










## TEA PARTY AND THE RIGHT

AlterNet / By [CJ Werleman](#)

 1018 COMMENTS

# Right-Wing Is Filled with Biblical Illiterates: They'd Be Shocked by Jesus' Teachings if They Ever Picked Up a Bible

*Jesus wouldn't have supported food stamps?*

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December 23, 2013 | Fox News' Bill O'Reilly defended the Republican Party's spending cuts for SNAP by effectively declaring Jesus would not support food stamps for the poor because most them are drug addicts. If his insensitive remark is inconsistent with Scripture, which it is, then the question becomes why do talking heads on the right get away with proclaiming what Jesus would or wouldn't support?

The answer is simple: Conservatives have not read the Bible.

The Right has successfully rebranded the brown-skinned liberal Jew, who gave away free healthcare and was pro-redistributing wealth, into a white-skinned, trickledown, union-busting conservative, for the very fact that an overwhelming number of Americans are astonishingly illiterate when it comes to understanding the Bible. On hot-button social issues, from same-sex marriage to abortion, biblical passages are invoked without any real understanding of the context or true meaning. It's surprising how little Christians know of what is still the most popular book to ever grace the American continent.

More than 95 percent of U.S. households own at least one copy of the Bible. So how much do Americans know of the book that one-third of the country believes to be literally true? Apparently, very little, according to data from the Barna Research group. Surveys show that 60 percent can't name more than five of the Ten Commandments; 12 percent of adults think Joan of Arc was Noah's wife; and nearly 50 percent of high school seniors think Sodom and Gomorrah were a married couple. A Gallup poll shows 50 percent of Americans can't name the first book of the Bible, while roughly 82 percent believe "God helps those who help themselves" is a biblical verse.

So, if Americans get an F in the basic fundamentals of the Bible, what hope do they have in knowing what Jesus would say about labor unions, taxes on the rich, universal healthcare, and food stamps? It becomes easy to spread a lie when no one knows what the truth is.

The truth, whether Republicans like it or not, is not only that Jesus a meek and mild liberal Jew who spoke softly in parables and metaphors, but conservatives were the ones who had him killed. American conservatives, however, have morphed Jesus into a muscular masculine

warrior, in much the same way the Nazis did, as a means of combating what they see as the modernization of society.

Author Thom Hartmann writes, “A significant impetus behind the assault on women and modernity was the feeling that women had encroached upon traditional male spheres like the workplace and colleges. Furthermore, women’s leadership in the churches had harmed Christianity by creating an effeminate clergy and a weak sense of self. All of this was associated with liberalism, feminism, women, and modernity.”

It’s almost absurd to speculate what Jesus’ positions would be on any single issue, given we know so little about who Jesus was. Knowing the New Testament is not simply a matter of reading the Bible cover to cover, or memorizing a handful of verses. Knowing the Bible requires a scholarly contextual understanding of authorship, history and interpretation.

For instance, when Republicans were justifying their cuts to the food stamp program, they quoted 2 Thessalonians: “Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.” One poll showed that more than 90 percent of Christians believe this New Testament quote is attributed to Jesus. It’s not. This was taken from a letter written by Paul to his church in Thessalonica. Paul wrote to this specific congregation to remind them that if they didn’t help build the church in Thessalonica, they wouldn’t be paid. The letter also happens to be a fraud. Surprise! Biblical scholars agree it’s a forgery written by someone pretending to be Paul.

What often comes as a surprise to your average Sunday wine-and-cracker Christian is the New Testament did not fall from the sky the day Jesus’ ghost is said to have ascended to Heaven. The New Testament is a collection of writings, 27 in total, of which 12 are credited to the authorship of Paul, five to the Gospels (whomever wrote Luke also wrote Acts), and the balance remain open for debate i.e. authorship unknown. Jesus himself wrote not a single word of the New Testament. Not a single poem, much less an op-ed article on why, upon reflection, killing your daughter for backchat is probably not sound parenting.

The best argument against a historical Jesus is the fact that none of his disciples left us with a single record or document regarding Jesus or his teachings. So, who were the gospel writers? The short answer is we don’t know. What we do know is that not only had none of them met Jesus, but also they never met the people who had allegedly met Jesus. All we have is a bunch of campfire stories from people who were born generations after Jesus’ supposed crucifixion. In other words, numerous unidentified authors, each with his own theological and ideological motives for writing what they wrote. Thus we have not a single independently verifiable eyewitness account of Jesus—but this doesn’t stop Republicans from speaking on his behalf.

What we do know about Jesus, at least according to the respective gospels, is that Jesus’ sentiments closely echoed the social and economic policies of the political left. The Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount read like the mission statement of the ACLU: “Blessed are the poor, for theirs is kingdom of heaven,” “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,” and “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Jesus also said, “Judge not he who shall not be judged,” and “Sell what you have and give it to the poor.”

So, when Republicans accuse Obama of being a brown-skinned socialist who wants to redistribute the wealth, they’re thinking of Jesus. Stephen Colbert joked, “Jesus was always flapping his gums about the poor but never once did he call for a tax cut for the wealthiest 2

percent of Romans.”

Biblical illiteracy is what has allowed the Republican Party to get away with shaping Jesus into their image. That’s why politicians on the right can get away with saying the Lord commands that our healthcare, prisons, schools, retirement, transport, and all the rest should be run by corporations for profit. Ironically, the Republican Jesus was actually a devout atheist—Ayn Rand—who called the Christian religion “monstrous.” Rand advocated selfishness over charity, and she divided the world into makers versus takers. She also stated that followers of her philosophy had to chose between Jesus and her teachings. When the Christian Right believes it’s channeling Jesus when they say it’s immoral for government to tax billionaires to help pay for healthcare, education and the poor, they’re actually channeling Ayn Rand. When Bill O’Reilly claims the poor are immoral and lazy, that’s not Jesus, it’s Ayn Rand.

The price this country has paid for biblical illiteracy is measured by how far we’ve moved toward Ayn Rand’s utopia. In the past three decades, we’ve slashed taxes on corporations and the wealthy, destroyed labor unions, deregulated financial markets, eroded public safety nets, and committed to one globalist corporate free-trade agreement after another. Rand would be smiling down from the heaven she didn’t believe in.

With the far-right, Republican-appointed majority on the Supreme Court ruling in favor of the Koch brothers’ Citizens United, the flow of billions of dollars from anonymous donors to the most reliable voting bloc of the Republican Party—the Christian Right—will continue to perpetuate the biblically incompatible, anti-government, pro-deregulation-of-business, anti-healthcare-for-all, Tea Party American version of Christianity.

CJ Werleman is the author of [Crucifying America](#) and [God Hates You, Hate Him Back](#). Follow him on Twitter [@cjwerleman](#).

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