The Misquoted Bible

(by Kent Heaton)

John Blake (CNN) wrote an article about the often used and seldom true quotations from the Bible titled, “Actually, that’s not in the Bible” (cnn.com). These *“chimney corner scriptures”* have been around for a long time and many have been accepted as part of the Biblical text. Blake points out that while the Bible is the *“most revered book in America … it’s also one of the most misquoted.”* It would seem incredulous that a book that has been in the hands of man for so many centuries would be so misread and misquoted. The reason is due to the ignorance of those who claim to know so much of what they know little about.

Some of the famous misquotes are *“God helps those who help themselves”* and *“spare the rod and spoil the child.”* None of these quotes are found in the Bible although there are some principles that may suggest their meaning (see **Proverbs 13:24** for the ‘spare the rod’ quote). Some ideas that people believe about the Bible are not found such as Jonah was swallowed by a whale and there were three wise men that came to Jesus at the manger. The Bible says Jonah was swallowed by a ***“great fish”*** (**Jonah 1:17**). The wise men of **Matthew 2** never saw Jesus at the manger and the number of wise men is never given.

The article does mention the most revealing quote from Kevin Dunn, chair of the department of religion at Tufts University in Massachusetts. Dunn said, *“Genesis mentions nothing but a serpent … not only does the text not mention Satan, the very idea of Satan as a devilish tempter postdates the composition of the Garden of Eden story by at least 500 years.”* Blake should have checked Dunn out because Mr. Dunn has failed to read the ‘rest of the story.’ The apostle John writes, ***“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world … He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan”*** (**Revelation 12:9**; **20:2**).

When Satan tempted Jesus in **Matthew 4** Jesus responded to each challenge with scripture (**Matthew 4:1-11**). The devil countered Jesus on the second temptation with a mutilated quotation of **Psalm 91:11**. Misquoting often is for the reason to prove a false premise with no regard to a textual truth. As someone said, *“a text without a context is nothing but a pretext.”* Jesus rebuked Satan with a quote from **Deuteronomy 6:16** that should be a warning to any who think that misquoting the Bible is a good thing: ***“You shall not tempt the Lord your God”*** (**Matthew 4:7**).

Misquoting the Bible can be as serious as misquoting a medical diagnosis or legal point of law. In medicine an incorrect measure of a drug can have deadly consequence. If we do not want our doctors, lawyers, accountants and airline pilots to misquote the facts then we should recognize the need to ***“present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness”*** (**2 Timothy 2:15-16**).

We must shun those ideas that are not found in the word of God. ***“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God”*** (**1 Peter 4:11**). When quoting the Bible let us know that what we quote is from the word of God and not the word of men.

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Francis of Assisi said, *“A man has only so much knowledge as he puts to work.”* The pursuit of knowledge requires a hunger for deeper examination and a willingness to exert whatever force is necessary to gain understanding. When Jehovah God revealed truth to man it required of man the desire to accept the will of God and the will of man to seek the knowledge of God’s will. Truth is only known when found. If no effort is made to obtain truth it will remain silent and undiscovered.  The knowledge of God comes from a heart prepared to seek the eternal truth and the desire to apply that knowledge to every part of life.

**Romans 10:17** explains that ***“faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*** The word of God (the Bible) is the only source man has to know the mind of God. The knowledge of the Bible is only going to be as much as the knowledge we put in our lives by reading and meditating on it. To learn the truths of God’s will it will take the desire to hunger and thirst after the precepts of divine writ. As we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (**2 Peter 3:18**) it will become a part of every facet of our lives. One important part this knowledge will endow upon our speech the words of God.

Peter admonished his readers that ***“if anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God”*** (**1 Peter 4:11**). Our words should be framed by the words of God. The knowledge we gain from the mind of God should be the words we use in our speech. God’s name should be used in reverence (**Exodus 20:7**) and His name should be sprinkled throughout our language to become the foundation of our character. His truths should be the basis for our decision and we must declare those truths as reasons for our actions.

Examining the life of Jesus is where we find the importance of quoting the words of the Father. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was tempted by the devil with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (**1 John 2:16**). He answered Satan with the words of His Father (**Matthew 4:4**; **Deuteronomy 8:3**; **Matthew 4:7**; **Deuteronomy 6:16**; **Matthew4:10**; **Deuteronomy 6:13**). Time and again throughout His ministry Jesus quoted the words of the Old Testament (**Matthew 11:10**; **Mark 7:6**; **Luke 7:27**; **John 6:45**).

The result of ‘quoting the Bible’ will have the same impact as suggested by Jesus to Philip in **John 14:9-10**: ***“Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.”*** When we use the Bible to guide our speech then the world will begin to see more of the Father in us – and the world needs to see more of the Father and less of us.

Moses was a man of great faith who spoke as the word of God. ***"Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass. For I proclaim the name of the Lord: ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He”*** (**Deuteronomy 32:1-4**). ***“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt”*** (**Colossians 4:6**) with the words of God.