

Tuesday's Touch ...#28

...from Pastor Ed ...August 4, 2009

Receiving Truth... Part 7 Context!

All scripture is given by inspiration and is profitable for doctrine.. .2Tim 3:16

Whatever was written before was for our learning... Rom 15:4

No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation...2Pet 1:20

As is well known, it is possible to take any speech or writing and twist it to say anything by simply pulling words and sentences out of context. The same can be said about making a true statement without proper context, like the First Mate who wrote into the ship's log, "The Captain was sober today." So it is no surprise that almost anything and everything has been taught "from the Bible."

In telling us that **all** Scripture is inspired and profitable, the Lord has cautioned us against interpreting one verse or passage while ignoring its surrounding context or its relationship to the rest of Scripture. The Bible is not just a rambling collection religious writings. They form a coherent whole.

Many passages commonly quoted by Christians are taken completely out of context. Who has not heard someone say at a sparsely attended prayer meeting, "Well, where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in their midst" (Matt 18:19). Does this mean that the Lord is 'less with' the Christian alone in his prayer closet? Certainly not! The context concerns official decisions of the church and its leadership, in this case regarding church discipline, verses 17-20. (1 Cor 2:9, "Eye has not seen...", is another classic example. Read the context, especially verse 10!) How easily we accept interpretations that sound good and make sense but are completely out of context!

The same is true concerning the overall biblical context. If we studied Ecclesiastes without the rest of the scriptures, what view would we have of life and of God? If we took James alone, our understanding of grace and justification would certainly be skewed. Both of these books are inspired and profitable, but they must be understood in the broader context of the full revelation of Scripture.

Inherent in this understanding of context, is the principle of multiple witnesses. The requirement of multiple witnesses to determine truth is well established in the Bible

(Gen 41:32; Deut 17:6; Jud 6:36-40; Heb 6:17-18, et al). This should be considered no less true when we seek to discern truth from the Bible itself. Is our understanding of one passage clearly supported by an unbiased reading of other passages in context? It will immediately be seen that the fundamental truths of Christ and the Gospel are each supported by a multitude of scriptural witnesses. But if a teaching centers on one passage (or verse!), and we must stretch and strain to see this 'truth' in other passages either by eisegesis (reading into), or by grammatical or logical "gymnastics", we must be wary. Certainly such teachings must never be considered touchstones of orthodoxy, or points of division among true believers. Godly saints have had differing views on various issues, and reverent debate and discussion is good and necessary. But let us not be among those "obsessed with disputes and arguments over words" (1Tim 6:4-5; cf 2Tim 2:23-25). The wisdom that is from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, and full of mercy (see James 3:13-18). The principle of contexts with multiple witnesses will steer us away from false teaching and useless wrangling.

Thou Who art Truth,

Keep us from being, or following, those who handle your Word carelessly or deceitfully. And deliver us from useless contentions and quarrels which result in our straining out gnats as we swallow camels (Matt 23:24).

Feasting upon the riches,

Amen

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