

EXAMINING THE CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE

Acts 17:11

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Human wisdom not requirement of salvation, but acquiring a knowledge of the facts that form the background of the scripture is often essential to properly understand them.
- B. "Context" literally that which is "joined or woven together."
- C. We must guard against isolating passage from context. consider its setting and all that is joined together with it

DISCUSSION:

I. LEARN THE FACT THAT PROMPTED THE SCRIPTURE

- A. Who is the author of the statement?
 - 1. Is it inspired? Matt 28:20; 1Cor 14:37
 - 2. Or and inspired record of an inspired statement
 - a. Gamaliel: are we to just let error alone Acts 5:38
 - b. Men's rules quoted, must not follow Col 2:20-22
 - 3. Is passage from old or new covenant?
 - a. Christ's doctrine in New Gal 2:21; 3:23-25; 5:4
 - b. Old law came to end Col 2:14; Heb 9:15-17
- B. To whom was statement made?
 - 1. For general application or a special situation
 - a. "Make and ark" to Noah Gen 6:14
 - b. John's baptism not for us Matt 3:1-6
 - c. Christ's baptism for rest of age Matt 28:18-20
 - 2. Was it a promise only to certain ones or for all?
 - a. Spiritual gifts limited Jhn 14:26; 16:13
 - b. Yet all who are baptized receive "gift of Holy Spirit" (salvation and blessings) Acts 2:38,39
- C. What is the subject matter?
 - 1. Is it about past, present, or future
 - a. Acts 8:34 past or present application 8:27-40
 - b. Were they intended for Christians to observe? i.e. sabbath day, abstain from meats, etc. Col 2:14-17
 - 2. Is subject same as isolated passage seem to indicate
 - a. Heb 5:4 is preacher specially called by God: context about Aaronic priesthood under Old Law
 - b. All called by gospel 2Thess 2:14, all Christians must feel their responsibility Matt 25:14-30
- D. What was the purpose to be accomplished?
 - 1. Most passages that require careful consideration have a special object to accomplish. It may be to prevent error or to correct one
 - 2. Revelation to assure Christians that truth and right would be victorious over error, thereby giving them the hope and patience they needed to endure

II. GAIN A KNOWLEDGE OF BACKGROUND OF TEXT

- A. Learn about history of times and geography of country
 - 1. Fact that Romans conquered Jews and Judea had a dual form of government in time of Christ helps us to understand trial of Jesus as well as many other events of N.T.
 - a. Jesus first examined by Jews Jhn 18:12-14; 24-27
 - b. Then to Roman gov. Pilate Matt 27:1,2; 12-14
 - c. Then back to Herod king of Jews Lk 23:6-12
 - d. Then back to Pilate Lk 23:13-23
 - 2. Observe the geography of country: the journeys of Paul come to life with understanding of locations
- B. Consider existing laws, customs, or popular opinions
 - 1. "Not lawful for us" reference to Romans taking away Jews power to inflict death penalty. Jhn 18:31 Law of Moses provided for such Lev 24:16,17
 - 2. Roman law required sleeping guard be put to death, soldier lying about Lord's body being stolen in danger of death. Jews promised to "secure you" Matt 28:14

III. CONSIDER THE WORDS THEMSELVES AND THEN COMPARE ALL PARALLEL PASSAGES

- A. Examine meaning of each word, sentence & paragraph
 - 1. Each word has purpose. Some words, pronounced alike but spelled differently may cause confusion
 - a. "Strait" restricted or difficult Matt 7:13,14
 - b. "Straight" upright, not crooked or bent Heb 12:13
 - 2. After learning meaning of each word, determine the idea expressed in sentence or paragraph as a whole
- B. Compare all parallel passages
 - 1. Helps to confirm the proper interpretation of difficult verses. Truth does not contradict itself
 - 2. Example: Can a rich man go to heaven?
 - a. Hardly enter into kingdom of heaven Matt 19:23,24
 - b. Those who will be rich and trust in riches Mk 10:23-25; 1Tim 6:9,10
 - c. Ones using wisely can be saved 1Tim 6:17-19

CONCLUSION:

- A. Suggestions made in study may require additional helps
- B. Bible atlas or encyclopedia has maps * historical information
- C. Find parallel passage using same words & phrase
- D. Dictionary helps with most words, but dictionary of N.T. words defines specific meaning of original Greek word
- E. Commentary useful analyzing who made statement, to whom and why. Caution must be followed. They are simply work of uninspired men and may have incorrect interpretation
- F. Follow these rules, examine passages from every possible angle and think for yourself. Do not allow anyone to tell you what the Bible says. Read it for yourself Acts 17:11