

Hermeneutics

Seventh Principle

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Understand the Context

- I. Context is supreme!
 - A. Education is repetition, repetition, repetition.
 1. Real estate is location, location, location.
 2. Interpretation is context, context, context.
 - B. What do we mean by “context”?
 - C. A text out of its context makes it a pretext for anything we desire to justify.
 1. Examining the context, we discover the true meaning of the text.
 - a) A good example of this in non-biblical literature is the letter of Thomas Jefferson to the Danbury Baptist Association in which he speaks of the separation of church and state, which many use today to teach that the government cannot mention God, et al.
 - b) Reading the whole letter shows that Jefferson is widely misquoted and misunderstood.
 - c) He actually meant the opposite of what secularists maintain.
 2. This happens frequently with the Bible.
- II. The chapter and verse divisions disrupts the context in many people’s minds.
 - A. Each psalm was written separately (see Acts 13.33).
 1. It is not proper to speak of Psalm chapter two, but
 2. Psalm 2 or the second Psalm.
 - B. Also, the proverbs are separate.
 - C. However, the rest of the Bible was written as we write.
- III. There are three parts to context.
 - A. The immediate context
 - B. The wider context

1. An entire discussion in which we find a passage (E. g., John 13–17).
2. A whole Book of the Bible (E. g., Ecclesiastes).
 - a) One can take a verse from Ecclesiastes,
 - b) ignore the context of the Book and
 - (1) conclude things that Solomon never meant.
 - (2) See 1.17, 18; 2.17, 18; 10.19c

C. The whole Bible

1. See a passage as part of the entire biblical message.
2. We cannot interpret a passage to contradict the Bible elsewhere.

IV. Things to consider with the context.

A. As Troy said, “Sometimes the context of a Scripture passage is misused and excessively shortened or excessively extended in its application.”

B. Therefore, we have to distinguish:

1. Temporary and permanent elements
2. Incidentals and essentials
3. Human customs or culture and laws or commands of God

C. Consider First Corinthians 14.33–35 and women keeping silent in the church.

1. What is the immediate context?
2. What is the wider context?
3. What is the whole Bible context?
 - a) Some say the context is miraculous gifts and so the prohibition has no application today.
 - b) Consider the immediate context of verse 34.
 - (1) To what part of the Bible did Paul reference?
 - c) Note also the context of other passages that address this issue:
 - (1) Gen 3.16
 - (2) 1Co 11.2–16
 - (3) Eph 5.22–33
 - (4) 1Ti 2.8–15

D. Consider Romans 16.16 and the holy kiss.

1. What is the immediate context?
2. What is the wider context?
3. What is the whole Bible context?
 - a) Did Paul or Christianity introduce the kiss as a form of greeting?
 - b) If not, what did Paul do in this passage?
 - (1) The kiss may be temporary, cultural, etc., but
 - (2) a holy greeting is permanent and divine.