

THE BIBLE VIEW

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Theme: Bible

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Get the Context

Bill Brinkworth

“Context”: “The parts of a piece of writing or speech which precede and follow a particular word or passage and may fix, or help to fix, its true meaning” — Chamber’s Dictionary

Too often a Bible verse is selected to prove a point or doctrine without understanding what it is really about. The context of what was penned is often ignored. The statement is often misunderstood because previous or following verses that inform more fully what the Scripture is about are not heeded.

Not understanding the context of a conversation is something we all have done at least once. We listened to some talking and thought we knew what was being discussed. However, after we put our two cents of an opinion into the discussion, we were soon embarrassed because what we thought was being talked about was wrong. They were talking about something completely different. We came into the conversation at the end and did not understand the original context.

Too often this happens to a Bible reader. They assume they know what the verse means but are in left field in understanding it. Getting the context of the verse is paramount.

Here are some simple guidelines to keep one from making an error in understanding a verse(s):

- To whom is the verse addressed? Too many try to apply to this church age what was given to Old Testament saints only or to the Jews. It should not usually be applied to today’s church. One should not make verses fit to suit what they want them to mean.

Although many principles in the Bible apply today, many do not. To be safe, read the verse as the original recipient would understand it. (This will take some knowledge of the audience and their customs, practices, thinking, etc.)

Read “Matthew” as a Jew would with their understanding of the Old Testament and what they were looking forward to in their future. Read Paul’s Epistles from the point of a man burdened for the Gentiles and with a vast background of the Old Testament.

- What event or time are the verses concerning? Some scripture specifically dealt with a time in past history, but future to the ones being written to. Often, those verses are made to fit today when they do not apply.

- Do other verses indicate that a previous practice or teaching is no longer to be followed? Some have tried to follow Old Testament worship when the New Testament commands that we are no longer to have sacrifices, as Jesus is the once-forever sacrifice. We are no longer to have high priests as Jesus is our High Priest (Heb. 4:14).
- Is the verse a part of a previous sentence? Sometimes, the Scripture continues a preceding verse(s). Perhaps that verse even ends with a comma or a semicolon (;). Understand those verse(s) before jumping to conclusions about one select verse.

Sometimes, a verse starts with a word that connects it to an earlier verse or even a chapter. A giveaway is if it is a verse that begins with “Therefore,” “Wherefore,” or other connecting words. A common rule is if one sees a connecting word such as “therefore,” ask one’s self, “What is it there for?” and look and see!

- What are the previous verses (and chapters) talking about? Some read a whole chapter that is about one thing and take one verse in that chapter and claim it is about something completely different. ALWAYS read previous verses, maybe even the whole chapter or more, before assuming you know what the verse means.
- Is the principle you believe that is being taught, taught elsewhere in the Bible? Many stick to a biblical doctrine only “taught” by one verse. Usually, a principle is mentioned in many places in the Bible, not just one. One should be suspicious when getting a doctrine from only one verse. Search further. If it is a teaching God wants you to know, it will be in multiple places.
- Do not take another’s understanding of the verse for granted. We all make mistakes and often have the wrong context of the verse. Study it and search it out for yourself. I have heard somebody’s understanding of a verse was based on “what our religion teaches,” “what our tradition follows,” or “what my Aunt Hilda, whose great-grandfather was a preacher, said.” The best commentary of the Bible is the Bible! If you are English-speaking, ensure that the Bible you use is the KJV. ALL other modern versions change words, delete words and verses, and teach many things differently than the preserved Word of God!

The Bible is not just a book. It is God’s preserved Word. Often, it is not easy to understand what you are reading unless you have the proper background of the verse. Always understand a verse’s context before coming to conclusions about its meaning!

“A text without its context is a pretext!”

Difficulties in the Bible

John Bates, 1871

No one need deny that there are difficulties in the Bible. Those hard-to-understand statements do not affect its Divine origin any more than the difficulties in understanding things in nature affect the truth of its Divine origin.

Because a man cannot comprehend all the difficulties that meet him in many of the pages of the Book, would he be wise in saying that God was not the Creator of it? How can one be wise, for a similar reason, when one denounces the Bible as the Book of God?

“The Bible was human in penmanship but divine in authorship!” — Author Unknown

Why Some Do Not Read the Bible

Author Unknown

Queen Elizabeth’s wrinkles waxed deep and many. It is reported that an unfortunate master of the mint (the person designing the country’s coins) was disgraced by making a too faithful likeness of her cast on the shilling, which showed her aging. The die was broken, and only one mutilated specimen exists.

Her maids took the hint and were careful that no fragment of a looking glass remained in any room in the palace. *The Quarterly Review*, a magazine of the time, said the queen “had not the heart to look herself in the face for the last twenty years of her life!”

A mirror exposes wrinkles, dirt, etc., that may be on one’s face, as the Word of God shows what is in one’s heart. Reading the Bible shows us our sins. If we refuse to repent and change, we soon tire of seeing our “dirty faces” in God’s “Mirror.” So many stop looking into His “mirror.” How foolish! Better see the “dirt,” confess it, and be cleansed by the Blood of the Lamb.

“It’s not the will of God if it is against what is taught in the Word of God.”

Wealth Untold

Author Unknown

Precious things of wealth untold,
Stores of silver and of gold,
God hides oft within the ground,
Till by seeking they are found.
In His Word He’s hidden, too,
Riches that He means for you.

Search the Scripture’s precious store
As the miner digs for ore,
Finding wisdom not of Earth,
Far above a ruby’s worth.
Search, and you will surely find
Treasures to enrich the mind.

Search the Scriptures every day,
Search, and find there hidden away,
Like a pearl within its shell,
Promises that fears dispel.
Search, and find God’s words impart
Treasures to enrich the seeking heart.

Search the Scriptures, finding there
Christ, its chiefest Treasure rare,
Through whom God makes wealth abound
In each life where is found.
Search, and find what Christ will do
To enrich all life for you.

“To own a Bible and not read it is proof of one’s unconcern for what God has to say!”