Wings

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"The Bible Teaches"

We are eager to quote Scripture to defend our beliefs. But so what? Even Satan can do that.

We must take care that our use of the Scriptures follows sound rules of interpretation.

"Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: "He shall give His angels charge over you," and, "In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone."' Jesus said to him, 'It is written again, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God"'" (Matt. 4:5-7).

". . . in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Pet. 3:16).

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We pride ourselves on being a people of the Book. Whatever the issue before us, "the Bible teaches. . . " is the final word. If the Bible teaches it, we believe it; if not, we don't. It's safer that way, right?

But while this may sound good in theory, in practice it carries a considerable degree of risk. For all its value, the Bible can become a stumbling block if we are careless in how we use it.

Consider, for example, how Satan sought to derail Jesus' mission. He took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and urged Him to jump off, apparently to get Jesus to show off His special connection with God. After all, did not *the Bible teach* that legions of angels would swoop down to rescue Him (Psa. 91:11-12)? What better way to prove His Messiahship than to put on a grand display of power before thousands of witnesses in the very shadow of the temple!

The problem with this challenge, of course, was that instead of trusting God to care for Him, such a foolish stunt would have been *forcing* God's hand. That's pride, not faith—which is why Jesus refused to take the bait (by quoting a clarifying Scripture).

This exchange, pitting one Scripture against another, illustrates the danger that hangs over our use of the Bible. Whether by carelessness or by stubbornness, we can easily follow Satan's lead and use a bit or two of Scripture to promote a concept that God never sanctioned. We can, in Peter's words, "twist the Scriptures" to our own destruction.

How can we avoid abusing the Scriptures in this fashion?

The first rule is to always, *always*, study the context. Who is speaking? To whom are they speaking? What is the purpose? What is the setting? For example, Job 4:8 ("Those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same") sounds like a great text for a sermon—until we realize that it was spoken by Eliphaz, who was unfairly seeking to blame Job for bringing his tragedy upon himself. That context forces us to temper the message we draw from his words.

A second rule—one used by Jesus in His duel with Satan—is to harmonize passages with other texts dealing with the same theme. The Bible is often its own best interpretor, but it requires a great deal of careful study to connect all the dots that will reveal the full portrait of truth.

There are other safeguards that should govern our use of the Scriptures, but these are adequate to illustrate the problem. Merely declaring "the Bible teaches . . . !" doesn't necessarily prove what we think it proves.

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