

Effective Bible Study: Lesson 3

Contextual Application

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One of the things we need to understand when entering a study of the Bible is God "calls" us to understand His word and God "expects" us to understand His word. Throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, God makes it clear that He expects people to understand what he has communicated to us and He even holds people accountable for failure to do so. For examples from just the first 12 chapters of the Bible, please see the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Able, Noah, the Tower of Babel and Abraham. Throughout the Bible, we see numerous examples of human accountability and expectation where handling God's word is concerned. In fact, if one were so inclined, they could suggest that a big portion of Scripture reveals pictures of our lives through a steady dose of examples of those who succeeded or failed based on how they handled God's message. Some of the stories in Scripture are so tough they are beyond confounding. But all of those stories have context, and they all have something to say to the disciple of Christ. But they need to be digested properly within context.

Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the words of Christ." The Bible never says faith comes by...

- ...assuming and hoping you are pleasing God.
- ...sincere efforts to win God's favor.
- ...guessing and convincing yourself that this must be okay.

Understanding what God wants comes from what He has revealed of His wants and desires in His word. So, God wants us to understand what the Bible says. We want to understand what the Bible says. We actually learn a number of things about God and ourselves through a steady diet of God's word.

- We see examples of this in judgment. The Bible reminds us that we will be judged according to God's word. John 12:48-50 says, "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So, whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say." If by faith we accept this as fact, and everyone is going to be judged by Jesus' words, which are God's words, then wouldn't it be wise to understand what Jesus says?

Perhaps if people considered what was really at stake, more would be interested. That's why people need to be taught.

- We also learn that God keeps His promises. God is faithful beyond our finite human ability to understand pure faithfulness. Romans 15:4 says, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope." God's word needs to be understood because we receive encouragement and hope from it, and we see God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness is demonstrated in covenant of blessings and curses given to the Hebrews in Deuteronomy 28-30. We understand God's faithfulness in the fulfillment of prophecy. We just celebrated Easter. How many verses prophecy about Jesus' death, burial and resurrection?
- God's word is repeatedly portrayed as having specific application to humanity. This can be seen in the fact that God expects a specific lifestyle out of His people. God calls people to be obedient and this obedience is reflected in the lifestyle of one who has been bought by Jesus blood. This should remind us that the Bible doesn't just simply call us to "profess" a certain thing or to merely "believe" a certain thing in our minds and hearts. Ephesians 2:8-10 reminds us that we are saved by grace. We can't do anything to add to the salvation God has given us. And He still expects a lifestyle of his people. He in fact created us to do good works. If you want to understand those works, you need to understand the message.
- Unity is also at stake. We don't have enough time to discuss how much disunity there is in the Christian world over varying applications of the word of God. Our unity is based on the ability of people to understand what the Bible says, and we need to understand it in roughly the same way. Why don't people understand the Bible the same way? There are two basic reason.
 - Ignorance. Some people just don't know what the Bible says.
 - Improper Hermeneutic. In other words, people are not in harmony with what the Bible says. Matthew 13:9 says, "Whoever has ears, let them hear." Hearing in the Bible has never been just about hearing and processing what is being said. It is about processing itself in such a way that it manifests itself into a part of your belief system creating action. God wants us to hear his message the same and unity depends on our ability to do so.

When it comes to proper understanding and application of Scripture, there have always been some basic assumptions amongst those who hold the Scripture up as God's word.

- God has spoken. The creation demands a Creator. If there is an effect, there must have been a cause. Most people don't accept mathematically impossible odds of order arising from randomness. Likewise, most believe that God hasn't just remained silent as the deists assert, but that this God has spoken and communicated with humankind. Romans 1:18-20. The God who created with world has also communicated with us. If God has created us, and then reached out to us, one would assume the message might be important. God created the world and He also communicated with us.
- The Bible is God's revealed word. We believe that the God who created the world communicated with us through the Bible writers. The Bible tells us more than 5,000 times that it is the word of God. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe."
- The ancient texts are available to us, in good form, and have been accurately translated. A basic study of this can reveal a number of marvelous facts regarding the preservation and accuracy of Scripture based on the available manuscripts discovered by archaeologists. In other words, your Bibles have been accurately translated. We will talk in a later study about the various English Bible translations, but for the time being, when you are reading a Bible you are reading exactly what God has revealed to humans. As a disciple of Jesus, you should trust this. To this end, we also believe the Bible is final, complete, sufficient, and the authorization on life and religious matters (John 12:48-50). As God's people have understood for the past 1,900 years, we are no longer anticipating more revelation to come. We are, however, awaiting Jesus' second coming.

In the last couple of studies, we focused on the lengthy Psalm 119, and the book of Philemon. This week I want you to try to apply some of the questions we spoke about in the last lesson. Try to identify application of the following passages, within their context. If you are familiar with the book in which they are contained, understanding who the writer and the audience are, and if you have an understanding of the occasion, that will certainly allow you to draw some conclusions about the intent of the passage and what we are to understand about it. But you also want to make sure that you look at the several verses written before and after the specific passage in order to help you better determine a specific context and application. With all that in mind, take some of those questions we asked in the last lesson (Lesson 2) and apply those questions to

the following texts. Clearly, not all of those questions will apply, and it's good to challenge the text with questions which you may come up with.

- Deuteronomy 32:44-47
- Joshua 22:4-5
- Jeremiah 31:31-34
- John 12:48-50
- 2 Timothy 2:2
- 2 Timothy 3:15-17
- 2 Peter 1:16-21