



The Biggest Mistakes Most People Make When Studying the Bible

Description



Most of the bad theology I've heard in my lifetime has come

from one thing: poor Bible study habits. I don't mean how often people study the Bible, I mean the way that people study the Bible. There are a lot of common mistakes people make, so here's a resource you can use to (*hopefully*) make fewer mistakes.

Mistake category #1: Studying the wrong thing

The obvious question is: "*But I'm studying the Bible, how could that be wrong?*" It's not wrong... as long as you actually are. There are a lot of things that people think are studying the Bible that actually aren't.

Studying Sermons

If I had a dollar for every time someone said the equivalent of "*Pastor _____ said _____ is true so I believe it*", I would be a rich man. I love a good sermon that teaches the Bible, but many pastors don't these days. These pastors might even have very good things to say, but unless they stay rooted and grounded in scripture, it really doesn't matter.

One example is the recently deceased Charles Stanley.

(And he often has good things to say.)

There are a couple of fellows at my church who really love his teaching and they will sometimes play one of his sermons at the men's bible study. His sermon pattern goes roughly like this:

1. Quote a Bible verse
2. Talk about things vaguely related to the verse for 5-10 minutes, often supported by a personal story
3. Repeat.

He even has good things to say regularly. However, his teaching style is terrible. In fact, it's the exact same teaching style as Joel Osteen. *(though Charles Stanley has much better things to say)*. The trouble is this: **It's not based on scripture and it teaches horrible Bible study habits.**

Remember, people pay attention to what you do, not what you say.

Charles Stanley (*and many other pastors*) will quote a verse and then apply that verse without taking into account the context or doing any actual Bible study, i.e. study of the *Bible*. They quote one verse, build a lesson on it for 5-10 minutes, quote another verse, build another lesson on it, and then keep doing that.

That's a terrible way to study the Bible.

Truly awful.

It teaches people to apply the Bible that way; it teaches them to read a verse, make an immediate application to their life that might only be vaguely related to what the verse is saying, and then move on. It also teaches the listeners to ignore the context, which is a huge mistake that we'll talk about soon.

I prefer Bible teachers who teach more carefully and actually stay focused on Scripture. One such teacher is [Mike Winger](#), who has an excellent [series on Mark](#) that I recommend. He teaches the Bible in a much better way, setting up the context and concentrating on the actual text instead of talking about things only vaguely related to the passage.

(And Mike Winger isn't without faults, nor am I. Mike is quite soft on marriage/gender issues, though his ["women in ministry" series](#) does a good job of disproving many fallacious feminist claims.)

So please, don't take someone at his word simply because he has the title of "pastor".

Please don't take my word on things either.

It doesn't matter what some pastor says; it matters what the Bible says.

If a teacher has good insights into scripture and handles it well, then I would listen to him more often. And by "listen", I mean "hear", not believe. All doctrinal points must be supported by scripture. A

teacher who quotes scripture and then spends almost the entire sermon talking about his personal opinion or personal stories instead of the verses isn't a good teacher.

Please don't do that, and please don't waste your time listening to teachers who do.

Using a bad translation

Let's say that you and I are in a Bible study and the topic of submission in marriage comes up, so you pull out your trusty NIV Study Bible and read 1 Corinthians 11:10 to support your belief that there's no authority in marriage.

1 Corinthians 11:10 (NIV – the “Not Inspired Version”)

It is for this reason that **a woman ought to have authority over her own head**, because of the angels.

I will then (*internally*) sigh and read what the verse actually says in a translation that doesn't intentionally pervert this verse. (*And yes I've read it in Greek.*)

1 Corinthians 11:10 (NASB 95)

Therefore **the woman ought to have** ~~a symbol of~~ **authority on her head**, because of the angels.

Perhaps this is a bad example because then I'll have to explain that the phrase “a symbol of” was added by translators and isn't original. Regardless, the point is that the verse actually says that a woman (*wife*) “ought” to have (*her husband's*) authority on her head and not her own authority. The NIV ~~translates~~ perverts this verse to mean the exact opposite of what God inspired.

The NIV intentionally perverts this passage. (*and many other passages as well.*)

That's a problem.

Or let's say that we were having a discussion on sin and whether or not we can be guilty of a sin if we didn't know we committed it. To that, I would pull out Leviticus 5:17 and read:

Leviticus 5:17 (NASB 95)

“Now if a person sins and does any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, **though he was unaware, still he is guilty and shall bear his punishment.**”

And then you look at me funny and pull out an ESV because so many pastors use/recommend it, and then you read the “same” verse:

Leviticus 5:17 (ESV – the “Extremely Substandard Version”)

“If anyone sins, doing any of the things that by the LORD’s commandments ought not to be done, **though he did not know it, then realizes his guilt, he shall bear his iniquity.**

Those aren’t remotely the same, are they?

Like the NIV, the ESV intentionally ~~mistranslates~~ perverts this verse.

This is what I mean.

A bad Bible translation might get you the basics (*maybe*), but the moment you get beyond “*repent and have faith*” it will let you down. I have a whole article on [What’s the Best Bible Translation? And More Importantly, Why?](#) which goes through what makes a good translation. However, here’s the short version:

Sadly, there are only 2 Bible translations that are worth using: The NASB (*the 1995 version, not the 2020 version*), and the NKJV (*New King James Version*).

(The Legacy Standard Bible might also qualify; see the article for details. And BTW, the original KJV is too easy to misunderstand because many of the words have changed meaning in the last 400+ years; again, see the article for details and examples.)

Pretty much every other translation I’ve seen has intentional and willful mistranslation in it. I’m sorry to say that’s the case, but it is. See my article on the topic for details and proof.

Basing teaching/doctrine on English words, not Greek or Hebrew words

This might seem painfully obvious, but a translation of the Bible is just that: a translation. The Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek plus a sprinkling of Aramaic.

It wasn’t written in English.

Now, this won’t matter much if you have a good translation. (*See the previous point*). For the most part, the NASB 95 and the NKJV will be accurate and you won’t have to worry about missing the point because of the translation (*for the most part*).

However...

Don’t be too dogmatic about a doctrine based on an English word.

For example, the wording of 1 Peter 3:4’s words to women in the KJV has stuck despite most other modern translations translating it differently:

1 Peter 3:4 (KJV)

But *let it be* the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, *even the ornament* of **a meek and quiet spirit**, which is in the sight of God of great price.

From this, I have heard Christians argue that all Christian women should be “meek”. However, “meek” is an English word, not a Greek word. The Greek word there is “?????” ([praus](#)), which more properly means:

This difficult-to-translate root (pra-) means more than “meek.” Biblical meekness is not weakness but rather refers to exercising God’s strength under His control – i.e. demonstrating power without undue harshness.

[The English term “meek” often lacks this blend – i.e. of gentleness (reserve) and strength.]

This is actually the same word used in Matthew 5:5’s “Blessed are the meek (*praus*)”. Rather different, isn’t it? That’s why modern versions usually have “gentle” instead of “meek”.

But it doesn’t stop there. The word that’s translated as “quiet” in nearly all translations has more meaning than simply “quiet”.

2272/h?syxios (“calmly quiet”) describes being “**appropriately tranquil**” by not misusing (or overusing) words that would stir up needless friction (destructive commotion).

I translated it this way:

1 Peter 3:4 ([my translation](#))

but the hidden man of the heart; in incorruptible **gentle strength and a tranquil spirit** which is very precious in the sight of God

There’s a not-so-subtle difference between “*a meek and quiet spirit*” versus “*gentle strength and a tranquil spirit*”. They hit the ear quite differently.

Again, don’t be too dogmatic about a doctrine based on an English word.

Most of the time it doesn’t matter very much, but if you want to be sure of something, check the original language. (*And I’ll link to a resource that shows you how to do that later on.*) That brings me to one of my personal pet peeves: Strong’s.

A MASSIVE Mistake: Using Strong’s Concordance as a Lexicon

(*Warning: slight rant incoming.*)

Strong's Concordance is NOT a lexicon.

Let me repeat.

Strong's

Concordance.

Is.

NOT.

A.

Lexicon.

Concordances are not lexicons. Lexicons aren't (*usually*) concordances. Please, for the love of all that's good and holy, please stop using Strong's Concordance as a Lexicon!

Please!

Okay, let's talk about the difference between the two. Here's the definition of concordance from Merriam-Webster:

an alphabetical index of the principal words in a book or the works of an author with their immediate contexts

[Source.](#)

And now the definition of a lexicon:

a book containing an alphabetical arrangement of the words in a language **and their definitions**

[Source.](#)

The difference is basically:

- A concordance helps you find words.
- A lexicon defines words.

Basically, a lexicon is like a dictionary for another language. A concordance lists where the words are used in a book so you can see where they are used. Concordances are cross-referencing tools, not tools for finding the definition of a word.

Strong's concordance is not a lexicon.

It never has been.

It never will be.

Thus, it should **not** be used to define words.

Strong's does contain word definitions, but they are woefully incomplete because it's a concordance, not a lexicon. Frankly, Strong's definitions are so incomplete that they are bordering on misleading much of the time. For example, consider the Greek word "???" ([en](#), a common preposition that's used thousands of times in the NT). Thayer's lexicon has almost 5000 words to explain what it means in various contexts, partially because it's used so often. By contrast, Strong's has... *drumroll please* ...five. Just 5 words. The "word origin" section of Strong's is a bit better at 28 words, and Strong's Exhaustive Concordance has 119 words on the definition... but half of those (60) are just listing how it's translated in various places.

That's compared to almost 5000 words in an [actual](#) lexicon.

(And I've sometimes found contexts that the lexicon didn't cover.)

Strong's is NOT a lexicon.

Please, for the love of all that's good and holy, please stop using it as one! *(Okay, rant over for now.)* If you want to look up Greek or Hebrew word definitions, please use a real lexicon and not Strong's.

(Note: You'll notice that I occasionally quote Strong's on this website. I do this because people think it's authoritative and will want to see it. However, I always check a real lexicon to see if Strong's is right and complete enough before I quote it.)

Which lexicon?

I'm going to give you a "cheat code" right up front: [Biblehub.com's interlinear Bible](#) is probably the best option for most people. It has Thayer's Greek Lexicon for Greek words and often has HELPS Word Studies as well. For the Old Testament/Hebrew, it has the Brown-Driver-Briggs lexicon.

Now, I have an article entitled [A Complete, 100% English Introduction to Koine Greek \(with Examples in English\)](#) that explains the structure of Greek for people who don't know Greek. At the end of that article, I show how to apply what you have learned in the article to get a LOT of information from Biblehub's interlinear Bible without actually knowing Greek. I don't have anything like that for Hebrew, but that article should help you with Greek.

Please check out the article for more information.

Using a pastor/teacher as a lexicon

Real quick, if a pastor/teacher says that a Greek word means something without quoting a lexicon, he could be wrong. First, he might simply be quoting Strong's which can be a problem as covered above. But even if he isn't, there's no telling where he got his info. There are no shortage of places online to get strange word definitions. Often people mindlessly repeat those definitions and for some reason, the wrong ones seem to persist much better than the correct ones.

Generally, when a teacher says that a Greek word means something, I always look the word up to check. More often than not, he is either wrong or woefully incomplete, and that leads to him being (*unintentionally*) misleading. There are exceptions of course, but the point remains: if the teacher doesn't quote a lexicon – not Strong's but a real lexicon – then please don't just take his word for it.

Treating the Early Church fathers as authoritative

Let me start with an example of a letter written by Ignatius of Antioch who died in the early-mid 100s, less than 100 years after the epistles were written and the apostles died. Tradition holds that he was a direct disciple of the Apostle John. Yes, the one who walked with Jesus and wrote several books of the New Testament.

Here's what a direct disciple of John wrote shortly before his death:

As therefore the Lord did nothing without the Father, being united to Him, neither by Himself nor by the apostles, **so neither do ye anything without the bishop and presbyters**. Neither endeavour that anything appear reasonable and proper to yourselves apart; but being come together into the same place, let there be one prayer, one supplication, one mind, one hope, in love and in joy undefiled. There is one Jesus Christ, than whom nothing is more excellent. Do ye therefore all run together as into one temple of God, as to one altar, as to one Jesus Christ, who came forth from one Father, and is with and has gone to one.

As therefore the Lord does nothing without the Father, for says He, "I can of mine own self do nothing," **so do ye, neither presbyter, nor deacon, nor layman, do anything without the bishop**. Nor let anything appear commendable to you which is destitute of his approval. **For every such thing is sinful, and opposed [to the will of] God.** Do ye all come together into the same place for prayer. Let there be one common supplication, one mind, one hope, with faith unblameable in Christ Jesus, than which nothing is more excellent. Do ye all, as one man, run together into the temple of God, as unto one altar, to one Jesus Christ, the High Priest of the unbegotten God.

Did you catch that bold underlined section?

Apparently, doing something without church leadership is sinful and opposed to the God's will. (*insert your favorite eye-roll emoji here.*) Let me repeat that Ignatius was a direct disciple of John, yet he's telling Christians to treat the local bishop like God Himself less than a hundred years after the epistles

were written. This savors strongly of “give us a king”, as well as being an example of the corruption of power that all men are susceptible to.

The early church fathers were only men – and typically wise men too – but they certainly weren’t infallible men.

Their writings can be tremendously instructive and valuable to understanding the faith and I don’t want to diminish that. The writings of the early church fathers have tremendous value and formed the foundation of modern Christendom. They should be honored for their contributions.

But they aren’t infallible.

Not even a little bit.

They can also indicate what the church widely believed in its infancy and their writings should be considered if only because of their closeness in time to the source. However, **they don’t override scripture**. Their writings and positions should be considered in the light of scripture and judged accordingly. *They are valuable, but be wary of the argument: “the early church fathers believed this so we should too”*. I think the quote above illustrates how fast the proverbial wheels can fall off the cart.

So consider their writings as you would any other wise Christian, possibly even giving them slightly more weight by virtue of their closeness in time to the apostles and Jesus, but ultimately as something written by fallible men who could make a mistake like any other man.

Treating traditional Church views as authoritative

First, a caution about what I do **not** mean. I do **not** mean that you should reexamine every aspect of Christianity looking for falsehood. There’s a modern phrase about “deconstructing” your faith and that’s a cover for destroying your faith more often than not. That’s categorically **not** what I mean.

However, the Protestant Reformation couldn’t have happened if someone wasn’t willing to look at what the church taught for centuries and go: *“Hey, that’s not what the Bible says!”*

Let me give you one example.

The doctrine of the “Eternal Generation of the Son” has been believed by an enormous number of Christians since the early 300s when it was codified in the Nicæan Creed. Here’s a definition:

The doctrine of eternal generation essentially teaches that God the Father eternally and by necessity generates or begets God the Son in such a way that the substance (divine essence) of God is not divided. The Person of God the Son derives His deity from this generation.

[Source: Got Questions.](#)

Basically, it says that from eternity past, the second person of the Trinity (*Jesus/The Word*) is/was

continually created by the Father so that He has always existed. They would object to that language of “created” and insist on using “generated” or “begotten”, but that’s mere wordplay. The essence is still creation because that’s what happens when you generate something or beget someone. Basically, it says that Jesus has always been created by the Father.

The foundation of this idea is that Jesus is called the “Son of God”, and so adherents believe that tells us something about The Word’s (*Jesus’s*) relationship to the Father in eternity past. However, this foundational idea is explicitly repudiated by scripture.

Luke 1:34-35

34 Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”

35 The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and **for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.**”

Jesus was called the “Son of God” because of the incarnation, **not** because of His relationship to the Father before the incarnation. This might seem arcane or useless, but it’s come up before for me. A while back I was having an enjoyable and friendly debate with a Catholic ex-seminarian about the morality of birth control that prevents conception (*because we of course agreed that abortion was wrong*). One of the arguments he made was that as the Father “generates” or “begets” the Son, so we too should “generate” or “beget” children.

No joke.

That actually happened.

Belief in the Eternal Generation of the Son is widespread – near ubiquitous – in the more liturgical denominations. Regardless, it’s based on an idea that’s specifically repudiated by scripture.

Another example of a long-held belief that’s contradicted by scripture is the doctrine of original sin, which is the idea that men are guilty of sin the moment we are conceived. [I have an article on original sin](#), so I won’t go into detail here except to say that God devoted an entire chapter of the Bible to repudiating this idea (*Ezekiel 18*). Despite this, it has been the default Christian position since Augustine (*died 430 AD*) popularized it. It’s been around for 1500+ years and yet has an entire chapter of the Bible devoted to repudiating it.

So just because something has been taught by the church for a long time, doesn’t necessarily mean it’s correct.

But as a counterpoint, be very careful if you consider discarding an idea that’s been held by the church for a long time.

Odds are there's a very good reason that the church has believed and taught it throughout the centuries. I'm not saying that it's always a correct teaching, but seriously and prayerfully consider it for some time and seek a **lot** of godly counsel before you discard a long-held teaching. Also, you should have a very solid scriptural reason to do so.

Mistake category #2: Not knowing the context, or worse, ignoring it

There are several different types of context we'll look at, starting with the most important one and then moving on to the most ignored one.

Immediate context (*read the entire verse carefully*)

I cannot overstate how important this is. Some of the biggest problems people have with the Bible are caused by not reading the entire passage carefully, including every single word. Here's an example.

At a men's Bible study, one of the men asked about 2 Samuel 21, where it seems like David was willing to execute Saul's sons for crimes committed by Saul.

2 Samuel 21:1 Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David sought the presence of the LORD. And the LORD said, "**It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he put the Gibeonites to death.**"

To summarize verses 2-5, David goes to the Gibeonites and asks what they want to make it right. They respond:

2 Samuel 21:6 **let seven men from his [Saul's] sons be given to us, and we will hang them before the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give them."**

The man who brought this up works in the legal field and was (*understandably*) visibly upset by the idea that David would execute innocent men for something their father did. Now, almost all the men at the study were either (1) also upset, or (2) saying: "*Hey, God said it so it must be fine*".

I thought there must be more too it (*mostly because of Ezekiel 18*), so I started reading the passage carefully, slowly, and methodically. There were two things that I noticed:

Thing #1: God didn't command the death of Saul's sons; that was David. Just because someone who is usually righteous does something, that doesn't make the thing he does righteous. (*More on this lower down in the section: "Bible Stories Are Often Descriptive, Not Prescriptive"*). Just because someone – even King David the “man after God's own heart” – did something doesn't mean that God approved. (*Uriah/Bathsheba come to mind.*)

Thing #2: more importantly, notice the word “house” that I highlighted in verse 1. The way that “house” is used in the Bible is usually more than a structure to live in, it usually refers to a person's entire family. It's often translated “household” for this reason. Here are some examples of the same Hebrew word in 2 Samuel 21:1 “?????” ([bayith](#)) being used this way elsewhere:

- In Genesis 7:1, God tells Noah to “Enter the ark, you and all your household” (bayith)
- In Genesis 17:23, “every male among the men of Abraham's household” (bayith) was circumcised.
- In Deut 15:20, God commands that “You and your household (bayith) shall eat it every year” (*speaking of firstborn males from herds and flocks*)

The word is used about 2000 times in the Old Testament, often in this sense of “household”. We know from other passages that Saul's sons went to war with him. So the logical conclusion is that the Gibeonites wanted to hang Saul's sons because they were swinging swords beside their father when Saul tried to exterminate them. Notice that verse 1 calls it a “bloody bayith” (*household*), making that logical conclusion explicit. Saul's household (sons) were “bloody” as it regards the Gibeonites. They were guilty of genocidal murder and the Gibeonites wanted them executed for their crimes.

Far from killing a man's sons for their father's crimes, this is about holding genocidal murderers accountable for their own actions. That changes things rather a lot, doesn't it?

Again, read the passage carefully.

I've lost count of the number of times that a single word was the key to understanding a difficult-to-understand passage. Because of that, it's important to read the verse carefully before you try to interpret or apply it.

Additionally, if the passage still doesn't make sense, perhaps it's time to start looking up the relevant words. Sometimes that clarifies things.

Immediate context addendum: Don't ignore “reason” words/phrases

By this, I mean words like these: (*in no particular order*)

- Therefore
- Because
- For (*when it's used to give a reason, usually at the start of a sentence*)
- So (*when used as a “reason” word*)
- That (*when used as a “reason” word*)

- So that
- For this reason
- etc.

Greek is full of words that connect thoughts. Don't ignore them because they often are key to understanding a passage. For example, just this morning (*as I write this paragraph*) I was talking with someone about Matthew 5:21-24

Matthew 5:21-24

21 You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'

22 But I say to you that **whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment**. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

23 **Therefore** if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Notice the "therefore" at the beginning of verse 23. I was always taught:

When you see a "therefore", ask "What's it there for?"

This led me to conclude that verses 22 and 23 were closely linked. I'll let you ponder the meaning of that particular "therefore" since explaining it would take a lot of space in an already long article, but it's important.

Those "reason" words are important; don't ignore them!

Moving on.

Close context (*the surrounding verses*)

Let's start with one of the verses that's most often quoted out of context.

Philippians 4:13

13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Sounds pretty encouraging, doesn't it? Nothing is impossible, right?

Well...

Let's look at the context.

Philippians 4:12-14

12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance **I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.**

13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

14 **Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.**

In context, Paul is talking about how he can endure all things because God gives him strength, not that he can do all things.

(Additionally, checking the Greek would help as well. It more literally reads: "I have strength in all things through the One strengthening me". The word typically translated "can do" more literally means "to be strong" or "to have strength". If you just took my word on that, you need to reread some of the earlier sections. ? You can see the word's definition [here](#).)

How about another one?

Jeremiah 29:11: 'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope.'

Let's just back up one verse...

Jeremiah 29:10-11

10 "For thus says the LORD, '**When seventy years have been completed for Babylon**, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.

11 'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'

God said this not long before he handed Israel over to Babylon to be devastated and all of the inhabitants carried off as captives of war or slaves. *(This was God judging them because they were burning their children alive as an offering to Molech; see Jeremiah chapter 19)* God's plan to give "a future and a hope" to the nation of Israel was for after it went through the most horrible thing it had suffered up to this point.

Context.

Context is important.

You can make the Bible say almost anything if you quote a verse out of context. Or as I've heard it put before:

I can teach all things through a verse taken out of context.

The basic rule is this: if you are going to use a verse to establish doctrine or practice, read at least one chapter before it and one chapter after it.

Preferably read several chapters before and after. (*For example, Matthew 21:18 through 26:2 all takes place on the same day; you would miss that if you didn't back up far enough*) If it's one of the epistles, just read the whole thing. Paul's letters especially tend to have a long, flowing quality to them, so you might miss the context if you only read one chapter.

Biblical context (*the rest of the Bible*)

The Bible is not a theology textbook. True that it's the source of Christian theology – or at least it should be – but it's not a textbook. Textbooks are typically arranged topically with subjects grouped together.

The Bible isn't.

The Bible is more like a big ball of wibbly-wobbly, timey-wimey... stuff. (*bonus points if you get the reference*) More to the point, unlike a theology textbook, it doesn't have all of its teaching on a particular topic in one place. **You can't flip to one passage on a particular topic and use that as the bible's final position without considering all of the other passages on that topic.**

From such things, extremely poor theology is made.

For example, divorce.

There are a lot of people who read Jesus's words on divorce in the Gospels and think that's it; that's the final word with no more nuance... but then don't consider that God also talked about divorce later in the New Testament and rather a lot in the Old Testament as well. **In fact, God Himself got a (*metaphorical/spiritual*) divorce.** (*Read Jeremiah 3*)

No joke.

Further, God decreed in the Mosaic Law that under certain conditions, a divorce happened automatically. **Yes, God decreed an automatic divorce under certain conditions in the Mosaic law.**

No joke.

(Details in my monster-length [article on divorce](#) for those who are interested.)

If you are going to build a doctrine, you need to take the entire Bible into account, not just a single verse.

Staying with the topic of divorce, some people believe that a second marriage isn't valid as long as the first spouse is still alive. But in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, we see that a woman who was at fault for a divorce – that is, her sin caused her husband to divorce her – she could get validly remarried. People who hold that no second marriage is valid as long as the first spouse lives have ignored that God explicitly stated that it's valid.

Additionally, God spiritually/metaphorically divorced Israel in Jeremiah 3 and yet the church is the bride of Christ. I have yet to hear a christian say the church's metaphorical marriage to Jesus is invalid, which would be required if a second marriage was invalid without the death of a spouse.

Many things are like this.

You need to consider **all** the passages on a topic, not just a few. Frankly, leaving even one verse out can cause serious problems in some cases. The internet is great for finding passages on a topic. My first search when I start looking into something new is usually to find all the verses so I don't misunderstand the topic.

I would like to write several more paragraphs to pound this point in as deep as it can possibly go. However, that would get repetitive and you'd probably skip ahead.

It's important though.

Make sure you read all the passages on a topic, not just a few. Or worse, only one.

Get the context.

Missing Cultural and/or Historical Context

Now, this one is a little harder and there are a lot of people who don't know simply because it's hard to find good information on it. I don't fault people for not knowing things like this. I would fault them for not checking the context or the other errors that we've talked about, but less so this one.

However, there is very good information out there if you know where to look. If you want an excellent overview, I have three recommendations, two of which are free and the third is a book so it's inexpensive.

(1) The paper "[Patronage and Reciprocity: The Context of Grace in the New Testament](#)" by David A. deSilva. [I have an article with an abbreviated version here on Berean Patriot](#) consisting of excerpts that give the overall picture. The full paper is well worth your time if you have the time; but if not, my article is only 1/4 the length of the full paper and gives a good overview, it's still ~6,400 words long though.

(2) Two specific videos done by Ray Vander Lann talking about seeing the Bible from the Hebrew cultural perspective. Ray Vander Lann spent years in the holy land and gained incredibly valuable insights into the culture that the Bible is from. I can't recommend these two videos highly enough, even though I disagree with some of his application. For your convenience, you can find both these videos embedded in [my article on Seeing the Bible from the Hebrew Cultural Perspective](#).

(3) The book "Misreading Scripture with Individualist Eyes" by E. Randolph Richards and Richard James. Its subtitle is "*Patronage, Honor, and Shame in the Biblical World*" and **this is one of the best Christian books I have ever read**. No Joke. **If I was going to recommend only one book that a Christian could read to understand the Bible better, this would be the book**. Yes, it's *that* good. It is 100% worth your time and I can't recommend it highly enough.

There are no shortage of other resources, but that'll give you a good foundation and a solid place to build from. Now, onto the next mistake of context:

Thinking 1st century Rome was patriarchal (*it wasn't*)

Yes, I know that every Christian "knows" that 1st century Rome was incredibly patriarchal and oppressed women, who were no better than slaves to their husbands.

Sigh.

A little history might help dispel that notion:

By the late Hellenistic Age, **this had resulted in a metamorphosis in the position of women. Equality for women extended beyond politics into economic life**, and in some occupations such as plumbing they came to dominate. The rate of divorce increased enormously, and **the power "of the paterfamilias was shaken to its foundations and eventually swept away altogether."** "The meek and henpecked Roman husband was already a stock comedy figure in the great days of the Second Punic War." This changing relationship led Cato the Censor to protest bitterly, **"All other men rule over women; but we Romans, who rule all men, are ruled by our women."** Equality had progressed to the point that **by the late Empire a woman who married retained her property, "and, legally, the man had not even the right to enjoy the income from it."**

"Egalitarianism and Empire" by William F. Marina [here](#).

Let me repeat that quote in the middle so it's not missed.

“All other men rule over women; but **we Romans**, who rule all men, **are ruled by our women**.”

– [Cato the Elder/Censor](#), died in 149 B.C.

That was written before Cato died in 149 B.C. That’s ~150 years before Jesus was born and as much as ~200 years before the epistles were written.

Rome was pretty egalitarian.

As I covered in [my book review of “The Making of Biblical Womanhood” by Beth Allison Barr](#) (*a terrible book that distorts history BTW*), there’s more evidence.

For instance, look into [Hortensia](#). In 42 BC she **publicly** argued down the ruling Roman triumvirate (*Caesar Augustus, Mark Anthony, and Marcus Lepidus*) in the Forum Romanum. She was protesting a **tax on women** that they wanted to institute. The tax wasn’t going to be on their husbands; it was going to be on the women themselves. Again: “*Equality had progressed to the point that by the late Empire a woman who married retained her property, “and, legally, the man had not even the right to enjoy the income from it.”*”

There’s also [Fulvia](#). She died in 40 BC and (*in succession*) was the wife of three great Romans, the best known of whom is Mark Anthony. According to the **Roman historian** Cassius Dio, at one point Fulvia controlled the politics of Rome. Dio wrote:

“The following year Publius Servilius and Lucius Antonius nominally became consuls, but in reality it was Antonius and **Fulvia**. **She**, the mother-in-law of Octavian and wife of Antony, had no respect for Lepidus because of his slothfulness, and **managed affairs herself, so that neither the senate nor the people transacted any business contrary to her pleasure.**”

To be clear: a **woman** was basically ruling Rome.

Or this from the book “Sex and Culture” by J.D. Unwin, page 397:

In the second century (B.C.) confarreatio disappeared ... Free marriages became usual, made and broken by mutual consent. Indeed **the will of one party only was sufficient for a divorce**, the intention to dissolve being communicated either by word of mouth or by messenger. There was no ceremony, no registration, no formality. **Women were free from any trace of marital authority**; they could hold property and could contract in their own name.

This lines up perfectly with the quote about women ruling men in Rome. So please, don’t be misled into thinking that Rome was patriarchal when the New Testament was written.

It wasn’t.

Early Rome was definitely patriarchal, but not by Jesus’s day.

Ignoring biblical commands because “it’s cultural”

The most common arena where I see this come up is in gender roles, so we’ll use that as an example. (*There’s a reason we just covered that Rome wasn’t patriarchal...*)

One popular example of a command from God that’s dismissed as being “cultural” is the various passages about wives submitting to their husbands.

They are clear commands that aren’t time-limited or bound by culture. This is especially clear in places like Colossians 3:18 where the command stands alone in a list of similar commands. As we saw in the previous section, these commands weren’t reinforcing the culture; they were actually counter-cultural.

Now, some things were indeed temporary, but they are explicitly stated to be such:

For example:

1 Corinthians 7:25-26

25 Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.

26 I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is.

Notice, this is explicitly stated to be temporary.

Another example is the Mosaic Law. While it was in place for about 1500 years, it is also explicitly stated to *not* be in place anymore in many, many places in the New Testament. (*Much of Romans and the entire book of Galatians for example*). So please, don’t assume that a command from God in the Bible can be ignored because “it’s cultural”.

Again, feminists are the worst offenders in this regard and are often downright deceptive in their “scholarship”.

No joke.

We’ll look at that next

A related mistake: Trusting Feminist/Egalitarian “scholarship”

A point of clarity first: I’m not attacking feminists themselves; I’m attacking the “scholarly” work they have produced. I don’t think most of them intend to be deceptive in their work, though that’s the result.

I realize that extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof, so let me provide some:

The first proof is my article: [Book Review: "The Making of Biblical Womanhood" by Beth Allison Barr](#). In it, I show how the author repeatedly makes misleading and downright false claims about history throughout in an attempt to push her feminist narrative. This is normal in feminist "scholarship".

Here's just one example from my article:

Barr has a chapter on "our selective medieval memory" where she argues that we've forgotten the great women of faith throughout church history. She asserts that these are "women who broke free from marriage to serve God" (page 78) and provides several example stories, including the one below on page 79:

I wondered what the speaker would think of women like Saint Paula, who **abandoned** her children for the **higher purpose** of God's call on her life. Paula's story tells of how she set sail for Jerusalem – after the death of her husband – on a pilgrimage, **leaving three of her children alone, crying on the shore.**

...

Saint Jerome, her biographer, tells us that **as the ship drew away from the shore, Paula "held her eyes to heaven . . . ignoring her children and putting her trust in God . . . In that rejoicing**, her courage coveted the love of her children as the greatest of its kind, yet she left them all for the love of God."

(She then goes on to list Paula's deeds afterward, which comes across as gushing praise.)

Barr paints what I consider to be a pretty horrifying picture. A mother literally abandoning her children to sail away from them as they cry on the shore wanting her to come back. She ignores them and then rejoices in this.

Barr appears to think this is a good thing.

It's pretty horrifying stuff...

...except it's not quite right historically speaking.

If you [do some research on Paula](#), you'll find out that her children weren't necessarily as young as the impression that Barr gives. One was married to a senator and she took one of her daughters with her. **So which is it?** Did Barr think they were crying young children or grown? **Why not mention that she took a daughter with her?** Barr's narrative in *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* makes it seem like they were young children. History paints a more complicated picture.

- Did Barr know these things?
- If so, did she intentionally leave them out to paint a more dramatic picture?
- If she didn't know it, then aren't her historical credentials called into question? (yet again)

Regardless of what she knew, **why does Barr seem to glorify the book's narrative of a mother abandoning her seemingly young children, ignoring their cries as she resolutely sails away rejoicing?** Why should that be glorified under any context?

This sort of omission is normal and common in feminist "scholarship".

Seriously.

No joke.

As another example, [Mike Winger has an 11.5 hour video on 1 Timothy 2:12](#). He starts the video by saying that the passage is clear and that the only video is only needed to dispel the confusion that feminist "scholarship" has created around it. He then spends 10+ hours of the video stating the feminist position and then showing how they distort facts, leave information out, or just plain old lie to push their agenda.

(An example Mike covers in the video: person A wrote a paper pushing a feminist narrative. Person B wrote a paper rebutting person A's paper. Then person A responded by writing another paper in which he quoted person B's paper – the one written to rebut him – out of context in order to make it look like person B agreed with him. No, that's not a joke; that actually happened. See the video.)

Another great example is Marg Mowczko's (*popular*) website. I've been sent many articles from her website over the years and have yet to read one that wasn't filled with errors, even to the point of being outright deceptive in some cases.

Basically, I no longer trust feminist "scholarship". Every time I look deeper into it, I find out it's filled with errors, half-truths, and sometimes outright lies.

Now, I'm not saying that all feminists are this way; I'm saying that virtually all of the feminist "scholarship" that I've seen – from both men and women – is this way.

So, my advice to you is this: double-check every single thing a feminist/egalitarian scholar says, even when that scholar quotes primary sources. Sometimes they quote accurately but then leave enough out to distort things anyway. I've seen it far too often to trust such "scholarship" and right now I can't think of a single exception; there might be one, but I can't think of it at the moment. (*And if you want examples, Mike Winger's long video linked above is a great source of them.*)

Now we'll move to the next major error of context.

Thinking Proverbs are promises (*they aren't*)

The book of Proverbs is just exactly that: a book of proverbs. It's not a book of promises, it's a book of proverbs.

This is a proverb:

A short pithy saying in frequent and widespread use that expresses a basic truth or practical precept.

[Source](#).

That is not a promise. It's not a guarantee. It's a wise statement that's practical and true. For example:

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.

This is **not** a promise.

It's a proverb.

Generally speaking, if you raise a child well he'll turn out well. That proverb expresses a basic and practical truth because it's a proverb. Please don't think of the proverbs as promises.

They aren't.

Getting theology from poetic books (*like Psalms*)

Psalms is a great book and a great source of comfort for many Christians. I think God intended it that way, but I don't think He intended it to be treated like a theology textbook. I actually devoted a significant chunk of [my article on original sin](#) to this since Psalm 51 is a central passage in the debate. I recommend that you read that article if you want more examples, but I'll give one to demonstrate the point.

Job 31:18

18 (But from my youth I reared him as a father,
And **from my mother's womb I guided the widow**);

Apparently, Job was guiding widows either while in his mother's womb or just after being born... at least if you take it literally. You see the problem. The moment you start taking the Bible's poetic books literally, you end up with some strange theology.

So be encouraged by the grand poetic imagery of Psalms, but also **be wary of taking it as literal or as a specific promise to you**.

Now, let's move to the next large category of errors.

Mistake category #3: Assuming the wrong audience

The Bible wasn't written to you or me. It was written for you and me (*and all Christians*), but it wasn't written to you and me. Allow me to prove that at least in part.

Galatians 1:1-2

1 Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),

2 and all the brethren who are with me, **to the churches of Galatia**:

Most of the other epistles are that way as well.

Now, don't misunderstand me: **I am categorically not saying that the Bible doesn't apply to us**. I'm not saying that at all. What I am saying is that the Bible was written to specific people in specific places at specific times.

In 2 Chronicles 20, there was a great army approaching and God told Israel not to fight it, but rather to simply go and "*see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf*". Now, they happened to be singing to God and some Christians think that means all we need to do to win the battle is to sing/worship God. However, during the conquest of Caanan, God told Israel to use the sword. God gives different instructions to different people at different times.

The same is true today.

Just because God said something at a specific time and specific place to a specific person doesn't necessarily mean that the same thing applies to you. Sometimes it does because there are universal promises, but more often – especially in the Old Testament – they are specific promises to specific people at specific times.

That leads us to the first error in this category:

“claiming those promises”

There's a terrible “Christian” children's song that goes like this:

Every promise in the book is mine,
Every scripture, every verse, every line.
All are blessings of His love divine,
Every promise in the book is mine.

For a moment, we'll set aside the obvious problem and just focus on the “what if” question; what if that was the case? Would we really want that? Well, let's take a look:

Deuteronomy 28:15-19

15 If, however, you do not obey the LORD your God by carefully following **all His commandments and statutes I am giving you today**, (*Berean Patriot note: that's the provisions of the Mosaic Law by the way*) all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

16 You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country.

17 Your basket and kneading bowl will be cursed.

18 The fruit of your womb will be cursed, as well as the produce of your land, the calves of your herds, and the lambs of your flocks.

19 You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.

And it gets worse from there. It gets a LOT worse. (*Seriously, go read the rest of the chapter if you want to see how bad it gets.*) **Thank God that this wasn't addressed to us!** If you go back and read it in context – yes, context again – you'll see that this is part of the covenant that God made with Israel. It doesn't apply to us, not at all. (*Thank God*)

You can't just assume that the promises God made to Israel apply to Christians today.

It doesn't work that way.

Now, some promises are universal in application, but they are usually explicitly stated to be so.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever** believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

This is a universal promise that you can absolutely claim, and thank God for that! The Bible is indeed filled with promises, but not all of those promises are "claimable". The universal ones are, but many of them aren't.

Please, don't try to "claim" a promise that wasn't intended for you.

Assuming that the Bible always addresses both men and women

We'll start with a verse that perfectly encapsulates this, and I want you to read the part that's highlighted carefully.

Jeremiah 44:24-25

24 Then Jeremiah said to all the people, including all the women, "Hear the word of the LORD, all Judah who are in the land of Egypt,

25 thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, as follows: 'As for you and your wives, you have spoken with your mouths and fulfilled it with your hands, saying, "We will certainly perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her." Go ahead and confirm your vows, and certainly perform your vows!'

Did you notice it?

Who is God speaking to? "all the people, including all the women." Yet whom did God address? "You", and the "you" here clearly have wives. Obviously the women didn't have wives, so this was addressed to the men, even though "all the people, including all the women" were present.

Here's another verse with a similar pattern:

Psalms 128:1-3

1 How blessed is **everyone** who fears the LORD, Who walks in His ways.

2 When **you** shall eat of the fruit of your hands, **You** will be happy and it will be well with **you**.

3 **Your wife** shall be like a fruitful vine

Within your house,
Your children like olive plants
Around your table.

In verse 1, who is “everyone”? Obviously it’s referring to men because women don’t have wives. One more example, this one even clearer:

Ezekiel 34:31

“As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, **you are men**, and I am your God,” declares the Lord GOD.

I’ll post a long list of additional examples in a minute, but here’s the spoiler:

The entire Bible – both the Old and the New Testaments – is *almost* entirely addressed to men, not women.

No joke.

This is actually good news for women, and I explain why in my article: [How Crucial are Women to a Biblical Household? Very!](#)

Now, you don’t have to like this.

Not at all.

You can hate it.

You can loathe and detest it.

But if it’s true – which I’ll prove in a minute with a *ton* of examples – then you can’t ignore it without seriously misunderstanding the Bible in some places.

But you say: “Prove it!”

The Proof

Here are some more examples, and these are but a small fraction of them. No, strike that. These are but a *minuscule fraction* of them. And if you are a woman reading this, **this is actually to the benefit of women, as counter-intuitive as it might seem**. Please see my article [How Crucial are Women to a Biblical Household? Very!](#) for more on why this is good for you.

Here are but a few examples: (*You can stop when you get tired of reading them, but realize this is only a tiny fraction of the examples I could post*)

- The 10th commandment reads “**You** shall not covet **your neighbor’s wife**.”, which is obviously

addressed to men.

- In Leviticus 18, God gives a long list of sexual practices which are forbidden. He begins each verse with “you shall not”. The “you” there is explicitly referring to men, which is clear from reading it. It’s made even more explicit in verse 23: “Also *you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion.*” Most commands are given to men with the phrasing: “you shall not”, but the one command is given about women “nor shall any woman”.
- In Deuteronomy 29:2 it says: “And Moses summoned *all Israel* and said to them”. In verse 11 it says “your little ones, *your wives*,”. Again, “all Israel” means either (1) every last man and woman, in which case this is only addressed to men even though women are present. Or (2) “all Israel” means just the men. Either way, only men are being spoken to.
- In Acts 1:16, Peter begins speaking by addressing: “*men*, brothers”, and the word for “men” there means adult males only, excluding women. (*note many translations obscure this fact; look at [Acts 1:16 in an interlinear](#) or the LSB to see it.*) This is despite the fact that the women are specifically mentioned as being present in verse 14.
- In Luke 18:29-30, Jesus says “There is *no one (masculine word)* who has *left house or wife* or brothers or parents or children,” for the Kingdom who won’t get a return in the age to come. However, not only does Jesus use a Masculine form for “no one”, but Jesus only mentions a wife, not a husband. He’s speaking to men, not to women.
- In Luke 15, Jesus tells a few parables of the same kind. In the first, He opens it with “What man among *you*,”, but in the second, he opens with “Or what *woman*,”. Notice, no “of you”; again He’s speaking to men, but about women.
- In 1 Corinthians 16:3, Paul commands that they “*act like men*”. This makes no sense if he was also addressing women.
- *In 1 John 2:12-14, John says that he writes to little children, young men, and fathers. What about young women and mothers?*
- God is often called the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”, but what about Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah?
- *In Revelation 14:4, we read about the 144,000, who “have not defiled themselves with women”, which obviously refers to men.*
- Genesis 2:24 says “*a man* shall leave his father and his mother”, but what of the woman? She leaves her parents much more in that culture, yet the woman is never mentioned.
- In Genesis 3:23-24, God drove “*him*” (*Adam*) out of the Garden in verse 23, and “*the man*” out in verse 24. But what of Eve? Again, her being driven out with her husband is assumed.

Again, this isn’t a commentary on women nor degrading to them. It’s actually **good** for them and to their advantage. (*again, see my article [How Crucial are Women to a Biblical Household? Very!](#) for why.*) If that wasn’t enough, let’s look at literally dozens more all at once.

There’s a common construction in the New Testament that’s masculine, but translated as gender-neutral 99% of the time.

(*I go into a lot of detail about Greek in my article: [A Complete, 100% English Introduction to Koine Greek \(with Examples in English\)](#) so I won’t rehash all of it here. If you want more detail, please look at that article.*)

For context, the Greek definite article (“*the*” in English) can be used as a pronoun, and here’s [one such example pulled from an interlinear Bible](#)

so you can double check me if you want:

Matthew 1:6 and to Jesse was born David the king. And to David was born Solomon by **her** *who had been the wife of Uriah*;

Notice that the phrase “*who had been the wife*” is *italicized*. The NASB does this to show when words were added by the translators for clarity. **Notice the word “her” in red**. That’s the Greek definite article (“*the*” in English) functioning as a pronoun. You can double-check me on this by looking at [the verse in an interlinear Bible](#).

Now, a common construction in the New Testament is using the definite article as a pronoun with a participle following it. Almost every time you see “he who___”, where the “___” is a verb, it’s a masculine definite article + participle combination.

Here’s the kicker.

Almost every time you see “Those who ___”, where the “___” is a verb, it’s a plural masculine definite article + participle combination. That means it would be more accurately understood as “The men who ___”.

For example:

- **Matthew 5:4** “Blessed are **those who mourn**, for they shall be comforted.
- **John 1:12** But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to **those who believe** in His name,
- **Romans 7:1** Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to **those who know** the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?
- **1 Corinthians 1:24** but to **those who are called**, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.
- **2 Peter 2:1** Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To **those who have received** a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ
- **James 1:12** Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to **those who love** Him.
- etc.

The entire New Testament is like this.

Almost every time you see the word “who”, or “whoever”, or “all”, or “every”, or “each”, or “those”, or even “they” and “them”, they are typically masculine words and refer to men (*when they refer to people and not objects*).

Now, what’s being stated usually applies to women too. (*though not always; more on that in a moment*)

For example, the moral commands about not murdering, killing, stealing, etc. are universally applicable. However, to quote Bible-researcher.com on an article about this topic:

In short, the Bible is by no means gender-neutral. It presents from beginning to end a thoroughly “androcentric” perspective, and it often leaves it to the reader to decide what application to women or what inclusion of women is implied.

[Source.](#)

The point is this: **the Bible was written to men, not women, and you need to keep that in mind when reading the Bible or you could misapply verses.**

Why This Matters

As I write this paragraph, I had a conversation last night with a female friend where this came up. We were talking about singleness and of course we went to Matthew 19:10-12. Notice something though:

Matthew 19:10-12

10 The disciples said to Him, “If the relationship of the **man** with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.”

11 But He said to them, “Not all **men** can accept this statement, but only those to **whom (masculine pronoun)** it has been given.

12 “For there are eunuchs **who (masculine pronoun)** were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs **who (masculine pronoun)** were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs **who (masculine pronoun)** made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. **He who is able to (masculine article + participle)** accept this, let him accept it.”

She noticed what I highlighted above, that this verse speaks specifically to **men**, not women. That’s important.

This is a good example of why understanding that the Bible is written to men matters.

The Bible does speak to men intentionally being single, but not women. Thus, **if you use Jesus’s words in Matthew 19 to override specific instructions to women elsewhere, you run into error.**

One example of this is singleness, which is what my friend and I were talking about.

We’ll look at those instructions after a quick clarification: **God gives women primary roles, but He never says that they are a woman’s only roles.** The Proverbs 31 woman was also an entrepreneur and lauded for it, but Proverbs 31 also talks about home and family (*the primary roles*) before talking about her other roles, which included entrepreneurship.

So let's see what the Bible says about singleness for women:

Titus 2:3-5 (NASB 95)

3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good,

4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,

5 to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

And again, it doesn't say that women must be only workers at home. Please, don't make primary roles into only roles.

The context of this next verse is about young widows, but I have yet to hear an argument that would make this not apply to young women generally, especially given the verse above.

1 Timothy 5:14 (NASB 95)

14 Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

That word "desire" is the Greek word "?????????" (boulomai) and it means: (*and notice I'm quoting a lexicon and providing a link so you can double-check for yourself.*)

Cognate: 1014 *boúlomai* – to plan with full resolve (determination). See 1012 (*boul?*).

1014 /*boúlomai* ("resolutely plan") is a strong term that underlines the predetermined (and determined) intention driving the planning (wishing, resolving).

I translated that verse this way:

1 Timothy 5:14 (my translation, which in my biased opinion is far more literal and accurate, partially because it translates the Greek infinitive verb usually translated "marry" properly as an English infinitive: "to marry".)

14 Therefore, I'm resolved that younger women are to marry, to bear children, to manage their household, and to give the one opposing us no opportunity for slander on *their* account.

Do you see how “resolved” in my translation brings out the very strong force of the Greek? This isn’t just a “wish”, or a “desire”, but God is “resolved” or “determined”, or has “resolutely planned” that young women should marry.

Do you see why this is important?

The problem with reading the entire Bible as written to men and women is that you can read instructions written only to men as instructions that also apply to women, and thus stray into error.

This applies to several other important topics, including what’s a legitimate cause for divorce (*you can see [my article on divorce](#) for more details*). However, I’ve already spent too much time on this particular mistake so we’ll move on.

(If you would like more background/history and yet more evidence, I recommend the article “[The Gender-Neutral Language Controversy](#)” by Michael D. Marlowe, especially the first set of bullet points under the heading “The Patriarchal Bible Problem”).

Miscellaneous issues

These don’t fit as neatly into the other categories but are still problems.

The Phrase “Biblical Principles”

If I hear a teacher use the phrase “biblical principles” when he isn’t discussing the phrase itself, that’s a yellow flag for me. Not a red flag, but certainly a yellow flag.

Why?

Because it’s often used to elevate man’s traditions/practices to the level of Biblical commands. For example: the “biblical principle” of “accountability”. Now, if you want to flip to chapter and verse and say that Christians are accountable to God, I’m right there with you. The various passages about God repaying each man according to his deeds are numerous and clear.

However, that’s not really what the phrase “*biblical principle of accountability*” means in the modern church. Most churches that I’ve seen use the phrase to mean that a Christian man (*this is never applied to women*) should tell another Christian whenever he sins. The verse used to support this is this one:

James 5:16

16 Therefore, **confess your sins to one another** (*Note: they almost always stop here and don’t even finish the verse*) **and pray for one another so that you may be healed**. The

effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

Notice the “why” clause? I hope so because we talked about how important they are earlier

You are to confess so that you might be healed. Notice the context of the preceding verses.

James 5:14-16

14 Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

16 Therefore, **confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed.** The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

Context!

Notice that the “healing” here is physical healing and the confession is connected to such physical healing. The idea of church “accountability groups” can’t come from this passage.

This is one example of something supported by the phrase “biblical principles” that isn’t taught in scripture.

Now, there are plenty of things that are good ideas that aren’t taught by scripture. But when someone uses the phrase “biblical principles”, it’s a subtle way of elevating something to the level of a command from God when it isn’t. You might even argue that “accountability groups” are healthy and good, but you still can’t elevate them to the level of a biblical command. *(And I personally don’t think they are healthy or good, but that’s another discussion for another time.)*

Thus, the phrase “biblical principles” is a yellow flag.

Not a red flag, but a yellow flag.

Eisegesis: reading into scripture

The word “eisegesis means:

1. **A subjective method of interpretation by introducing one’s own opinions into the original:** opposed to exegesis.
2. An interpretation, especially of Scripture, that reflects the personal ideas or viewpoint of the interpreter; **reading something into a text that isn’t there.** Compare exegesis.
3. Personal interpretation of a text (especially of the Bible) using your own ideas.

Now we all do this to some degree. I try to assiduously avoid it, but every once in a while I catch

myself doing it anyway. *(And that's always scary to me because it makes me wonder how often I don't catch myself doing it.)*

Here's an example of eisegesis.

For a short time while church hunting, I attended a Calvinist church. At the time, the pastor was teaching through John's gospel and I found myself constantly scratching my head when he taught. There are several stories of miracles near the beginning of John where this Calvinist pastor taught that basically anyone who wanted a miracle from Jesus was doing so with truly awful, terrible, motives. He went on like this for many weeks.

Eventually, I realized that he did this because he was a Calvinist and was – in my opinion – not capable of seeing anyone as having good motives because he was reading the first point of Calvinism (*the total depravity of man*) into every single passage. **Even when someone was stated to have good motives, he had to twist things to make the motives bad.**

That's eisegesis.

That's reading your biases into the text.

(As a side note, I've noticed that feminists/egalitarians and Calvinists tend to be the worst offenders in this regard. Everyone does it to some extent, but those two groups seem to do it far more than anyone else.)

This is unfortunately something that none of us can completely overcome because we often aren't aware that we are doing it. **Perhaps the best cure is to read the Bible with others and let iron sharpen iron.** If we are the body of Christ and each part supplies what the others lack, then perhaps that's partially what God intended. ?

Bible stories are often descriptive, not prescriptive

There's a great example of this in Ezra that upsets many people. Now, please read the following carefully.

Ezra Chapter 10:1-5

1 Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men, women and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly.

2 Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, said to Ezra, "We have been unfaithful to our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel in spite of this.

3 "So now let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord (*Berean Patriot note: notice the lower case "I" in "lord; he's not talking about God."*)

and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

4 “Arise! For this matter is your responsibility, but we will be with you; be courageous and act.”

5 Then Ezra rose and made the leading priests, the Levites and all Israel, take oath that they would do according to this proposal; so they took the oath.

I have lost count of the number of times people have been very upset by this because they think it means that God commanded these men to divorce their wives, seemingly without cause. **However, a careful reading of this passage reveals that it wasn't God's idea.**

Not at all.

It was the idea of Shecaniah the son of Jehiel and they made an oath to divorce their wives without consulting God. This reminds me of the story of Gibeonites in Joshua chapter 9. Joshua 9 happened during the conquest of Caanan and the Gibeonites – who lived in Caanan – tricked the Israelites into thinking they were from far away, which is where the relevant part is for this point.

Joshua 9:14-15

14 So the men of Israel took some of their provisions, and did not ask for the counsel of the LORD.

15 Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore *an oath* to them.

Read in context, this was a bad thing that they didn't consult God. This story in Joshua 9 has an obvious link with Ezra 10 since Israel didn't consult God before swearing an oath in either case.

Ezra chapter 10 is one example of a Biblical story that is descriptive, not prescriptive.

It describes what happened but it doesn't tell that it's a good thing or a bad thing; it just happened. The Bible accurately records history and there are plenty of lessons to be learned from that history. However, be careful that you don't slide into error by making a story like this prescriptive instead of recognizing it as descriptive.

This happens a LOT in the Old Testament.

There are no shortage of stories where someone – often even someone who's otherwise righteous – is recorded as doing things without comment. Remember in such cases that much of the Bible is history. It accurately records what happened, but that doesn't mean that God approves of what happened. Remember to discern between a story that is descriptive versus one that's prescriptive.

Conclusion

Nearly all of these errors can be avoided by carefully reading the passage and taking context into account. I mean both the immediate, close, and biblical context; cultural context is often important as well. When in doubt, check the original language in a real lexicon, and Strong's doesn't count.

On a more personal note, I'd like to thank everyone who emailed to ask if I was okay since it's been so long since I posted an article. I'm doing okay, just extremely busy which is why I haven't written more lately. Thank you all again. ?