

4 Ways People Misuse the Bible

The Bible is a supernatural book. It is divinely inspired and saturated in God's living presence. It brings joy when we are sad, comfort when we are weary, guidance when we are confused and encouragement when we are ready to quit. That's why we need to read and study it daily.

God's word is compared to fire, water, seed, honey, milk, meat, bread, rain, a lamp, a mirror and the very breath of God. But it is also compared to a weapon. Ephesians 6:17 calls the Bible "the sword of the Spirit," and Hebrews 4:12 says it is "sharper than any two-edged sword."

And while swords are extremely useful in a conflict, they are also dangerous. This is why the apostle Paul instructed Timothy to handle the word of truth "accurately." This word, in the original Greek, means "to make a straight cut."

That means when we use God's Word, we don't wave the blade around sloppily or slash people. Instead, we use it according to the Owner's manual. After all, the Bible is not our sword—it is the sword of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who inspired all Scripture, should guide how we use God's Word.

Some disturbed people today buy guns and plan mass shootings; in the same way, lots of people buy Bibles and then misuse them. The result is spiritual carnage. Here are four primary ways the Bible is misused:

1. We misuse it to condemn people. Our heavenly Father is merciful, slow to anger and full of love. Yet people who don't understand His heart make Him out to be a harsh, abusive God. Legalists spend most of their time in the Old Testament, and they prefer to judge rather than extend grace.

All Scripture is inspired by God, but we are a New Testament people now. The coming of Christ changed everything. The Old Testament must be read in the light of the New. You will be miserable, and you will make other people miserable, if you don't understand that mercy has triumphed over judgment (see James 2:13).

For example, we often quote Malachi 2:16—"For the Lord, the God of Israel, says that He hates divorce"—without explaining that God has compassion for the victims of divorce. Be careful how you quote God's Word to people. Always season your words with grace.

2. We misuse it to manipulate people. Preachers have a special responsibility to nourish, encourage, exhort and even rebuke the church using God's Word. But we should never use Scripture to extort money, twist people's arms or put them under a cloud of guilt.

For example, I've heard ministers use verses from the Bible to suggest that if people give in an offering, all their debts will be magically paid overnight. That is not scriptural; that is sorcery! I've also heard ministers use 1 Chronicles 16:22a—"Do not touch My anointed"—to warn people never to ask questions about a minister's financial behavior. But the Bible should never be used as a tool to keep people from asking honest questions.

3. We use it to mislead people. The Bible warns us about false teachers who infiltrate the church as imposters. Such teachers always quote chapter and verse to defend their odd doctrines. Mormons sometimes use Jesus' words in John 10:16a—"I have other sheep who are not of this fold"—to promote the idea that God established Mormonism as His final, end-time church. But Jesus was speaking of Gentiles in that passage.

Even the devil can quote Scripture (see Matt. 4:6). Beware of people who use Scripture to lure people away from simplicity

of devotion to Christ. Some liberal denominations today use Isaiah 43:19a—"See, I will do a new thing"—to suggest that God has now sanctioned same-sex marriage. Yet if you study the New Testament you will find that homosexuality is never permissible for a Christian. The "new thing" prophesied by Isaiah was the coming of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the age of grace! Don't be deceived by a person who uses the Bible to excuse their sin or to lead others into immorality.

4. We misuse it to excuse people from responsibility. While some people judge others with the Bible, many try to smooth the edge of the sword so it won't hurt anyone. Because they don't want to appear judgmental, they go to the opposite extreme by overemphasizing grace. They play it safe by avoiding parts of Scripture that directly confront sinful behavior.

Yet human hearts are hard, and sin has made us that way. We need to be cut. Our hearts are sick, and we need to be sliced open by the Holy Ghost in order to be healed. He uses the two-edged sword of God's Word to perform that divine incision. True conversion cannot happen until the sharp edge of the truth performs the needed surgery. Soft sermons result in soft, weak, spineless Christians.

We must become like Paul, who told the Ephesians: "For I did not keep from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Don't add words to the Bible that aren't there, and don't ignore words that are there. Speak the whole truth with all grace. Let the Holy Spirit help you to wield His sword with balance and precision. {eoa}