

Rightly Dividing the Word

Week Two: Observing Text & Context

How We Read the Bible...

"Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him *more* will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him." –Jesus in Luke 8:18, contextually after the parable of the Sower

"When I pray, I talk to God, but when I read the Bible, God is talking to me; and it is really more important that God should speak to me than that I should speak to Him¹". –DL Moody

"Study without prayer is atheism. Prayer without study is presumption"
–RW Dale

Review

I. Why Study the Bible

- Clarity. Because you can understand it
- Theology. Because every Christian is a Theologian
- Authority. Because it's Divinely powerful.
- Responsibility. Because it's your *duty!*

II. Goal of Bible Study

The Goal of studying the bible is that the man of God would be adequately equipped to handle every situation biblically. (2Tim 3:16-17)

"Scripture was not given to us to increase our knowledge but to change our conduct." –Andrew Murray

Define Terms

- **Inductive Bible Study (IBS)** – A method of studying the Bible where by slowing down you and asking the right questions, you allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.

3 Parts to IBS_

- Observation [open your eyes]
- Interpretation [open your mind]
- Application [open your heart]

¹ D.L. Moody, *Experiencing Pleasure and Profit in Bible Study* 15

- **You cannot apply it to your heart until you interpret it with your mind, and you cannot interpret with your mind until you observe with your eyes!!! ((Ex. 1 Corinthians 7:29))**
 - Context of book, context of chapter must be observed before you interpret and before you apply!
 - Cf. 1 Cor 7:3-5, Ephesians 5, 1 John 2:15-17

The purpose of Scripture is to know Jesus and consequently be saved. That purpose can never be fulfilled unless God's message is understood. That is the goal of good observation and interpretation. However, to understand the Bible will not bring salvation. The message must be *believed* and *obeyed*. That is the task of application.

OBSERVATION:

- **Exegesis** – The determination of the meaning of the biblical text in its historical and literary contexts.
 - Solid Exegesis seeks to determine the **intended meaning** of the author in each text. *This is the main part of Observation!*

INTERPRETATION:

- **Hermeneutics** – the science or art of interpreting the Bible (nxt wk)
 - Explaining in one language what is conveyed in another language.²
 - The art of moving the text from what it meant then to what it means now³.
 - When I say that I don't mean that the scripture has different meaning now but to convey the meaning of scripture today from Biblical culture to our culture we must interpret.
 - Example: *Five times in the NT it refers to greeting others with a holy kiss*⁴. (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thes. 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14). **Then it spoke of greeting, friendliness and love to others. In our western minds it speaks of being creepy...kinda.**
 - Thus the importance of Exegesis as a part of Hermeneutics.
 - Begin with the process of exegesis of the text in order to understand what it originally meant.

² Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 19

³ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics* 27

⁴ Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 93

APPLICATION:

- **Exposition** – Is the communication of the meaning of the Biblical text along with it's meaning for today.
 - Exposition takes the correct observation, interpretation and application of a text and communicates that to an audience.
 - Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27)
 - The primary goal of Exegesis is an *understanding* of the biblical text; the primary goal of Exposition is *communicating* the meaning of the text⁵.

Observation : Good Exegesis – Text & Context

Text & Context: first rule of Bible Study.

- Can't divorce a Text from its Context.
 - Ex. Philippians 4:13
 - "All things?"
 - Ex. Philippians 4:19
 - "All your need?"
 - Contextually Read: **Philippians 4:10-20**
 - "...I can do all things..."
 - v.11 purpose statement: "be content"
 - Paul knew how to be content in every situation serving Jesus brought him into. Hunger or plenty.
 - "...God shall supply all your need..."
 - Because the Philippians gave such a sacrificial gift (v.18) to Paul in the preaching of the Gospel (missions) God would not overlook it but supply all their need!
 - To His Glory for His Namesake (v.20)!!!!

When God communicates to us through His Word, He communicates to equip us and help us live the life He has prescribed we should live. When we make the text mean something God did not intend, we abuse the text, not use it.⁶

⁵ Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 20

⁶ Gordon Fee, *How to Study the Bible for All Its Worth*, 25

3 Levels of Context:

1. Book level or *overall context*.
2. Paragraph or Chapter level or *surrounding context*.
3. Sentence level or *immediate context*.

- All of this controlled by the context of the *entire bible*. Understanding its unity being authored by God “who does not lie” (Titus 1:2).

Importance of Context:

- God has given us eternally relevant principles through His Word; the way God chose to give us these principles are surrounded by a certain context.
 - The way we listen to God should match how God has chosen to speak.⁷ Thus we must contextually know the setting.

I. Book Level: **Overall Context**

*(Goal: determine the Purpose or Theme of the Book)

- Every book in the Bible shares in serving to reveal the Glory of God and to make known His Salvation. But almost every book in Scripture differs in its specific purpose or theme from the other books.
 - Book of Isaiah differs in its approach to reveal God than the book of Proverbs. Even the book of Matthew differs in its approach than the book of John.
- How to determine the purpose of a book...
 1. Read the entire book, following the flow of thought, searching for a theme...don't worry about understanding every sentence the first several times through, just read!
 - **SLOW DOWN!**
 - Read about the Back Ground or the Occasion of the Book.
 - Bible Handbooks, Commentary Book Intros
 - *“In inductive study, context is determined or identified ... by carefully observing what is repeated in the text and seeing how it all relates. If you observe what is said and pay attention to the repeated words, phrases, or ideas,*

⁷ J. Scott Duvall & J. Daniel Hayes, *Grasping God's Word*, 99

you'll clearly see the context in any book, chapter, or passage that you're studying⁸."

2. Ask good questions
 - 5 W's and an H (Page 24 in How To Study Your Bible)

5 W's & H with Philippians

Who wrote it and to whom was it written? Who were the major characters?

- Paul to the Church (possibly house churches) in Philippi
- Paul (author), Timothy (being sent there), Epaphroditus (sent to Paul, now being sent back)

What are the major teachings?

- Unity
- ...

When was it written?

- Sometime around AD 60

Where was it written?

- Written from prison (probably Rome)

Why was this written, occasion?

- Paul wrote to the Philippians to thank them for the generous gift sent to them by their pastor Epaphroditus (4:10-19)

How was it written? What's the style?

- Epistle

Kay Arthur

- These questions are the building blocks of precise observation which, remember, lay a solid foundation for accurate interpretation. However, if you rush into interpretation without laying the vital foundation of observation, your understanding becomes colored by your own presuppositions – what you think, what you feel, or what other people have said. And if you do this, you distort the Scriptures to your own destruction – something we are specifically warned against⁹.
 - **2 Peter 3:14-18**

⁸ Kay Arthur, *How To Study Your Bible* 21

⁹ Kay Arthur, *How To Study Your Bible* 25

II. Paragraph/Section Level: *Surrounding Context*

- Here we go from the overview of the book to a closer look at the theme and themes of paragraphs and sections.
 - If you have a modern bible the paragraph theme divisions are shown by the headings over section.
 - But we must read and reread, study and ask good questions...THERE ARE NO SHORTCUTS!

- Connect the dots...
 - Look for repeated words and or key words
 - Look for a purpose statement
 - Look for comparing and contrasting words
 - Look for questions and answers
 - Look for lists
 - Look for cause and effects
 - Look for conditional clauses

- Example: 1 Corinthians 13

- Example: Mark 8:13-30
 - Comparisons of the three episodes?

III. Sentence Level: *Immediate Context*

- The most important guideline for determining the meaning of a passage is the passage in its immediate context. (Remember Philippians 4?)
 - The words and sentences that precede and follow the passage.
 - The setting in its cultural context.

“Disregarding the context is one of the greatest problems in Bible interpretation. By disregarding the total surrounding’ of a Bible verse, we may completely misunderstand the verse. We need to take into consideration the sentences and paragraphs that precede and follow the verse and also to take into consideration the cultural setting in which the passage and even the entire book was written.¹⁰”

- REMEMBER: we are not trying to interpret the text yet. Interpretation comes later, we want to know what the text SAYS not what it MEANS...

¹⁰ Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 77

- Example: WORD *trunk*.
 - Of a car, of an elephant, luggage, of a tree, did I mean trunks as in swim trunks?
 - It would help to know the context. If I told you I was in my car and needed something out of my trunk you would understand.
- Example: word SAVED
 - 1 Timothy 2:15 *Nevertheless she will be **saved** in childbearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness, with self-control.*
 - Acts 4:12 *Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be **saved.**"*
- CONTEXT determines the meaning.

Homework

-How to Study Your Bible Chapter 4-6

-Basic Bible Interpretation Chapter 1

-Exegete Philippians 3:10

- Remember you're not looking for what it "means" but what it "says." What was Paul saying to the Philippians.
- Remember to read it contextually in its overall, surrounding and immediate context.