

The Judeo-Christian Right Wing

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There are many wonderful messages in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament—important moral messages that all of us (religionists and secularists alike) would be wise to embrace. Too often, freethinkers dismiss Judeo-Christian scripture wholesale. They tend to do so because of its affiliation with (institutionalized) dogmatism. Many humanists demand that morality be grounded in universal principles...rather than be grounded in social constructs (i.e. based on historical artifacts).

However, it is not only reasonable, but—in my estimation—very important for *everyone* to recognize some of the messages found within both (A) the ancient texts of Judaism and (B) the ancient texts oriented around Jesus of Nazareth. Though they are conveyed in allegorical form, certain messages are worth heeding. We mustn't let the choice of narrative vehicle dissuade us from celebrating the moral message. After all, it is possible to divorce the moral message from the theology in which it happens to be couched.

Oddly, though, some of those who most vehemently profess fealty to those texts are the very people whose values are not in keeping with the salient moral messages. It seems that many religious people need to be tutored in the more noble tenets of their own religion...*by humanists* (i.e. people who, ironically, best embody those very tenets). After all, Jesus was, if nothing else, a humanist. This staggering irony is often lost on the pious.

What follows is a brief review of the important moral messages (what I take to be humanist messages) found in the Old and New Testaments (based on over 140 key passages). This is provided as a public service for Christians and Jews who talk the talk yet often fail to walk the walk.

I start with ten entreaties found in the Hebrew Bible:

- Don't hate (Leviticus 19:17)
- Love thy neighbor (Leviticus 19:18)
- Be kind to strangers (Leviticus 19:33-34, Exodus 23:9, Deuteronomy 24:17-21); Love strangers (Deuteronomy 10:19)
- Don't oppress others (Proverbs 22:22, 3:31, Leviticus 25:17, Deuteronomy 24:14-15)
- Be merciful, because mercy is healthy; cruelty is unhealthy (Proverbs 11:17)
- Pursue peace (Psalms 34:14)
- Be good to others (Proverbs 3:27-28, Zachariah 7:9-10, 8:16-17)
- Be good to others, *even if they hate you* (Exodus 23:4-5)
- Don't be spiteful (Proverbs 24:17)
- Turn your swords into ploughshares (Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3)

Such “rules of thumb” would seem to inform a certain kind of foreign policy—pursuing peace over militancy, social justice over domination. Alas, their obvious application to international relations is often subverted by other priorities. Regarding the contemporary issue of Israel *in particular*, we find the following five salient points:

- “You have fought many wars...and are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight.” (1 Chronicles 22:8)

- “Woe to those who...rely on chariots.” (Isaiah 31:1)
- “It was not by their sword that they won their land.” (Psalms 44:3)
- “They will beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Nations will not take up arms against nation, and will not train for war anymore.” (Micah 4:3)
- “One who is to rule in Israel...shall be one of peace.” (Micah 5:2-5)

Moreover, Deuteronomy tells us to be kind to one another—*even to resident foreigners*. Here, we are told not to shed the blood of the innocent. Revisionist Zionism, it turns out, doesn’t fair so well once one actually pays attention to Yahweh. Proponents of RZ would be well advised to heed the counsel of their deity (when he’s *not* talking about protocols for worship, which attire to wear, and what not to eat).

Regarding the Revisionist Zionist, one can’t help but wonder which excerpts from the Hebrew Bible is he emphasizing.

The moral insights continue:

We are told that pride and shame are two sides of the same coin (Proverbs 11:2), that open-mindedness is a virtue (Proverbs 18:13), and that anger is a bad thing (Ecclesiastes 7:9). It would seem, then, that tribalism (e.g. national chauvinism) is not in keeping with the spirit behind Hebrew scripture.

That RZ is a flagrant betrayal of Judaism is, according to the above 27 passages, quite plain to see. It seems that proponents of RZ eagerly imbibe their ideology even as they utterly neglect their holy scripture. I don’t pretend to be the first to point this out. What I aim to elucidate is the perverse irony: Those who most embrace right-wing foreign policy are typically those who most vehemently profess fidelity to their sacred texts.

Of course, the Hebrew Bible is riddled with a smorgasbord of edicts—many inane, some abhorrent, some praiseworthy. Some adherents of Judaism opt to emphasize passages regarding, say, not trimming one’s side-burns and abstaining from mixing a calf with its mother’s milk...*OVER the humanitarian encomiums listed above*. This is a bizarre hierarchy of priorities. One is compelled to ask: How skewed are one’s priorities when one will strictly avoid pushing elevator buttons on Saturday, yet endorse the systematic persecution of an entire people based on race? (So much for the entreaty in Exodus 23:2 to not follow the crowd.) By engaging in a judicious reading of the text, one is compelled to ask: Is a salient message to take home from sacred scripture: “Men mustn’t cut the corners of their garments?” Or are there other decrees to emphasize first? What REALLY IS important?

A question all of us should ask, then, is: What are the key lessons one should take away after reading the Hebrew Bible? That mixing fabrics should be avoided? That goyim living in Canaan should be viciously oppressed? That a man should ensure that a piece of cloth is worn on his head at all times? For any reasonable person, these would seem to be the LEAST important “action items” on the docket. Viciously persecuting goyim seems not to square well with the more important messages.

One can’t help but wonder, have Revisionist Zionists ever *actually read* the Hebrew Bible in its entirety—or do they merely indulge in a selective reading of convenient passages? Or are they simply doing what they’re told to do by those in authority?

One can wonder the same thing about fundamentalist Christians' treatment of the Gospels of Jesus (which, it often seems, they have mastered the art of completely ignoring). Those (who deem themselves sincere followers of Jesus) who support the bloated budget of the military-industrial complex should be reminded: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be children of God" (Matthew 5:9). To the Christian Neocon, we may add: "Though militarism may appeal to you, sir, it's certainly not the primary moral one should take away from Jesus of Nazareth."

Regarding right-wing Zionism *by Christians*, need we remind ourselves of the golden rule (Matthew 7:12, 22:39; Luke 6:31)? Suddenly, bulldozing Palestinian houses doesn't seem to be the most "Christian" thing to do. This single entreaty alone is fatal to American Exceptionalism. We are also told to avoid the "eye for an eye" approach (Romans 12:17). Indeed, God knows that two wrongs don't make a right.

"Be at peace with each other" (Mark 9:50) was, after all, the primary message of the Prince of Peace. Meanwhile, to the victims of American military action, it may be said: "Anyone who kills you thinks he is offering service to God...because they have not known the Father" (John 10:2). It is quite clear: If one wants to do God's work, fighting *the other* (in his name) is not the way to go. Tell that to the millions of Vietnamese and the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis pointlessly killed due to American military intervention. They might wish that more Americans had listened to Jesus. Other passages admonish us to pursue peace with "the other" in every way that we can (most notably: 1 Peter 3:8, 3:11).

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37; 15:20) clearly tells us to help even those not of our own tribe. In my estimation, this is the most important passage in the entire Bible—Old and New Testaments. Tragically, it may well be the most *ignored* passage in the entire Bible as well. Alas, the way super-patriotic Christians conduct themselves, one would think the New Testament's primary message was to wage war on outsiders whenever the (annointed) nation sees fit.

Need we remind ourselves of the entreaties by Jesus to love thy neighbor (Mark 12:31; Matthew 19:19, 22:38-39; John 15:12)? How about the importance of forgiveness conveyed by the parable of the lost sheep (Matthew 18:12-14 and Luke 15:3-7)? Regarding the recriminations perpetrated by Christian Zionists, shall we ignore Jesus' plea for us to resist indicting others for a mote in their eye while not seeing the plank in our own eye (Matthew 7:3-5)? "All who live by the sword will die by the sword," Jesus tells us in Luke 22:50. One visit to Gaza should put an end to "casting stones" at Palestinians (John 8:7). According to Jesus, we're supposed to address our own sins first. God help us. (One wonders if Neocons have a "special" copy of the Bible that reads, "Blessed are the war profiteers.")

One certainly can't be a foreign policy hawk while heeding Matthew 5:38-42 (the entreaty to turn the other cheek when one is wronged...rather than invoke an "eye for an eye"). But wait, there's more: Saul of Tarsus ALSO urged us to love thy neighbor (Galatians 5:14 and Romans 13:8-9)...and to be good to others (Thessalonians 5:14-15). Indeed, he told us to pursue peace above all else (Romans 14:19). "Return no one evil for evil... Live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:17-18), for "God has called us to live in peace" (1 Corinthians 7:15, Hebrews 12:14). "Do not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21; 1 Peter 3:8-9). So much for "an eye for an eye".

How, pray tell, is one to square any of this with the right-wing ideology known as "Christian Zionism"?

“Paul” also notifies us that being kind to others is of utmost importance (Ephesians 4:31-32). In James 2:8, we’re told to love thy neighbor. 1 John 4:7-8 and 3:18 both tell us to love one another. At no point do they say “except if you’re Palestinian”. As mentioned, 1 Peter 3:8-9 tells us to be good to others. I searched in vain for the passage that said: “Pursue your national interests first, above all else...even at the expense of human rights.”

Imagine if IG policy in Palestine were based on these 30 *New Testament* passages. Imagine.

A foreign policy inspired by a discerning reading of the Bible couldn’t possibly be based on militarism. But what of economic policy? Those *corporatists* who claim to be part of the Abrahamic tradition (be they Jews, alleged followers of Jesus, or self-proclaimed Muslims) should be especially ashamed of themselves.

The Torah, the Gospels, and the Koran are all quite clear that “people of the book” are obligated to do what they can to help the weak, the poor, the sick, the downtrodden...and to never hoard money for themselves. Even as they proclaim fealty to Yahweh / Christ / Allah, pious plutocrats betray the most important requests made of mankind by their deity. Here are 31 examples from the Hebrew Bible:

- The entreaty to put probity over material acquisition is in at least THIRTEEN Proverbs (8:11, 11:28, 19:1, 19:22, 21:26, 22:1, 22:9, 23:4, 25:21, 28:20, 28:27, 29:7, and 31:8).
- We’re told to help the poor in TEN passages (Leviticus 19:10, 23:22; Exodus 23:11; Deuteronomy 15:7-8, 10-11; Zechariah 7:9-10; Proverbs 19:17; Psalms 41:1, 82:3-4, 14:21). We’re also told to treat the poor *fairly* (Exodus 23:6).
- At least FOUR MORE passages tell us that we must help those in need (Deuteronomy 26:12-13; Isaiah 1:16-17, 25:4; Jeremiah 5:27-29).
- “Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord which he has given you” (Deuteronomy 16:17).
- Warnings against the emptiness of consumerism and materialism are given in Ecclesiastes 5:10-15

And, of course, we’re told that the meek shall inherit The Land in Psalm 37:11 (to be echoed later in Matthew 5:5). These 31 passages from the Old Testament not enough? What about the *New Testament*? Corporatism fares even worse. Here, I mention the 50 most obvious *New Testament* passages to support this point.

We can start with greed / gluttony / avarice: the lust for financial accumulation. The most commonly quoted is: “For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. People, eager for money, have wandered from the faith...” (1 Timothy 6:10). Indeed, we’re told by Jesus: “You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13). (One wonders if, perhaps, Christian corporatists have their own “special” version of the Gospels that reads, “You serve God BY serving money.”) Other passages clearly denounce avarice—most notably: 1 Peter 5:5 and James 4:6.

Jesus was crystal clear on his message of anti-materialism / anti-greed with his statement about the affluent getting into heaven (Mark 10:25, Matthew 19:23-24, Luke 18:25). The parable of Dives (the rich man) and Lazarus was a scathing indictment of the affluent not using their resources to help the needy (Luke 16:19-31). It takes a concerted effort to ignore ALL these hallmark passages. It is quite clear: making financial acquisition one’s summum bonum is antithetical to the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 6:19 and Luke 12:15-21). “Keep your life free from the love of money” (Hebrews 13:5). We must be mindful of the emptiness of affluence (James 5:1-5).

Jesus of Nazareth was adamant about the iniquity of speculation and usury, indicting the money changers (usurers and financiers) in at least seven passages (Mark 11:15-19, 27-33; Matthew 21:12-17, 23-27; Luke 19:45-48, 20:1-8; John 2:13-16). So much for the financial services industry. Let's put this bluntly: If you are an investment banker or private equity operator, you are—ipso facto—NOT a follower of Jesus. Period.

Indeed, Jesus' indictment of the money changers was *the only time* that he became overtly irate. Clearly, it was the bankers (those who made financial acquisition an end in itself) who angered Jesus the most. Lest one is either schizophrenic or downright duplicitous, one can't be an investment banker / hedge-fund manager / private equity manager and be a follower of Jesus at the same time. He had nothing but contempt for the money-changers, for usury, for cupidity, for enterprises based on monetary acquisition. And Jesus certainly saw the powerful to be LEAST in keeping with the divine (Matthew 5:5).

The need for social justice was emphasized when Jesus instructed us to “take care of the least of these, for they will be first; as you did (not) do it to / for the least of these, you did (not) do it to / for God” (Matthew 25:40). Taking care of the disenfranchised: this was arguably the primary *moral* message of Jesus (Matthew 6:3-4; Luke 3:11, 12:33, 14:12-14, 22:27). (Denouncing Mammon was also a major theme throughout.) This key principle is impossible to square with supply-side economic policy. “The man who has two tunics is to share with he who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise” sounds more like Galbraith than Friedman. How does one claim that this is the word of god, and in the very next breath promote free-market fundamentalism?

Even Saul of Tarsus notifies us of the importance of taking care of those in need (1 Corinthians 13:4-6; Galatians 2:10). In addition, we find this message in James 2:15-16 and 1 John 3:17. How can one possibly be a Neoliberal and a follower of Jesus? Answer: one can't.

It seems outlandish that, after an honest, judicious reading of the New Testament, one would be left with the impression that cutting vital public services for the rank and file in order to fund enormous tax-breaks for the super-rich is “the Christian thing to do”. Is it possible to survey the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and conclude that supply-side economics is what he would have endorsed? What passages would leave a reader with such an impression?

The parables of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) and of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 19:12-27) are entreaties to use one's assets *responsibly*. They are about having a good work ethic and not squandering one's talents. Their message has little if anything to do with capitalism per se. Augmented prosperity entails a proportional degree of civic responsibility, as we learn from Luke 12:48: “For everyone to whom much is given, of him much shall be required.” Responsible investment, we're told, isn't about speculation, it's about social justice. One's assets must always be used for the common good: “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work, we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35).

This reading of the Prodigal Son and the Talents is confirmed later (1 Peter 4:10). Following the parable of the Prodigal Son (in Luke 15) is the Parable of the Dishonest Manager in Luke 16, which reiterates the message to not squander one's assets or abuse one's wealth. Luke 16 involves an indictment of the money-loving Pharisees: a statement against materialism and love of financial acquisition. It makes sense, then, that Luke 16 ends with the tale of the rich man (Dives), driven by greed, rebuffing the sick man in need (Lazarus). To view the point of the Prodigal Son and the Talents as anything other than an entreaty to use one's resources to effect social justice is to pervert Jesus's overarching message.

Indeed, giving sets us free, while hoarding entraps us (James 5:2). Not only is financial acquisition no virtue, according to the teachings of Jesus, but we're morally obligated to use our assets to help those in need. After all, we reap what we sow (2 Corinthians 9:6-8). There will have to be a lot of camels going

through a lot of needle-eyes if corporatists are to get into heaven.

Here, civic-mindedness is key. Saul of Tarsus tells us in Philippians 2:4, “Each of you should not only look to your own interests, but to those of others.” He reiterates in Romans 14:7-8 that “none of us lives for himself alone.” Indeed, the original followers of Jesus were Marxian in their approach, living in socialist communes. This is stated clearly by Luke in Acts 2:44-45 as well as in Acts 4:34-35: resources were distributed to each according to his need.

To praise corporate titans and speculators, then, is to glorify what Jesus denounced: the love of money symbolized by the money-changers in the temple, by the Pharisees, and by Dives. One can be an investment banker; one can be a follower of Jesus; but one can't be both. To promote systems of highly concentrated wealth, to support Neoliberal economic policy, to endorse supply-side economics, is to betray the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. This couldn't be more clear.

I've just listed 50 New Testament passages that clearly entail policies aimed at social justice above all else. Where's the list of passages that prescribe unfettered capitalism? There are none.

It may be added that—taken literally—not *all* the prescriptions in the New Testament are advisable. For example, Mark 10:21-27, Luke 6:30, and Luke 14:33 surely take generosity too far (imploring us to give *everything* away), so—understandably—almost everyone ignores them. But this hyperbole is testament to the emphasis placed on a life of helping the disenfranchised, not a life based on material acquisition. The over-arching message of Jesus is quite clear on this point. It couldn't be more straightforward that Jesus's message can only be squared with genuine social democracy.

The point here isn't to engage in a scripture-quoting competition. Anyone can embark on a cherry-picking expedition to suit their purposes. After all, cherry-picking is easy enough for anyone fishing for rationalizations for pre-established conclusions. Indeed, cherry-picking is precisely what the present essay does. Therefore, the question becomes: Which cherries are you picking?

One can just as well emphasize other passages in the Bible that call for other modes of conduct (killing anyone who's caught gathering sticks on the Sabbath, for example). So one must ask oneself: *What kinds of* passages shall I choose to emphasize? In the end, one must decide which passages are the salient ones. One can only do this by using one's own capacity for discernment. (Stoning one's wife to death for “talking back” and raping the virgin daughters of our enemy probably shouldn't make the list.)

CONCLUSION:

In referring to Judeo-Christian scripture, waging an exegetical pissing contest gets nobody anywhere; we must ascertain which passages trump which. (The same goes for the Koran, a book that contains a mountain of morally dubious passages amongst a mountain of morally upstanding passages. Which passages one opts to emphasize reveals much about what kind of person one is.) The capacity to be discerning exists independently of the book to which one refers. The standards by which one ascertains which parts should be emphasized must—by definition—exist independently of anything said in the text. What one imports into one's reading says more about a person than about his religion. Alas, with ideology, critical reflection is anathema.

Oddly, it seems that in order for an adherent of Judaism or Christianity to be right wing, he is required to ignore the salient themes of his own sacred text. The point is rarely made by Progressives, but—based on the evidence—it’s difficult not to conclude that if “people of the book” actually read their holy book with a discerning eye, all people of the book couldn’t help but be Progressives. I wonder: Am I missing something? Perhaps. It seems that many of the devout emphasize the *theology* of the scripture over the *moral messages*. Or maybe they just choose to focus more on the petty parts than on the substantive parts. Whatever the explanation, if Jesus was truly the son of a benevolent deity, he surely must grieve when he beholds his alleged followers in modern America.

Strange is the person who reads the Gospels and—of all things to take away from that reading—takes away the message that zygotes should be treated as full-fledged humans, homosexuality should be condemned, everyone should be allowed to carry lethal firearms, investment banking is a noble enterprise, the super-rich should be allowed to hoard their money even as others suffer, public healthcare should be treated as a consumer product (limited exclusively to the enfranchised), material wealth is a sign of merit, being rich is a virtue, public services for the poor are to be avoided, a nation should devote as much money as possible to a standing military, and it’s okay for the IG to viciously oppress the Palestinians. To such ideologues, one can only say, “What Gospel are YOU reading?” It’s astonishing what jumps out at people when they read scripture. Are these really the key lessons right-wing Christians take away from the Gospels?

It’s no stretch to say that if Jesus of Nazareth—as portrayed in the synoptic Gospels—attended a Heritage Foundation talk or a GOP convention, he would probably be quite nauseated. It seems straight forward that Jesus would see his moral message (if not his theological message) far more in secular humanists than in the conservative “Christians” of our day. (There can be little doubt that he would have been quite disgusted by Neoliberal economic policy and Neocon foreign policy. He’d be utterly dumfounded that these are currently the ideologies of those who profess to follow him most vociferously.) The over one hundred passages quoted in the present essay are all reflections of humanism—representing principles that exist independently of any theology. Indeed, to live a life of which Jesus would approve, it seems being a conservative Christian is not the way to go. This irony should help us recognize that noble principles transcend all institutionalized dogma.

Call yourself right wing. Call yourself a devotee of Jesus of Nazareth. But spare us the absurdity of claiming to be both. Ask yourself, which would Jesus of Nazareth have joined: Amnesty International or the NRA? Which would he endorse first: The ACLU or the Chamber of Commerce? Doctors Without Borders or AHIP? The Civil Rights movement or the Business Roundtable? The Big Brother / Big Sister Association or Goldman Sachs? Human Rights Watch or AIPAC? Even a cursory reading of scripture makes the answers quite obvious.

Meanwhile, we may pose other queries: What kind of practitioner of Judaism would endorse the American Enterprise Institute or the Club For Growth? What kind of Muslim? What kind of *human* would be right wing? The answer to each: Not a very good one. It seems high time we start calling bad people “bad people”, and ignorance “ignorance”. The truth will set us free (John 8:32). (We may also note 1 Timothy 1:4, to be wary of dogmatism—a measure that would essentially preclude all religion.)

In the Torah, Jews are told to be open-handed to the poor and to the foreigner—to remember their own experience of oppression, and to take care never to commit the same crime against others. In the New Testament, followers of Jesus are enjoined to take care of the least-well-off and to help one’s fellow-human-in-need, even when he is not a member of one’s own tribe. This message couldn’t be more straightforward. That anyone in the Judeo-Christian community misses such an elementary message is nothing short of astounding.

That I was able to (quite easily) mention over *140 passages* from the Bible that are antithetical to right-wing doctrine shows why true Judeo-Christian fealty entails NOT being right-wing. For those right-wing ideologues who insist on sticking to their guns (and who have an indelible marker), this essay may serve as a helpful guide for “blacking out” passages that don’t accord with their worldview. (It seems a lot of ink would need to be spilled to accomplish such an edit.)

To any right-winger who claims Faith in one of the three Abrahamic religions, it must be said: “You are a delinquent Jew / Christian / Muslim. Go back and read your holy book.” It’s time that humanitarians take a stand, and notify the pious that genuine probity speaks louder than sanctimonious lip-service. In the end, it’s about being a good human, irrespective of one’s race or creed.