PROOF TEXTING
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This term used for the title of this article may not be known or understood by the average person. It is well understood by preachers. Webster defines it as, "Taking isolated text and establishing a position that may not be the author's original intent." Another said it means, "You take scriptures and do not consider other scriptures that bear on a subject." One writer said it is taking "out of context quotations," which results in, "introducing one's own presuppositions, agendas, or biases (eisegesis)." One writer went so far as to refer to this method having "dreaded problems," and added that by using this method, "you can make the Bible say almost anything you want it to say."

I want to deal with this subject by first discussing the criticism. Is it possible for a person to read the Bible and draw their own conclusions which are in fact wrong? The answer to that question is "Yes." That is the very reason we have so many denominations. Is it possible for one to make the Bible say whatever you may want it to say? The answer again is, "Yes." However, that is not taking the Bible for what it actually says. It is forcing our own opinions on the text (eisegesis). It is interesting to me that most of those who criticize this method use it. Though they would disagree, if you read after them enough, you will see them in making a point using other related scriptures which they believe proves their point.

I agree that it is wrong to take one scripture from its context and make a doctrine out of it. Any passage taken out of context is a pretext. I also agree that if you gather several scriptures without considering their context and bring them together to form a doctrine that too is wrong. An old example is about a man who said he would just open the Bible and let it fall wherever it did, and he would obey it. The first time he did that it opened to, "Judas went out and hanged himself" (Matthew 27:5). Not wanting to do that, he once again let his Bible fall open, and it fell on, "go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). Still not liking that idea, he opened the Bible again and let it fall, and it opened to, "What you must do, do quickly" (John 13:27). Another example comes from the story about a preacher many years ago did not like women wearing their hair up in a bun on the back of their heads, which both of my grandmothers did. He preached a sermon in which his main text was Matthew 24:17 which he read to say, "top knot come down." Obviously, not only was it quoted incorrectly, but it was also taken out of its immediate context. From these humorous illustrations, we can see the harm in taking a single scripture or several scriptures out of context to draw a conclusion on a Bible subject. However,

if only one scripture is found with no other supporting text that teaches a truth, it is still true. If several scriptures are brought together considering their context to teach a truth, and they all support it, that is a right way to arrive at Biblical truth.

Many years ago, I had a debate with the preacher for one of the largest denominational churches in our area. The discussion was conducted very kindly and orderly by both of us. In his first twenty-minute speech, my opponent read every passage he could find that seem to imply we are saved by faith alone. Fact is, that even though he preached that and taught that, he did not believe it, for he also taught that we must repent of our sins, and live as God directs. When it came my turn to speak, I said, "I thank Bob for reading all of my scriptures for me because I believe every one of them." Then I added, "The difference between Bob and I is not that he believes in faith and I don't, but it is that he believes faith alone saves us, and I don't." I went on to show that Scripture teaches us many things we must do to be saved in addition to believing, such as repenting of sins (Luke 13:3, 5), confessing faith in Christ (Matthew 10:32-33; Acts 8:36-37; Romans 10:10), and being baptized to have our sins washed away (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4, 17-18; 1 Peter 1:22-23). At the end of this discussion, the denominational preacher made two statements: first, "I lost this debate," and added "I did not study enough." His second statement was, "I could be wrong, but I don't think I am." I thought that he might study some more and come to a different conclusion, but I know he continued to preach for that denominational group as long as he lived.

The question is, is it wrong to proof text? Proof texting is simply one way of arriving at the whole truth. Any interpretive tool can be abused. It is not wrong to proof text, if we mean by that taking a single passage which in its context teaches a truth, it is the truth. When reaching a conclusion about any Bible subject we should rightfully consider all that the Bible has to say on that subject before drawing a conclusion. If in doing so, we bring several different passages from different books of the Bible in support of a truth, that too is also the truth on that subject. This we know for sure, that God's word contained in the Bible is the truth when it is properly read, studied and understood correctly. (2 Timothy 2:15)

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