

25 Reading & Interpretation Errors

1. Inaccurate Quotation: A biblical text is referred to but is either not quoted in the way the text appears in a normal translation or is wrongly attributed: Money is the root of all evil.
2. Twisted Translation: The biblical text is retranslated, not in accordance with sound scholarship: JW's - John 1: 1 as "In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god."
3. The Biblical Hook: A text of Scripture is quoted primarily as a device to grasp the attention of readers or listeners and then followed by teaching which is unbiblical.
4. Ignoring the Immediate Context: A text of Scripture is quoted but removed from the surrounding verses which form the immediate framework for its meaning.
5. Collapsing Contexts: Two or more verses which have little or nothing to do with each other are put together as if one were a commentary on the other(s).
6. Overspecification: A more detailed or specific conclusion than is legitimate is drawn from a biblical text. Especially parables and prophecy.
7. Word Play: A word or phrase from a biblical translation is examined and interpreted as if the revelation had been given in that language. Example: Mary Baker Eddy says the name Adam consists of two syllables, A dam, which means an obstruction, in which case Adam signifies "the obstacle which the serpent, sin, would impose between man and his Creator."
8. The Figurative Fallacy: Either (1) mistaking literal language for figurative language or (2) mistaking figurative language for literal language.
9. Speculative Readings of Predictive Prophecy: A predictive prophecy is too readily explained by the occurrence of specific events. Bible & Newspaper.
10. Saying but Not Citing: A writer says that the Bible says such and such but does not cite the specific text: "The Bible says, 'God helps those who help themselves.'"
11. Selective Citing: To substantiate a given argument, only a limited number of texts is quoted: the total teaching of Scripture on that subject would lead to a conclusion different from that of the writer.
12. Inadequate Evidence: A hasty generalization is drawn from too little evidence.
13. Confused Definition: A biblical term is misunderstood in such a way that an essential biblical doctrine is distorted or rejected: Reincarnation & Born Again.
14. Ignoring Alternative Explanations: A specific interpretation is given to a biblical text or set of texts which could be interpreted in quite a different fashion, but these alternatives are not considered.
15. The Obvious Fallacy: Words like obviously, undoubtedly, certainly, all reasonable people hold that and so forth are substituted for logical reasons.
16. Virtue by Association: Either (1) a cult writer associates his or her teaching with those of figures accepted as authoritative by traditional Christians; (2) cult writings are likened to the Bible; or (3) cult literature imitates the form of Bible writing such that it sounds like the Bible.

17. Esoteric Interpretation: Under the assumption that the Bible contains a hidden, esoteric, meaning which is open only to a few elite, the interpreter declares the significance of biblical passages without giving much if any explanation for his or her interpretation. Allegorizing.
18. Supplementing Biblical Authority: New revelation from postbiblical authors. (Apocrypha, Mormon, etc)
19. Rejecting Biblical Authority: Either the Bible as a whole or texts from the Bible are examined and rejected because they do not square with other authorities.
20. World-View Confusion: Scriptural statements, stories, commands or symbols are lifted from the framework of Scripture.
21. Redefinition of Terms: Words which have a meaning contrary to presuppositions are changed to fit them. (Wright - Justification)
22. Moralizing: Often ignore the historical or narrative sense of a text to moralize it as a precept. Instead of manna from heaven teaching the event of God's provision to Israel, it is pressed to teach we must only have our basic needs met.
23. Personalizing: Interpreting passages so as to make them all pertain to "me" despite their intention and audience. "The story of Balaam's talking donkey reminds me that I talk too much." Or, "The story of the building of temple is God's way of telling us that we have to construct a new church building."
24. Spiritualizing of Texts: Similar to esoteric interpretation and allegory, this interpretation sees more in the text than may appear plainly. The first miracle of changing water to wine at the wedding is "to show that God can take something worthless (pots with water = us) and make it useful.
25. Right Doctrine / Wrong Text: A text seems to support a given system. Even though the system may be accurate, the text may not be teaching the given doctrine. For example Galatians 1:15 although supporting the Calvinistic doctrine of Predestination is not explicitly teaching it.