



"What is the best safeguard against false doctrine? The Bible regularly read, regularly prayed over, regularly studied."  
—J.C. Ryle

**08-May-26**

## **Misappropriating Scripture**

In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the author presents a scene in which a character, Treebeard, an Ent or Shepherd of the Trees, expresses deep sorrow and anger that the enemy's minions have been felling huge swaths of trees on his border to feed their weapon-producing smithies. Decades ago, environmentalists seized on this scene and a few others, declaring that Tolkien must also be an environmentalist. Before long, Greens in many nations lauded Tolkien's *magnum opus* as a manifesto for their cause.

It did not seem to matter to them that Tolkien was not an environmentalist. He was an English scholar and novelist who just happened to be very fond of trees. At best, he could be labeled as a conservationist, decrying the rapid deforestation of his beloved England to make way for housing developments, industrial plants, parking lots, and broad highways. At heart, he saw himself as a traditionalist who saw a cherished way of life and a picturesque countryside swiftly disappearing before his eyes. Never, however, would he have supported the escapades of Greenpeace, Earth Liberation Front, or Earth First!

Over the past few decades, there has been a radical uptick in similar wrongheaded associations with the Bible, usually for political ends. Perhaps the most brazen has been mainstream Christianity's wanton declaration that [Jesus Christ](#) would support sexual deviance. "He never condemns homosexuality in the Gospels," LGBTQ+ advocates would insist, many of them speaking from pulpits and wearing rainbow-colored robes. "Jesus preached love," others would assert, "so whether it's a man and woman or two men or two women doesn't really matter if they love each other." It made no difference to them that, in His preaching, Jesus bolstered the Ten Commandments and pointed back to Genesis 2 to illustrate the proper form of marriage ([Matthew 19:4-5](#)).

Little more than a century ago, the temperance movement co-opted the Bible to push its agenda on the nation, culminating in the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, otherwise known as Prohibition, which ran from 1920 to 1933. Using carefully chosen verses, its advocates convinced millions that [God](#) was anti-alcohol and that imbibing alcohol was therefore a [sin](#). They meticulously avoided [Judges 9:13](#) ("... new wine, which cheers both God and men"), and reinterpreted the wine Jesus gave His disciples during the Last Supper as merely "the fruit of the vine," simple grape juice.

For nearly two millennia, leaders across Christendom have piously invoked the Just War Doctrine for wars of "Christian" conquest and expansion among a host of other flimsy rationales. In the early fifth century, Augustine first argued that war is morally permissible for Christians when motivated by love and justice. [Thomas Aquinas](#) expanded and systematized the idea in the thirteenth century, teaching that a just war is, in its essentials, one declared as a last resort by a sovereign ruler to bring justice to an erring group or nation, with the objective of advancing good and avoiding evil. To sinful humans, their ideas seem reasonable, but they fail to reach the standard of the Ten Commandments and Jesus' preaching in the [Sermon on the Mount](#). Indeed, the apostle James writes that "wars and fights" have their source in lust, murder, and [covetousness](#) (James 4:1-2), later asserting that such worldly behavior "is enmity with God" (verse 4). True Christians let God fight their battles.

People tend to do this kind of misappropriation automatically. We want outside authority for our opinions and crusades, so we seek support from

legitimate, acclaimed sources. For this reason, companies that sell products to the general public eagerly pay top dollar for celebrity endorsements. Will not millions of women buy the face cream endorsed by the latest beautiful actress? Will not millions of men fork over their hard-earned money for the car or truck driven by the handsome, rugged actor or athlete? Everyone knows endorsements work.

Appeals to the Bible work, too. It may not work as well with the majority in this post-Christian era, but it still works with millions who consider themselves Christians. Politicians in heavily Christian districts prove the truth of this ploy during every voting cycle. Cameras capture them going to church or praying, and they love telling their audiences their favorite Bible verse (often mangling it) and how much they love the Lord Jesus.

As God's elect, we must be careful that we do not misappropriate the Bible to support our pet beliefs. The most common method is called "proof-texting." A person will read the Bible and find a verse or phrase that encapsulates a cherished viewpoint, which becomes a mantra that brooks no opposition. Anyone who brings up a modifying principle or example must be either ignorant or a heretic!

One such phrase is "God is love" ([John 4:8](#), 16). Yes, He is, but His character is much broader than any human idea of love. Sometimes, [God's love](#) manifests itself as [kindness](#) and mercy, but at other times, it comes out as justice and judgment. Both are loving, godly actions, but their outcomes seem contrary to a human perspective. To grasp the full picture of godly love, we must allow the rest of Scripture to round out our understanding of this complex divine characteristic.

Another area that is often involved in the misuse of Scripture to bolster one's personal beliefs is [Sabbath](#) observance. Some, believing it is to be kept strictly, will point to the [fourth commandment](#) or some other [Old Testament](#) passage on Sabbath-keeping and argue in a letter-of-the-law manner about how we have regressed in keeping God's commands. Others, in the same congregation but less rigorous in their observance, will counter with the words or actions of Jesus that the Jews of His day considered to have broken the Sabbath command. Again, the complete doctrine cannot be found in just one verse or passage. It must be collected "here a little, there a little" ([Isaiah](#)

[28:10-13](#)) and weighed seriously, or as Paul instructs, we must "rightly [divide] the word of truth" ([II Timothy 2:15](#)).

Many in the churches of God misappropriate Christ's [letters to the seven churches](#) (Revelation 2-3). How often have we heard, "The ABC Church of God is so lax, it must be Laodicea!" Or "Look at the mess XYZ Church is in! I think it is Thyatira!" And, of course, our personal group is Philadelphia, and we will go to a place of safety while the rest of the church suffers in the Great Tribulation! However, we do not get to choose which group corresponds to which letter or which of the seven churches we fall into, for that is the Judge's job. When we misuse the Bible in this way, we cause all sorts of problems for ourselves and others. It is better to strive in humility for personal growth in righteousness and let God sort out the others.

God has given us His Word as a wonderful gift of truth and revelation about Himself and His way. But we err when we carve out the bits of it that appeal to us and disregard the rest. Christianity is not built on sound bites or memes but on sometimes involved commands, explanations, examples, illustrations, metaphors, and [wisdom](#). Each adds a layer or two to the full meaning of the subject.

Due to this reality, Bible study—that is, studying the whole Bible, not just one's favorite books or sections—is paramount. We need to get the whole counsel of God ([Acts 20:27](#)) and pray and meditate on how it fits together. In this way, we will grow in the mind of God.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## New Transcripts

### [1840: Jesus in the Feasts \(Part Four\): Atonement](#)

Given by Richard T. Ritenbaugh on 02-Oct-25

### [1873: Peace, Peace \(Part Three\): Contentment](#)

Given by Richard T. Ritenbaugh on 02-May-26

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Discerning Truth and Applying Wisdom](#)**

by Martin G. Collins

Discernment is a prerequisite to making wise choices. Dr. M. Scott Peck argues we can develop and exercise discernment by becoming sensitive to early warning systems, which trigger the reactions of revulsion and confusion when evil confronts us. In interpersonal relationships, a discerning person pays close attention to another's vocabulary, his tone of voice, pace of speaking, laughter and body language. Discerning individuals possess four qualities: 1.) Penetration—the ability to see beyond the superficial, (2.) Insight—profound depth of mental acuity, (3.) Discrimination—the ability to distinguish the false from the truth, and (4.) Perception—a sympathetic "gut" feeling. True spiritual discernment is a gift from God, enabling us to judge between good and evil, comparing things in life with God's Word to see whether they match up with His standards. Like human discernment, we need to exercise spiritual discernment daily until it becomes habitual. We as God's Called-out Ones need to cry out for discernment by exercising the mind of Christ.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[The Whole Truth](#)**

by John O. Reid

Most of us have heard the courtroom mantra, "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." John Reid, however, applies these criteria to our behavior, showing that many of us shy away from "nothing but the truth"!

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## **Featured Audio Schedule**

**Friday Night Bible Study**

The next Bible Study (Friday 08-May-26) will be **Psalm 23 (Part Three)**, given by **John W. Ritenbaugh**. The Bible Study will be featured on the [CGG homepage](#) from **6:00 pm Friday** (EST) and all day Saturday.

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