

Why use the Every-Verse Method?

By K. Scott Schaeffer

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Have you ever found yourself reading the Bible, and unexpectedly, you encounter a verse that perfectly supports something you already believe? Maybe it's a belief that somebody else had told you was incorrect. Maybe you had an argument over it, because you knew you were right about this crucial issue. Upon discovery of this verse, you feel a sense of elation, because it will enable you to win similar arguments about that crucial issue in the future. The newly-discovered Bible verse immediately becomes one of your favorites.

So you underline the verse. You make note of where it resides in the Bible. You recite it a few times to commit it to memory, in case you don't have a Bible nearby when you need it. You can't wait to have a discussion on this issue again, because you know that those who oppose you will not stand a chance when you whip out this powerful Bible verse.

Finally, the long-awaited day arrives. You find yourself discussing that very important issue again, perhaps even with the same person with whom you disagreed before. As the discussion begins, you get excited, because you know that this time—you have the ultimate weapon in your arsenal. You wait for the perfect moment, open your Bible to the correct page, and recite the magic verse that proves you are on the side of God.

As a result of your secret weapon's irrefutability, you expect your opponent to stumble backward and fall to the ground, admitting, as he gasps for his last breath, that he was siding with the devil all along. But that's not what happens. Much to your surprise,

your opponent opens his Bible and does the unthinkable—*he* quotes a Bible verse that refutes *your* Bible verse! Knowing that your opponent’s Bible verse is inferior to your Bible verse, you decide to take the only possible course of action: you say your verse again, but louder and more emphatically this time. Your opponent fires back with some sort of evil gibberish, but you are no longer listening to what he is saying, because his arguments might lead you to side with the devil, too. So you repeat your verse again; but this time, you follow it with the ultimate accusation, “Are you telling me the Bible is wrong? Are you saying that the word of God is lying?”

Welcome to the world of Bible-based Christianity. Not every disagreement between Christians is as dramatic as the one I just described, but I’m sure this example gives you a sense of Bible-based Christianity’s great dilemma. We have a Bible that we believe to be the word of God. We believe that God gave us this Bible, because He wants us to have all the right spiritual answers (the Bible doesn’t say that, however). Yet, we disagree on numerous spiritual issues, even though we all base our beliefs on this very same book.

How can this be? Does the Bible contradict itself? I’ve heard many non-Christians say that it does; most Bible-believing Christians say it doesn’t. If we take the Bible at face value, believing that every verse is directed toward today’s world, and the original context in which it was written is not taken into consideration, then the Bible does indeed contradict itself. But most sensible Bible-believers understand that we have to look at the historical background of the Bible’s various books in order to understand them. Usually, when we examine the context and historical background of what appear to be conflicting verses, we realize that they don’t contradict each other after all.

Even though many of our disagreements and misinterpretations of the Bible are the result of the fact that we have imperfect minds and an imperfect knowledge of the context in which each book of the Bible was written, we owe many of our misinterpretations to the fact that we are merely Bible-based Christians. Being Bible-based does not necessarily mean that we search the entire Bible to seek the truth. Instead, being Bible-based often means that we focus on the verses that appear to support the beliefs we want to hold, and we ignore the verses that might lead us to change our minds if we were to seriously consider them. Let’s face it: the Bible is a big book. If we search

long enough, we are bound to find a verse that supports whatever we want to believe. When we take this approach, we are likely to paddle upstream against God's will.

Here's an example of the Bible-based approach gone wrong: It involves **1 Corinthians 6:19**: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" Over the years, I have witnessed numerous occasions in which Christians have used this famous verse to support their man-made physical health agenda. My earliest memory of this is from the late 70's, when a recently *born again* relative pulled out the Bible, recited this verse, and told my parents that they would spend eternity in hell if they continued to smoke cigarettes. Other Christians have used the "body is a temple" verse to campaign against eating fatty foods, or even meat, despite the fact that the Bible records God commanding the eating of meat on several occasions.

Fortunately, in this case, we don't have to look very far to find the true meaning of verse 19. The verses immediately preceding it command the members of the church to avoid prostitution. **Verse 15** states, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be!" So when verse 19 tells us the "body is a temple," it does not address eating, smoking, or exercise at all; it addresses sex with prostitutes.

Isn't it astounding that Christians regularly distort the "body is a temple" verse, even though the verses surrounding it explain its meaning? How much more will we distort verses that are not so easily defined by the verses surrounding them? With most Bible verses, we must examine other chapters and books of the Bible to gain a proper understanding of the issue at hand. If we don't look elsewhere, we might venture down the wrong path by building errant beliefs out of a misinterpretation of a solitary verse.

An excellent example of how we could do such a thing is found in **Luke 14:26**, where Jesus is quoted as having said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." Here, an explanation of what this verse means is not provided in the same paragraph as it was for the "body is a temple" verse. We have to look elsewhere in the Bible to better understand the meaning of Luke 14:26. I'm not going to cover every family relationship verse in the Bible at this point; but we know from the 6th

commandment saying, “Honor your mother and your father [**Exodus 20:12**]” to the Apostle Paul’s plea of “Husbands, love your wives, [**Ephesians 5:25**]”, that we are called to love our families as well as everybody else. Jesus even instructed us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

Fortunately, I’ve never known a Christian to misuse this verse to insist that we are to hate our families. Most Christians believe that Jesus wants our love for our families to pale in comparison to our love for Him, and that we shall not turn away from Him at our family’s insistence.

Okay then, so are we to love our families or hate them? The answer is that we must love our families—the exact opposite of what Luke 14:26 appears to say when we read it without examining the rest of the Bible! Yet with so many other verses, many of which we will examine in upcoming chapters, we do make the mistake of building an entire theology out of one or two specific words found in them. And if anybody presents biblical evidence to the contrary, we simply repeat the verse again and claim that our view is the indisputable, exact word of God.

If we choose to hang on every word of a given verse that supports our beliefs, and do so in the name of perfect adherence to every word of the Bible, then we must hang on every word of every Bible verse, not just the ones we like. So let’s take a look at several Bible verses where we just might fall short of this lofty ideal.

Exodus 23:10-11, “And you shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, but on the seventh year, you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard and your olive garden.”

Analysis: If we follow the Sabbath day, why do we Christians not follow the biblical Sabbath year? I say we all take next year off!

Exodus 23:14-16, “Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me...the feast of Unleavened bread [vs. 15]...The Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits [vs. 16]...The Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year [vs. 16].”

Analysis: Okay, the first one is Passover, which we still celebrate, but what happened to the other two feasts? You could say we replaced them with Thanksgiving and Christmas, but these two holidays were not created for that reason.

Leviticus 19:13, “The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning.”

Analysis: As a former sales rep, I have often had to wait nearly two months for my commissions. I can't recall knowing anyone in our society who has received pay the same day in which they worked.

Leviticus 19:19, “You shall keep my statutes. You shall not breed together two kinds of cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together.”

Analysis: I can proudly say that I have never broken the cow-mixing rule. However, I can also say that I have never known a Christian to have a garden comprised of only one kind of plant; and I have known plenty of Christians, including myself, who wear cotton-polyester shirts.

Leviticus 19:27, “You shall not round off the side-growth of your heads, nor harm the edges of your beard.”

Analysis: Maybe the Amish are onto something here. Then again, maybe God wanted the Israelites to look nothing like the clean-shaven Egyptians, whose oppression they had just escaped. God may have wanted the Israelites to have an identity of their own, as He was preparing to make a mighty nation out of them. He most likely did not want them look and feel like a spin-off of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 8:10, “When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you.”

Analysis: Looks like we got this one backwards, since we give thanks before we eat, not after.

Deuteronomy 22:8, “When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone falls from it.”

Analysis: A parapet is a wall or fence lining the edge of a roof. I can always tell how many Christians live in a neighborhood by counting the roofs with fences on them. I’m being sarcastic, of course. In Egypt (the land the Israelites had just vacated prior to receiving this Mosaic law), the arid climate allowed people to sleep on rooftops, which they did regularly; so rooftop fences made more sense for them than they do for us.

Deuteronomy 22:12, “You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of your garment with which you cover yourself.”

Analysis: This may be my least favorite verse, because I doubt that I would enjoy, or be very good at, making tassels. At least Elvis fans can be encouraged by the fact that “The King” upheld this law.

Deuteronomy 25:5, “When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. And it shall be that the first-born whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother that his name may not be blotted out from Israel.”

Analysis: Wouldn’t it feel pretty weird to adhere to this law today? Notice that it does not make exceptions when the husband’s brother is already married, because polygamy was allowed by God in the Old Testament. This is one case in which the biblical law seems worlds away from how we live today.

Matthew 5:29-30, “And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish than for your whole body to go into hell.”

Analysis: Few Christians take this instruction literally. They see this quote as an example of hyperbole in which Jesus uses colorful language to make a point. They may

be right. But if you are one who insists that we are to strictly obey every word of every verse of the Bible, get out your hand-saws and eye-gougers!

Matthew 6:6, “But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”

Analysis: I used to refuse to pray in Bible studies and other Christian gatherings out of strict adherence to this verse, and I believed that everyone else was in sin by participating in group prayer. Only when I realized that no other Bible verse lent support this one did I lighten up. This quote is one of three examples, provided by Jesus in Matthew 6, of practicing one’s piety before others in order to be seen by them. The message here opposes pride, not group prayer.

Matthew 14:33, “So therefore, no one of you can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.”

Analysis: If we consider ourselves to be disciples of Jesus, are we to give up all our possessions? There have been poverty movements throughout the history of the church that have taken this verse literally. Their fatal flaw, of course, was running out of money to support their ministry. People with money and possessions won’t donate to a ministry that tells them they are going to hell for having money and possessions.

Other possible interpretations of this verse are that the message was intended for Jesus’ twelve disciples and not for the rest of us, or that Jesus meant that we have to be willing to give up anything for Him.

Matthew 23:9-10, “And do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders; for One is your leader, that is, Christ.”

Analysis: From now on, you may call the man from whom you are descended “Dad,” or “Hey Fatty,” but never call him “Father.”

1 Corinthians 14:34-35, “Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.”

Analysis: This quote attracts significant attention today. Many churches refuse to let women be pastors as a result of this verse and others that are similar. But I’ve never known of a church that denies women the right to speak from the moment they set foot in the building until the moment they leave, as this passage commands.

Galatians 5:2-3, “Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is under obligation to keep the whole law.”

Analysis: Most Christian men in America are circumcised, despite what we read in these verses. Those who defend this practice say there is a difference between circumcision for health reasons and circumcision as a sign of a covenant with God. They may be right. Nonetheless, this is yet another example of a Bible verse that we choose not to obey word for word.

Clearly, from these examples, we see Bible verses that even the most devout Bible-believers don’t follow. Are we to follow these verses to the letter to avoid being hypocrites? Of course not! Rather, we are hypocrites if we build our beliefs out of a single verse that has little or no support elsewhere in the Bible. If we insist upon hanging on every word of an isolated Bible verse, then to be consistent, we must hang on every word of *every* isolated Bible verse, including those I just listed.

Notice that these verses occur only once or twice and appear nowhere else in the Bible. If there were 35 verses throughout the Bible stating that we must wear tassels on our clothes, we would be well-advised to obey them. But since there are only two verses in the entire Bible telling the Israelites to wear tassels on their clothes, there’s no reason for us to convert this verse into a modern-day Christian requirement. If we do, we may enforce a rule that misrepresents God’s will for us today.

Improper Translation

How is it that we can get the wrong idea from a Bible verse? Well, there are several different ways, the first of which is by improper translation. It doesn't take a lot of effort to learn how we can draw differing conclusions from different translations. All we have to do is compare a couple of Bible translations side by side. In many cases, one Bible's translation of a verse will leave us with a slightly different impression than another Bible's translation of that verse.

Regardless of which translation we use, there is no way to perfectly translate ancient Hebrew (Old Testament) and ancient Greek (New Testament) to modern day English. Anybody who is bi-lingual knows that a given word in one language does not necessarily have an exact match in another language. To make matters more difficult, Bible translators face the challenges of having to know exactly when a Bible book was written and which words meant what at that point in time. Translators must deal with the fact that 6th century B.C. Hebrew differs a lot from 8th century B.C. Hebrew, which differs drastically from 10th century B.C. Hebrew, and so on.

Languages change continually, and they did so even more in the ancient past, when few people could read and write. A word that meant one thing in one century could have easily changed meaning by the next century. Even in recent centuries, when written language has been commonplace, word meanings have changed significantly over time. Pick up any King James Bible, which was written in English in the 1600's, and you will find it very difficult to understand if the only English you know is the modern kind.

To better understand the Bible, many Christians take a couple semesters of ancient Hebrew and Greek in seminary. Unfortunately, this experience gives them just enough knowledge of these ancient languages to misunderstand the Greek and Hebrew texts. Some of them, when having a disagreement with someone over an issue, like to alter the meaning of a Bible verse to match their theology by claiming that one of its words is improperly translated. They will say that the true meaning of the original Hebrew or Greek is _____. In such instances, be suspicious. The definition they give is likely to be only one of several possible definitions, because most commonly used words have multiple meanings. For example, in modern English, even the word "word" has nine

definitions in Webster's. And there's no reason to assume that ancient Greek and Hebrew words were any different.

To complicate matters further, a word's definition can change when incorporated into a phrase. Those who claim to have the "true meaning" of a word often fail to realize this and misinterpret the corresponding verse as a result. Imagine future historians from A.D. 4000 attempting to translate early 21st century American phrases by insisting upon the "true meaning" of each word in each phrase. Their literal interpretations could look something like this:

Push the envelope: Americans pushed envelopes rather than carry them.

Sidekick: A means of self-defense

Who let the cat out of the bag?: Americans kept cats in bags, so they wouldn't scratch the furniture.

Cooking the books: The poorest Americans ate paper when food was unavailable.

Round robin tournament: A competition between fat birds which have since gone extinct.

It's raining cats and dogs: A common and miraculous weather phenomenon that some scientists claim is impossible.

Never look a gift horse in the mouth: Americans feared looking into the mouth of a horse dressed in wrapping paper with a bow on its head.

Blown to Smithereens: Wind often blew objects to the home of Mr. & Mrs. Smithereen.

Heavy Metal Music: Americans loved the sound of banging metal objects together.

A little knowledge of ancient Greek and Hebrew is more dangerous than none at all. It's best to let the Bible translators, who have studied ancient texts on a daily basis for years, translate it for us. I recommend the most literal Bibles, like the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and the New King James Version (NKJV) for the greatest accuracy. Literal Bibles like these are less reader-friendly, but they aspire to give us a word-for-word translation, unlike thought-by-thought or paraphrase translations which incorporate more of the translator's personal beliefs into God's Word.

Regardless of which translations we choose, none are close to being perfect. We have no choice but to humbly accept that any given verse stands a significant chance of being at least slightly mistranslated.

Inexact Quotes

Another cause of verse misinterpretation is the fact that Bible writers didn't use exact quotes like we do today. Capturing every single word with precision was unnecessary, since they didn't have to worry about getting sued for misquoting someone. Their quotes only had to encapsulate the speaker's general message.

We encounter few inexact quotes in the Epistles (the letters written by the Apostles to the early churches), because the person presenting the message is the one writing it down, so little opportunity exists for the writer's words to be misquoted. It's in books like the Gospels and Acts where quotation issues arise. In these books, the writer is quoting someone other than himself. In the Gospels, it is usually Jesus being quoted. Fortunately, we are blessed with four Gospels, the first three of which cover many of the same events and quotes. These Gospels are a key to understanding just how accurate the New Testament quotations are, because we can examine two or three records of the same quote and compare.

If we examine the story of Jesus calming the stormy sea while his disciples feared for their lives (found in **Matthew 8:23-27**, **Mark 4:36-41**, and **Luke 8:22-25**), we find that in Matthew, Jesus is quoted as saying, "Why are you timid, you men of little faith?" In Mark, Jesus' question is recorded as, "Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?" And in Luke, we find Jesus saying nothing more than, "Where is your faith?" While the exact wording differs from one Gospel to the next, the general point of Jesus' remark is preserved: the disciples' faith is weak. If we were to hang on every little word of one of these quotes, we might build a theology out of whether Jesus said "how," or "where," but we would be wasting our time in the process.

This sounds like common sense, but since Jesus is the focal figure of the Christian faith, we have a tendency to hang on every little word of His quotes, especially when only one record of that quote exists between the Gospels. While hanging on every word of the sea-calming quotes is unlikely to affect one's life, our lives can be affected by

Matthew 5:39, where Jesus says, “But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil, but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.” We could conclude from this verse that we are never to resist an evil person, that we should let them do what they want to us, and never refuse to do what they ask of us, even if they ask us to do something evil. But if we look at the verse which precedes it, **verse 38**, Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.’” Here Jesus quotes the Old Testament law that commands the government to punish a criminal by making him suffer a fate similar to that of his victim. When Jesus follows this statement by saying, “turn the other cheek,” He instructs individuals to refrain from inflicting personal justice through revenge (which only makes matters worse). He teaches that the government may discipline wrong-doers, but that individuals may not. So, if someone does something we dislike, such as a slap in the face, we may not hit them back as a means of getting even. Unfortunately, many people misinterpret this verse as a command to avoid self-defense or as ban on punishing criminals. Their misinterpretation is the natural consequence of hanging on every little word of an isolated verse while ignoring the messages that reverberate throughout the Bible.

Unoriginal Verses

Many Bible-believing Christians will tell you that the Bible is inerrant, but after further biblical examination, they concede that it was the original Scriptures that were inerrant, not the Bible we have today. If you look closely at the pages of your Bible, you will notice little numbers located throughout the text which direct you toward footnotes at the bottoms of the pages. These footnotes will often say things like, “most ancient manuscripts do not contain this verse,” or, “some ancient manuscripts say...” By these notes, we know that some Bible verses haven’t always been written as they were in the original manuscripts.

Don’t be terribly alarmed by this problem, because it doesn’t affect the vast majority of the Scriptures. Bible translators create our translations from the examination of hundreds, or even thousands, of ancient manuscripts. There are over 5,000 ancient New Testament manuscripts alone (although many of them are fragments). Few of these match up word for word, proving that ancient copyists inserted, deleted, or changed

wording from what was in the original manuscripts. However, by looking at the entire group of manuscripts, Bible translators have been able to construct a standard Greek text. This standard text has been modified over the years as more ancient texts have been discovered and as understanding of the ancient Greek has improved. Thanks to the compilation of these texts into one standard text, most copyist errors have been eliminated.

However, some verses which were absent from the original manuscripts still appear in our Bibles. Why would translators even bother to include these? The reason is that the first English translation of the Bible, the King James Version, was created over two centuries before the first standard Greek text, and is, therefore, less accurate. However, readers have grown accustomed to, and have relied upon, the King James Version's unoriginal verses all these years. To preserve the traditional Bible for them, translators have chosen to let the unoriginal verses remain while placing footnotes at the bottoms of the pages notating the discrepancies.

One of the most notable examples of an unoriginal text in the Bible is Mark 16:9-20. Many Bibles separate this segment of the chapter from the rest of Mark and label it as one that was missing from the oldest manuscripts. Here, Jesus is quoted as having said, "And these signs will accompany those who have believed; in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison; it shall not hurt them. They will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover [**Mark 16:17-18**]." This is the only verse in the Bible that claims Christians can handle snakes and drink poison without harm. There's no better example of how harmful it can be to build a theology out of a solitary verse that promotes an idea found nowhere else in the Bible. Many people have lost their lives by counting on this verse as the perfect word of God.

Is it possible that the Bible contains other unoriginal verses of which we are unaware? Absolutely! It's not the majority of them, but there must be some. How do we avoid being misguided by these unoriginal verses like the snake-handlers were? Once again, we resist building theologies out of solitary verses whenever possible and focus on the themes that repeat throughout the Bible.

Some people believe that every verse in our Bible today perfectly matches the original Scriptures, because God would not allow us to be led astray. However, no Bible verse makes this claim. Some will quote **Revelations 22:18-19**, which says, “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city which are written in this book.” This verse does not say that God will prevent anybody from changing the Bible’s words; it says that He will punish those who do. In fact, all biblical laws have been broken many times (see Romans 7:7-13 in which Paul explains how sin often results from the law), so Revelations 22:18-19 effectively guarantees that people will alter the words of the Bible.

I’m not saying that the Bible is unreliable and that we should distrust every verse we read. The chances of a given verse being unoriginal are slim. The Bible as a whole is very reliable, and its history is well supported by extra-biblical evidence. If you want to see examples of this evidence, there are numerous books available that’ll give you all the details. My point is that verses which appear to be out of line with the rest of the Bible or that cause us hardship inconsistent with the love of God, might be unoriginal, inexact, improperly translated, or poorly understood.

Incomplete Understanding of Context

The Bible was not written in a vacuum. We cannot assume that every verse addresses all people in all times in all situations. Contrary to what many Christians would like to believe, the Bible’s commands addressed the specific problems of the cultures and times in which they were written. That doesn’t mean these commands are irrelevant to us today. Many of them do apply to all people in all times in all situations, but others do not. How do we know which ones apply to us? We have to do some research on the situation at hand when the command was written.

There are five subdivisions of the Bible from which we receive God’s instruction: the Old Testament law, the Writings, the Prophets, Jesus (the Gospels), and the letters of the Apostles (the Epistles).

The Old Testament law was designed to rule the nation of Israel for centuries to come. In this law we find the Ten Commandments, which apply to all people for all time. Many other OT laws do as well. But some laws addressing such issues as agriculture and clothing no longer seem applicable today. The Writings, such as Psalms and Proverbs, are not necessarily directed at specific events, but provide general wisdom for all people in all times and places. The Prophets get very specific in addressing people and their sins, but their general messages about right and wrong apply to all people in all times.

The New Testament, on the other hand, is different. In the Gospels, Jesus often gave the Jews examples of ways in which they were disobeying the Old Testament law and Prophets in both their thoughts and actions. His Sermon on the Mount was indeed a sermon, not a proclamation of new laws.

Most Christians are unaware that Jesus is not the law-giver. In **Matthew 5:17-18**, Jesus says, “Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the law until all is accomplished.” Not only does Jesus fully support the Old Testament law, but He adds very little to those laws. Since most of us Christians spend little time in the Old Testament, we incorrectly believe that Jesus was preaching from scratch and that His teachings overrule the Old Testament law and prophets.

Finally, we have the Epistles (letters of the Apostles to the early churches). While these letters provide great explanations of salvation and of what Jesus means to those of us who believe in Him, they also attempt to resolve issues in the churches to which they were written. Churches are never without their problems, and the early churches were no exception. Jesus’ Apostles couldn’t be present at all of these churches, so they wrote letters to address issues they heard about from afar. The Epistles are the only books of the Bible not addressed to the Israelites; therefore, they often address problems not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible.

We have to be careful when reading the Epistles, because they address specific situations which we may never fully understand. Even if we have some knowledge of a situation, we probably lack complete knowledge of it. So before we build theologies on what these verses say, we need to check for consistency with the rest of the Bible. Like

Jesus, the Apostle Paul, the most prolific writer of the New Testament, supports the Old Testament in **2 Timothy 3:14-17**, by saying, “You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood, you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the Man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

The “Scripture” to which Paul refers is the Old Testament of the Bible. While many Christians merely see verses 14-17 as support for biblical inerrancy, Paul’s main point is that the Old Testament is every Christian’s foundation. The New Testament is a supplement to the Old Testament, not a replacement for it. We shouldn’t discount the Old Testament just because Paul didn’t re-write it in the Epistles, or because Jesus didn’t recite it in the Sermon on the Mount. Both of them pointed to the Old Testament law as our scriptural foundation, so we must interpret the New Testament instructions through those of the Old Testament rather than look at the New Testament instructions as laws unto themselves.

The only difference between the New Testament law and the Old Testament law is the manner in which sin is forgiven. We no longer need to practice tedious sacrificial rituals to earn God’s mercy, thanks to Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins on the cross. But the way we are to behave toward one another does not change the slightest bit from the Old Testament to the new.

The Every-Verse Method

If we can be led astray by improper translation, inexact quotes, unoriginal verses, and an incomplete understanding of context, how can we determine any of our beliefs from the Bible?

Should we just give up on the Bible and believe what we want?

Of course, not!

My recommendation is not for Christians to become less biblical, but more biblical.

It is no longer enough to be merely Bible-based. We need to be thoroughly-biblical. No longer should we seek out verses that support what we want to believe and ignore those that don't. From now on, when seeking to determine our beliefs regarding a specific issue, we need to look at every verse in the Bible addressing that issue. Will this be an exact science that gives us an indisputable answer on every issue? No, but it will give us a much better understanding of the issues that the Bible addresses over and over again. If there are 20 verses addressing a given issue, we will be able to see where the majority of those verses direct us and not be led astray by one misunderstood verse.

I call this approach the Every-Verse Method. From it, we will not only get a more complete feel for the Bible's instructions, but we will also learn which issues are most important to God by the amount of attention they receive in the Bible. A sin that is addressed 25 times is probably a bigger deal to God than one that is only addressed once.

Looking through the entire Bible to collect all the verses addressing a specific issue can be tedious work, and most Christians have no time for that. That's where I come in. Throughout the Every-Verse Method studies on this web site, I will present to you every verse in the Bible that deals with each study's subject (determining which verses apply to an issue is subjective, so I cannot guarantee that I've included every applicable verse; but I try my best to do so). I will not only list all applicable verses, but I will also describe their contexts (we all know the dangers of taking a verse out of context) and analyze them. I will then reach a conclusion based upon the sum of the verses and refute arguments that oppose the Bible's messages on that subject.

Not only will these studies help you understand which Christian practices are truly biblical, which ones are optional, and which ones are evil; but it will allow you to enjoy greater freedom in Christ, because you are about to find out that the Bible is not as oppressive as many churches are.