like not understanding it is a usually a "verb modifier" to the "object noun" in the sentence. So, we make a grammar mistake thus creating a whole theology by obsessing over the "verb" and miss the main point of the "object" by skipping the context and thus missing out on the meaning. Or, taking a word out of context like the "little gods" false teaching a few years back, because pastors ignored the original word and cultural meaning and made a grand assumption and a false teaching that distracted people from the true Truth of the passage.

Did you know that most seminary trained pastors do not know what *Baptism* really means and just make the assumption and will die on that hill composed of presumptions that is just a seemingly grassy knoll on top of a hill of compost? We have added so much tradition and supposition over it, we've covered over the real intent.

There are many passages in Scripture that plainly tell us what *Baptism* means. For example, look at John 1:19-34 and Colossians 2:11-15. In John, we are shown it is a ceremonial cleansing or washing ritual to show publicly a commitment to follow God and removes the pride and pagan obstacles that prevented one from serving with obedience. If you do a little research, you will find that culturally, this was also a ceremony one went through to join a pious group that held to the covenant that God gave to Israel. Converted gentiles were baptized to join the Jewish community (Deut 6:4; Matt. 3:6; John 3:3-5; 4:7-26).

In Colossians and the rest of Paul and Peter's epistles, *Baptism* "symbolizes" our identification with the sign and seal of the salvation we received from Christ. This also represents Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. This means our covenant relationship with God is declared by our outward sign of the public profession of our faith. In simpler terms, baptism is a testimony of the act-not the act itself; it is like the sign for the advertisement of a product, not the product. It is not the act itself that signifies or saves; rather it is a testimony that *my heart has changed; I now belong to Christ and no one else!* It symbolizes the washing away of sin and our new birth renewal in Him and Him alone.

Thus, if you do not read in your suppositions, you will find that *Baptism* is not a mode, type, or a ritual, but rather a public profession and testimony of our "cleansing" by Christ as a result of our response for the gift of His grace so that we make a declaration-a promise to be a committed Christian of principles and virtue (Gen. 7:7; Acts 2:38; 15; Rom. 2:38; 4:11; 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-29; Phil. 3:3; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21; 4:1).

If you put aside your pride and traditions and truly seek what God has, you will find that real, biblical baptism was never intended to be a just a ritual; rather, it was meant to signify one's testimony, the "authentication" of their identification in and with Jesus Christ, our new birth in Him. *Baptism* means we have been

cleansed; our pious commitment is our response. Thus the style, form, and means are not important; rather, sincerity of faith is (Luke 11:13; John 3: 3-6; 14: 16, 26; 16:7; Acts 1:5-8; 2:1-3; 19:1-2; Rom. 8:26-27; 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 12:3,13; 15:45; Gal. 5:13-26; Eph. 3:17; 1 John 2:1; Rev. 3:20).

The questions often missed with *Baptism* are *if we trust in Christ, if we understand His character, how will we live? Are we living as we believe? If not, why not?* Make a commitment to remove all obstructions! What do most of us do instead? Fight over the procedures, mode, and style, making it into a ritual and missing the entire point because of a faulty hermeneutic. This is a typical case of *eisegesis*, but many people do this with Scripture. (For more on *Baptism*, see our article series on it or the Bible studies on it!)

Good Bible Interpretation is a Must!

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15

Good Bible interpretation comes from our careful interrogation and examination to discover the real truths of the Bible. This can only happen when we abandon ourselves to Christ, and engage the text with faith, reason, and logic. We are never to read in our fears, hurts, ideas, or plans; rather, we are to look to Christ as our Lord. We are to never hold back with failure but rather look forward to what He has for us. We are not to hide in our theology, pride, complacency, or presumptions. Our drive must be to follow His character, not our own or our culture.

To be a good Bible student and a great Bible teacher, our interests must be surrendered to His; His interests must be ours (John 3:30; Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:5; 2: 20-21; Phil. 3:10)! Doing what we do not want to do in the first place becomes sheer pleasure because it is serving Him (John 15:13; 1 Cor. 9:22; 2 Cor. 12:15). When we are doing this, our understanding of the Bible will grow and consequently our faith, maturity, and character will also grow and then we will be showing the love and care we are called to give to reach our neighborhoods for Christ!

Why do people do Eisegesis? Because pride and positioning caters to our whims, not to solid reasoning and the search of the Word. Basically, it is because (to say this bluntly) people do not read the Bible or at least have not read it well, so they force their will into it instead! It amazes me how some pastors and Bible teachers can go to a text and not "read it," but can be really good at "reading into it." That is, instead of reading what is there, in its context, what the words say in the original languages and culture, they read in their theological ideas, frameworks, and presumptions, and thus totality miss what God is actually saying!

This brings up several questions: *why are we as a Christian community not thinking hard about God's Word as those of old did? Why do we pass by reading "from" the Bible and insist on reading "into" the Bible?* Instead of gleaning and applying what God has to say, we read in what we want it to say! We have more tools and reason, so let's get busy and dig into God's Most precious pasture land, His Word, the Bible!

I Warn Everyone!

Eisegesis is like taking a short cut through a mine field. It is an example of someone in leadership who wants the glory without the work, the fast-food approach to Christianity. Some so desperately want to be validated by being in leadership, they take all the short cuts and miss the importance of the journey of maturity and growth and the people from whom we are called to learn and those we are to touch. We can't have all the glory without the effort and even the anguish, too. Just like we can't have the fruit from our orchard without the planting or cultivating of the tree; or have the vacation without the work. And when we do, we have to know it is not from God (Matt. 4:8-10). In fact, in the world, it is considered theft to have something without working or paying for it, unless it is a gift. Fruit without work is what Satan offers us. But, the cost is too high for a fruit that is rotten; the additional cost is a meaningless existence with a damned future. So, all we would end up with would be suffering with no purpose and no glory!

I warn everyone! Take heed; with proper biblical understanding, God will reveal His Kingdom and Glory to you. The cost may seem high, but it was only high for Him. For us, exegesis is dirt cheap, no matter what we have to go through. When we remain obedient, faithful, and take seriously our call to be disciples and make disciples, He will show us. Just think of His blessings, and the joy of being in Him. Most of the things that hold us back from growing in Christ are not just sin; rather, they happen when we refuse to recognize His divine power. We are ignorant of what He can do, and are afraid when we know we should follow. So, be with God as in a personal relationship, and seek God by being diligent with His Word; place Him first so you can be more like Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6; 1 John 3:2; James 1:2-8; Rev. 22:4).

I warn everyone! At the close of the New Testament, Revelation 22:18-19, God makes this dramatic imperative point: *I warn everyone*. This is God's most passionate warning to not add or subtract from what He says. God wants His Word protected, revered, and applied. He does not want us to be corrupt or seek to distort His Word. This means we are not to add in our thoughts to His or replace His with our own. We can add commentary, insights, applications, and encouragement as long as we stay true to His text, because this is the Word of God and it is Holy. Thus, when we do add our thoughts, we must make sure they are lined up to His and make a distinction, to ourselves and others, between His

Word and our words. In context, this is referring to Revelation, but it also applies to the entirety of the Bible (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Gal. 1:8-9; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 3-4)!

1. Why does God severely warn us to never manipulate God's Word for skewed, personal agendas?
2. Why do so many preachers and commentators seek to do *Eisegesis*? How does one rationalize that it is OK to manipulate God's Word?
3. What can your church leadership do to teach and model to its people never to read in to God's Word what is not there, or take away what is there?
4. How can you better use God's Word to develop your faith so you are more ready for His return?
5. What can your church do about getting its people lined up to God and His Way and precepts and to know and be prepared by faith, spiritual maturity, character, and Fruit?

We, as human beings, tend to sway easily by ideas, people's personalities, new encounters, and experiences that tantalize us. New religious formats and thinking are appealing as we seek the latest and greatest, but what we think is great usually is not. We become captive to traditions and influenced by arguments and feelings that are persuasive. But, we must never substitute our ideas for God's! We will follow the latest fad and want more. We get bored with our car and want a new and better one, and so forth. We do this with our doctrines too! The advertising machine in Madison Avenue knows this well, as we all want more, and they use this trait to appeal to us, pushing us in the direction they want to sell or influence us in some way. At the same time, we must be on guard not to allow such things to infuse, influence, or govern us. We have His Word, wisdom, influence, and Holy Spirit; there is nothing better! We have His fullness; there is no better filler than His presence! Therefore, we must be aware of our nature to seek what is wrong and fleeting, and always be on guard. Never allow yourself to be cheated by wrong thinking or chasing the wrong things, because they will rob you of greater opportunities and treasures in Christ! The bottom line is this: we do not need any substitute or the world's distractions because we are complete in Him! Do not be the one who seeks to please the world while rejecting our loving and living Lord-in your doctrines or in your life!

Do you heed God's warning? Are you an Exegete or an Eisegete?