

Use of the Bible for Faith and Practice

The Bible is inerrant in the sense that it says what God wants it to say. It is trustworthy as a source of God's Word written. It is the final authority on questions of faith and practice. Any doctrine or point of faith or practice that is in conflict with Holy Scripture is false.

Like media sound bites, proof-texts are used as short statements that are presented to characterize a situation or topic. In the Christian setting, proof-texts are intended to represent the cumulative teaching of Holy Scripture on the topic of discussion in the context of application. Chosen well, they illuminate God's teaching. Chosen poorly, they bring God's Word into disrepute. Sanday observed that a single verse from the Bible was always considered the word of God.¹

Scriptural Guidance About Scripture

The Bible gives a few rules and many examples of how to use Holy Scripture. One of the famous passages used to guide interpretation of Holy Scripture is given in 2 Peter 1:20-21.

You must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.²

2 Timothy 3:16 (Authority of scripture.) Paul: "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

Romans 15:4 (Examples for hope, faith) Paul: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope."

Deuteronomy 4:2 Moses: "You shall not add to the word which I command you, not take from it; that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you."

Deuteronomy 12:32 Moses: "Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to it or take from it."

Matthew 5:17-19 Jesus: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

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

Proverbs 30:5-6 Agur, son of Jakeh of Massa: "Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you, and you be found a liar."

¹ W. Sanday, "Bible", in Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Charles Scriber's Sons (undated [old]).

² 2 Peter 1:20-21

Isaiah 45:19 (God not secret, no hidden meanings.) God: “I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, ‘Seek me in chaos.’ I the Lord speak the truth, I declare what is right.”

Isaiah 48:16 (From the beginning I have not spoken to you obscurely.) God: “Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.”

2 Corinthians 1:13-14 (No hidden meanings) Paul: “For we write you nothing but what you can read and understand; I hope you will understand fully, as you have understood in part, that you can be proud of us as we can be of you, on the day of the Lord Jesus.”

2 Peter 3:15-17 (Seek scripture with education and balance.) Simon Peter. “Our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, beware lest you be carried away with the error of lawless men and lose your own stability.

1 Corinthians 1:17 (Do not get needlessly esoteric.) Paul: “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart’. Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”

John 16:25 (Jesus spoke in metaphors.) Jesus: “I have said this to you in figures; the hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in figures but tell you plainly of the Father.”

Philippians 3:15-16 (Reconciling conflicting doctrines.) Paul and Timothy: “Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”

Romans 9:20 (What right have you to examine God?) Paul: “Who are you, a man, to answer back to God?”

Job 38-39 (What right have you to examine God?) Job 38:1-4. “Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: ‘Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.’” (This goes on for two chapters.)

John 21:21-23 (Do not read into scripture what is not there.) John: “When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what about this man?’” Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!” The saying spread abroad among the brethren that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?”

Deuteronomy 18:22 “When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him.”

Titus 1:9 Paul: A bishop “must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it.”