

Walking The Old Paths, Episode 4: The Context Principle

Welcome to the Walking the Old Paths podcast. I'm JP, your host on this journey through the Bible. Each week we embark on a systematic study of the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. On today's episode, we'll be taking a look at another powerful tool for our journey: the context principle.

Early on in my Christian life, I had a zeal for the Lord and a love for the Word of God. So much so that I wanted to lead Bible studies. Now, for the most part, they weren't Bible studies as much as they were book studies by some author who used the Bible to illustrate his topic. Now, I'm not saying that there isn't some use to that. As long as the book is sound doctrinally.

The problem is many of them are not. And knowing what is and what isn't sound doctrine is difficult to impossible for any new believer. The Bible refers to them as babes in Christ.

That is what I was. A babe in Christ. I needed time to be grounded in the Bible and to understand what sound doctrine is before I ever should have led others in Bible study.

I needed the principles that are we are learning in these episodes to be equipped for studying the Bible, that I might rightly divide the word of truth. One of the most dangerous Bible studies we can be in is one where the teacher reads a text and then asks everyone to share what that means to them. If you've ever been in one of these Bible studies, you know that the various opinions and applications can be confusing and even contradicting.

And that brings us to our lesson today on the context principle. The context principle is the principle whereby God gives light to a text through the surrounding texts, or through remote texts that have the same theme.

Nearly all false teachings are based on texts of Scripture whose context is ignored. Let me give you an example of this. Early on in my Christian life, when I was at work, I kept a Bible with me that I read while I was scanning patients. Well, one of those patients noticed the Bible and started having a conversation with me about how one needs to be baptized in order to be saved.

And he quoted [Mark 16:16](#), He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. Well, since by that time I had read through the Bible already several times, I knew that it didn't sound right. It didn't fit the salvation message of the whole New Testament. Already some of the principles that I practice today in Bible interpretation, I knew then without even really knowing what they were; such as not building a doctrine around the obscure while ignoring the plain teaching of Scripture.

Let me say that again. You don't build doctrine around the obscure passage while ignoring the plain teaching of Scripture. Well, this man was ignoring the context, both the immediate and remote of the scriptures. Not only that, but he left out the last part of the verse, but he that believeth not shall be damned. You'll notice it doesn't say, but he that believeth not and is not baptized shall be damned.

Now at that time I didn't know how to answer him. I just knew something wasn't right. But you know the good thing about being challenged on what you believe. It drives you into the Bible to find the answers. Even today, 22 years later, when I am challenged, I still go to The Book for answers.

Now, Satan is a master at twisting scripture out of context.

I want you to consider the story in Matthew chapter four, when Jesus was tempted of the devil in the wilderness. After Jesus responded to the his first question by quoting Scripture, Satan thought he would do the same.

If you have your Bibles, turn over there. Matthew chapter four. Look down here in [verse five and six](#). Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down.

Now notice this, for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Satan was quoting two verses from Psalm 91, but ignored the context of the Scripture. He should have kept reading because it spoke of his own destruction.

[Psalm 91:13](#) says, Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

The Bible can be made to say anything, but not when it is taken in context. This therefore becomes a powerful tool to us, and one we need to add to our pack for our journey on the old paths of Scripture.

All right, so we have our tool the context principle. But how do we apply it? Well, I'm glad you asked. I want you to imagine that you're drawing circles around any verse that you are studying. We start with a small, tight circle and start enlarging it outward. The first circle is the immediate context. What does the entire verse say?

Remember, we can't just take a portion of a text to make it say what we want it to. I already gave the example of Mark 16:16 and how some use that out of context to say baptism is necessary for salvation.

Here is another one. There was a popular TV show a few years ago that kept quoting part of Romans 8:28.

All things work together for good. Well, you say that is great. The TV show is quoting the Bible. Well, yes, they are quoting part of it. But by only quoting what they wanted, they were taking it out of context and misapplying it. Let's hear the whole verse. [Romans 8:28](#) says, and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

After we read the whole verse, what observation can you make about all things working together for good? That it is only applicable to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose. That is our first circle. Let's move it out a little. Let's now include the verses that appear before it and after it.

Using our same example of Romans 8:28, let's include [verses 27 and 29](#) now.

And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did

predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

What observations can you make when we look at the surrounding verses? Well, how about in verse 27 says, The Spirit of God is interceding on the behalf of the saints. That is the saved. And it is also according to the will of God.

Verse 29, it says that God predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His son. We call that the process of sanctification. So now we see in these immediate verses surrounding our text that God is working in our hearts to make us like unto His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Okay, let's keep expanding that circle. Let us now include the whole chapter of [Romans 8](#) that our text verses in.

After reading that, what additional observations can you make about the overall theme of the chapter? Well, just a couple of that I see right off the bat. It defines who are true believers. [Romans 8:1](#) There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

[Romans 8:9](#) says, But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

It also talks about our sufferings in this life. In [verse 18](#) it says, For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. [Verse 26](#) Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

And in [verse 32](#), He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

With those observations on the chapter, we see that all we go through in life, the trials and tribulations that we suffer, are all working together for our good. When we look at it in context, we can see that it is not saying that God will make our lives easy, but that he will use the trials, the tribulations, and the infirmities of life to

make us more like him. Therefore, we are to focus on the eternal benefits of our present sufferings and not temporary comforts.

And just so we don't become discouraged when we go through life's difficulties. Paul reminds us that these temporary sufferings will never separate us from the love of God.

[Verses 38 and 39](#). For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Okay, friend, we are not done yet. Let's keep expanding that circle. Keep moving it to the chapters surrounding it and the book it is found in. And here is an important lesson I want you to see. Those chapter breaks are not inspired. They were put there to help us make quick references, and I'm glad for them. They make finding specific verses or passages easy.

But sometimes those chapter breaks interrupt a thought or a theme, and it gives the impression that a new subject is being discussed. I want to give you two examples, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament, that illustrate this. Isaiah chapter 53 is a famous chapter that foretells the sufferings and the death of the Messiah.

But that prophecy doesn't begin in verse one. It actually begins back in chapter 52 and verse 13, and it continues through chapter 53. [\[Isaiah 52:13-53:12\]](#)

In the New Testament, we see an unfortunate chapter break that occurs between Matthew chapter 16 and 17 that would otherwise help give context to a verse of Scripture that has much speculation surrounding it. Look over here in Matthew chapter 16.

The last verse 28 says, Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

Because the chapter ends here, we are left with the thought that some of the disciples with Jesus would not die until he comes in his millennial reign. Remember, that's the the Kingdom age.

But if we keep reading in chapter 17, we have an explanation to what Christ was referring to. So in verses one and two of Matthew 17, And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. [[Matthew 16:28-17:2](#)]

When we look at the context of the verse in Matthew 16:28, we observe that he did not say they would not taste of death until he came in his kingdom, but rather until they see.

Peter confirms this interpretation in [Second Peter chapter one, verse 16](#) through 18 says, For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

And this demonstrates our ever-widening circle. We must look beyond the book our text is in to other books of the Bible that shed additional light on a subject or theme. Remember this friend: Scripture interprets Scripture.

And finally, we widen the circle to include the whole of Scripture. We need to know the overall message of the Bible.

There is another principle called the survey principle, which states that we need to look at the whole before we can become too immersed in its parts. Christian friend, you need to be constantly reading through the Bible.

This Bible study is going to go slow. We are walking the old paths. Not taking an airplane through it. This should never replace your normal daily time in the Word of

God. Set aside time every day to read and study the Bible. Read through it and when you're done, read it again and keep doing it until you leave this earth.

While we are walking and talking together, as we traverse the old paths, each of us will be making our own round trips through the Bible over and over again. This way, we can ensure that we have the main themes of Scripture ingrained in us. It is part of the tools we need in proper Bible interpretation. Before we leave for the week, I want to circle back to the verse we read in [Romans 8:9](#).

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

This verse that we talked about gives us a biblical test on who is saved. We see that only those who have the Spirit of Christ belong to him.

Do you know, friend, if you have the Spirit of God in you, are you walking after the flesh? Are you walking after the things of this world? Is God something that you think belongs once a week in a church? Are you ashamed to talk about him? Are you ashamed to let others know that you are a Christian? Do you think, act, or talk like the world?

Or do you hunger and thirst after the things of God? Do you enjoy studying your Bible? Are you drawing closer to God through his precious word? Do you enjoy being around God's people, worshiping and serving alongside other believers in a church? Does sin bother you? Does it pain you to do those things which that God hates? That is the difference between a possessor of the Spirit of Christ and one who only has professed Christ, but never was saved.

I trust you know, friend, whether you have the Spirit of Christ in you. If you don't know for sure why don't you take it to God and ask him to reveal it to you today? The Bible says today is the day of salvation.

I met a man this last week. His name was Larry. When I was out door knocking and I asked Larry if he knew for sure that if he was saved or not, and to kind of test him on these things.

And I am not deceitful about it, I say, I want to ask you a question; it's a revealing question. And I said, if you when you die and you stand before God and he asks you why he should let you into heaven, what would you say to him when you ask that question? It really brings out what someone believes.

And Larry said, well, I went to a Baptist church when I was younger, and I got baptized, and then he started talking about all the good things that he does. And I pointed out to Larry that by how his answer, how he was trusting in a baptism and his good works to get him into heaven. And from there I took Larry to the Bible, and I read to him [Ephesians 2:8-9](#), which says, For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

And I showed him that it is by the grace of God that we are saved and it's through faith in Christ, in his shed blood, that we are saved and not of our own works, because if it was by our works, we would be able to boast in heaven. We'd be able to set our works before God and said, hey, this is why you should let me into heaven.

But he failed to see that the whole reason that Christ had to come to this earth and die on the cross for us is that we could not save ourselves. Sin cannot dwell in his presence. Remember that, friends, we have to be perfect. We have to be like Christ, and it's only through the shed blood of Christ and through faith in him, that we can be saved and be declared righteous in God's sight.

Well, friend, that wraps it up for this week. Join me next week as we discuss the next tool we will be taking on our journey through the old paths, the mentioned principles.

Until then, support your local church and your pastor. Pray for him. He has a tough job dealing with all of you.

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Email me and let me know where you're from, what kind of church you attend, and then share a brief testimony with me. I would love to hear them. Until next time may you grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.