

A Word About Proof Texts

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When one is associating a belief with the text of Scripture it is never wise to choose texts from obscure, debated or overly figurative portions of the Bible. Why go to a vision of Zechariah when you can go to an epistle of Paul for the same doctrine?

When tying a doctrine concerning the Church to Scripture we find good men like F. Turretin running to the song of Solomon. Surely it is unwise to appeal to the Song of Solomon, since the assumption that the Song is actually speaking about the Church is a decided long shot.

A Dispensationalist who thinks he has proven the pre-tribulation rapture by just citing 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is not paying enough attention to the passage. I have seen this done many times. Someone says, "the pre-trib rapture is there in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15." Not in those passages it isn't. Yes, 1 Thessalonians 4 speaks of the rapture. No, it says nothing about the timing of the rapture. More passages need to be brought in to help.

Likewise appealing to certain verses in the Prophets and applying them indiscriminately to the present state of

Israel, or extrapolating OT warnings of judgment upon Israel for her idolatry and wickedness and applying them to the United States often entails lack of respect for the context.

Is it a fait-accompli to refer to Jn. 5:25 for proof that the first resurrection of Rev. 20 is the new birth and not physical resurrection? The verse right before Jn. 5:25 famously refers to regeneration as "passing from death to life."

It is a good bet then that the "dead" who hear and "live" are the spiritually dead. Then again, the word "resurrection" is not in the passage. It is there in verse 28-29 where Jesus is referring to "those in the tombs" – i.e. corpses! – being raised at the end-time judgment, but not in first century Israel. Thus, the resurrection in Jn. 5:28-29 supports the idea of physical resurrection in Rev. 20. The new birth in Jn. 5:25 has nothing to do with Rev. 20. Notice also that the context of Rev. 20 refers to those who had been "beheaded" (20:4), and who are contrasted with "the rest of the dead" in verse 5.

When trying to prove that infants of believers should be baptized and admitted to membership in the visible church, the Shorter Catechism (Q.95) uses Acts 2:38-39, Gen. 17:10; Col. 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 7:14. Acts 2:38-39 says:

And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of

¹ <http://drreluctant.wordpress.com/2014/09/30/a-word-about-proof-texts-2/>

Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. "For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.

Notice that repentance is necessary to receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit; something which infants cannot do because they do not understand repentance, nor indeed what there is to repent of. But if it is pressed that only the hearers of Peter had to repent and the promise would automatically include all their children, then clearly there would be no need for any of the children to repent, because they would have already be forgiven through the promise. If individual repentance is necessary to receive forgiveness then infants would need to show repentance before being baptized according to the order of Peter's instruction (nobody thinks it would have been alright for these Jewish hearers to have been baptized before showing repentance!). Thus, Acts 2 really has nothing to do with why infants ought to be baptized.

What about the Catechism's next proof-text: Gen. 17:10? Well Genesis knows nothing at all about baptism. The reference is to male circumcision. Yes, infant males were to be circumcised, but that was so they would be included under the provisions of the Abrahamic covenant as descendents of Abraham and Isaac to inherit the promised land (17:8). There is no Church in view here, so again, how is this a proof-text for baptized infants being

church members? We start to see the presuppositions in the next two references which were given as comparisons. First up, Colossians 2:11-12:

and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Nothing here about infants or church membership. The "circumcision made without hands" relates to the new birth, so those to whom Paul is writing had believed the gospel. How do I know that? Simple, verse 6 says, "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." These are believers! The context was ignored by the Westminster men. Please notice that these believers were said to have been "buried with Him in baptism," which is surely Spirit-baptism not water baptism. So water baptism isn't in the text either!

The final proof-text resorted to is 1 Cor. 7:14:

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

This passage has to do with marriages where the father is an unbeliever and the mother is a believer. In such a situation it is comforting to

know that God regards the children as “clean” in the sense that the marriage is “clean.” Notice that if used to prove infant regeneration this would not require anything else (belief, repentance, consecration) from the children. they would be saved already! And without baptism too!

These are examples of poor proof-texting. In each case the context was ignored because it wasn't important to the formulation of the doctrine. The doctrine was presupposed and forced upon the verses.

It is also not good to choose proof-texts which could quite easily and legitimately be interpreted in a way which would not lead to one theological conclusion. We ought to find the clearest, most unequivocal verses to prove our beliefs. When employing these base-texts careful attention should be paid to those passages which most closely match the doctrine or interpretation we are setting forth.



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