



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 11

Principle: The implicit must always be interpreted by the explicit, not the opposite. A classic example of this is the popular interpretation of John 3:16. This text teaches explicitly that all who "believe" will not "perish" and will have "everlasting life." This text does not say anything about who will believe, i.e. who has the ability or the power to believe. However many assume that this text implies that everyone has the natural ability to fulfill the call.

Yet in John 6:65, Jesus says, "No one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." This text teaches explicitly that no one has the natural ability to come to Christ, apart from the sovereign grace of God. Furthermore Romans 3:10 and 11 explicitly teach that no one seeks, wants, desires, goes after God. By assuming that people have the ability or desire to believe Christ the clear, explicit teachings are ignored and forced to conform to false assumptions.

Principle: the full sense of any Scripture is not manifold but one. A verse or passage may have numerous possible applications, but only one correct meaning. We are to look at the text and interpret it in its plain grammatical sense, as it was intended by the author to the original audience, in its original historical setting, and not based on today's viewpoint. For example Christ's letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 were originally addressed to seven historical churches in Asia minor (Turkey), even though these messages can apply to the struggles churches face in all ages. We must strive to correctly interpret the single meaning intended by the author (2 Timothy 2:15).

On the other hand some passages may consist of two parts (such as prophecies; types and antitypes), which have a near future fulfillment and a distant future fulfillment. These are not two different meanings but rather two parts of the one and entire sense intended by the Holy Spirit (Exodus 12:46; Hosea 11:1 – historical meanings; John 19:36; Matthew 2:15 – Messianic meanings).

Principle: understanding typological language used in Scripture. People, places, rituals and events in the Old Testament point to greater realities in the New Testament. These Old Testament types or shadows prefigure, and are fulfilled in, the substance, which is Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:16-17).

Principle: Context is everything. Individual verses are not isolated fragments, but parts of a whole.

1 - Immediate context - what precedes the verse (antecedent); what follows the verse (subsequent). See Matthew 7:1-5 (not to judge), and 6 (change of topic).

2 - Broader context – in the same book, the writings of the same author, the whole of the OT/ NT. See Matthew 18:15-18; John 7:24 (called to judge).

3 - Historical context – time, customs, culture, background of the people and places in the passage. See Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 Peter 1:20 (the last days and times).

4 - Literary context – type of literature – narrative, didactic, poetry, symbolic, figurative, etc.

5 - Contextual connections – nearest connection; conjunctions (but, since, therefore, because, now, however, etc.); repeated words and themes; natural divisions of the text (see 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10 – though there is a chapter division in the Bible, these verses are naturally connected).

When the rules of Biblical hermeneutics are properly understood and utilized, the student of the Word of God is then equipped and able to cut in a straight manner, accurately handling the Scriptures, and avoiding twisted and perverted conclusions (2 Timothy 2:15).