

Bible Study for Every Christian
Bible Study for Every Christian Part 6: Evaluation and Application

Selected Scriptures

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We're learning how every Christian can study the Bible for himself or herself. Although there's still a high value set in the New Testament on teachers, it doesn't do away with the responsibility that every Christian has, if you're in Christ a responsibility you have, to study the Scripture, to be like the Bereans who look into the Scriptures and see what it really says and compare what you read and what you hear against the Scriptures.

Now as we've sort of worked our way through this process, I have reduced the process of inductive Bible study to six distinct steps. The first step is preparation, and I'm going to review these again in a moment, so I'll just mention them, observation is the second step. Meditation is the third step, interpretation the fourth, and then tonight, we've looked at the first four, tonight, Lord willing, we'll look at evaluation and application.

Now last time we looked at number four there, interpretation, and by that we simply mean this, interpretation is the proper use of generally accepted principles to determine the one divinely intended meaning of the passage. The Bible doesn't mean more than one thing; in every passage, it means one thing. The single truth intention of the author is what some theologians call it, and we must, as students, be looking for that one truth intention intended by the author of Scripture.

Now how do we get there? What are these generally accepted principles? Well, it can be more complex than this and I gave you some resources if you wanted to study beyond this, but essentially you can reduce it to these three main principles. Interpret the Scripture based on authorial intent. Your goal is not to ask what does this mean to me. It doesn't matter what it means to you. The question is what did it mean when the author penned it. What did that author intend to communicate? That's how you want all of your correspondence treated, isn't that true? You don't want somebody reading in to what you write, what they think it means. You want them to read what you intended to communicate. And so this is a basic principle, frankly, of all communication and it's true with the Bible as well. Interpret based on authorial intent.

Secondly, interpret Scripture with Scripture. Let the Scripture, first of all the context of that Scripture, help interpret it, but the wider context of all of Scripture, interpret it. It can't mean what you think it means if it conflicts with the rest of Scripture because the Scripture is the product of one mind ultimately, the mind of the Holy Spirit. And so it doesn't conflict, one part with another, and so you let Scripture help interpret Scripture. And we expanded on each of

these last week and I'm just touching on them now. So if you're unclear about any of these, go back and listen online.

Number three, interpret literally. By that we mean, as with other literature, we must interpret the Bible in the simplest, most literal sense unless there is some indication in the context to do otherwise. If the context makes it clear that it's an allegory, you interpret it as an allegory. If the context makes it clear that it's hyperbole, it's purposeful overstatement, then the context helps determine it, but otherwise you interpret the Bible literally as you would any other piece of literature, the simplest, most literal sense, unless indicated otherwise by the context. That was interpretation.

Tonight, we're going to finish the series by examining the fifth and sixth steps of inductive Bible study. Evaluation is step number five and application is step number six. So let's begin then by looking at evaluation. What do we mean, there needs to be evaluation? You've now done all of your study, you've done your analysis of the grammar, you've looked at the words, you've looked in the context, you've done the things we talked about in study and you've come, you've meditated on it, and now you've interpreted it, you've come to a conclusion, this is what it means.

What is evaluation? Well, let me just remind you of the steps. Preparation, first step, is preparing your tools and your heart for study. Making sure you have the right tools, we talked about that, but mostly it's preparing your heart. It is saying, Holy Spirit, I am ignorant and in need of a teacher; help me to understand Your Word in a life-changing way. That's preparation. After you've done that comes observation. This is observing the details of the text to determine what it really says. What does the text say? The third step is meditation. This is thinking deeply about the text to understand it and to plan how to do it. The fourth step we just touched on, using generally accepted principles to decide what the text actually means. That's interpretation. Evaluation is this then, compared to those other steps, it is comparing your interpretation against the interpretation of others. That's evaluation.

Now what is the Biblical basis for this step? Why is this important to do in Bible study? I'm not going to take you to a number of texts to prove this because it's fairly easy to understand, but let me give you the big picture. We've already established that there is only one divinely intended meaning for every text, only one meaning. The Holy Spirit only meant to communicate one thing in each paragraph. That meaning has never changed. The Holy Spirit has always been helping believers to understand that one meaning of that paragraph as it stands in the Scripture. Therefore, it is highly unlikely, read impossible, for you to come up with an interpretation that is an accurate one that nobody else has ever come up with because what would that imply? That the Holy Spirit picked you to make a fresh revelation to of what that text actually means and He'd never opened the minds of other Christians in the history of the church to understand it. So, because of that, it's important to check your interpretation against those who are either more

skilled than you are, who have more tools than you do, or are more godly than you are, or all of the above, or some combination of them.

So, how can you go about evaluating your interpretation? How can you go about comparing it against the interpretation of others? There are a couple of key ways. Here's the process. Step number one, compare your interpretation, what you've decided that passage means, against several good study Bibles. This is absolutely essential and basic. If you do nothing else in this step, you have to do this. You have to somehow check what you have arrived at against the interpretation of others. The simplest way to do that, the first level of evaluation, is having a good study Bible or two. I would recommend to you the three I have here; those initials stand for the MacArthur Study Bible, the English Standard Version Study Bible (the ESV Study Bible), and the NIV Study Bible.

When I was involved in, actually, the MacArthur Study Bible project, I gave a great deal of time to analyzing the study Bibles that were available at the time and none of them except the NIV really measured up, to be honest with you. I know some of you love the Ryrie Study Bible. Forgive me saying this, but I just felt like every time he commented on something it was the obvious thing and when I wanted him to comment, he didn't. Forgive me for saying it that bluntly, but that's just the truth. These three I would recommend because they're all thorough. Now, you will find issues with each of them, at least the last two. I pretty much agree with the first one, but you might find some there as well. The bottom line is you don't read anything except the text of Scripture as the final authority, even if it's a very good resource, but these are all helpful resources. It's ideal to have all three, but I would encourage you to have at least two of them so you can crosscheck them with each other. You don't want to trust any one source alone if you can help it. You remember you're testing your interpretation, so get you at least two, maybe three, if you can afford to do that, and check what you have, the conclusion you've come to, against the study Bibles.

Second process, or second step in the process rather, is compare your interpretation against some conservative commentaries. And I put, by conservative, I mean non-liberal. There are commentaries that you can get who are written by men who don't believe in the integrity of Scripture, who will write intentionally to undermine the Scripture. Some of the best technical commentaries are written by men that I'm convinced aren't believers at all. They know the language, but it's not apparent that they know the Lord. So you have to be very careful in choosing commentaries.

So let me just talk about that a minute. How do you choose helpful commentaries? Well, maybe you just want a one-volume commentary. Maybe you're just getting started in this and you really don't need much beyond that. If you're going to get a one volume, R. C. Sproul would recommend, and I haven't had a lot of experience with this one, but he recommends *The New*

Bible Commentary by InterVarsity and Eerdmans, so if you just can afford one, you want to have one commentary in addition to your study Bible or study Bibles that would be one to consider.

You can also get multi-volume series of commentaries, in other words, multi-volumes on the Old Testament, for example. There's an old classic, it's a little heavy sledding in places, but it's freely available. It's in the public domain I think, you don't even have to pay for it online. You can get it as a free resource on some of the online programs, Keil and Delitzsch, couple of German authors. Again, you have to be, you have to wade through a little bit of heavy sledding at times, but you can work through a lot of that and still get a lot of meat out of it. A simple series that covers the Old and the New Testament is the Tyndale Series, a set of little, brief commentaries on each book of the Bible. It will cover everything, that's the advantage of it. The disadvantage is because it's one little commentary volume on each book of the Bible, they don't have a lot of detail. So it's pretty concise, it's pretty much an overview, but that can be helpful. Anything you can find by William Hendriksen on the New Testament is really helpful. That's actually John MacArthur's favorite commentator, or at least was for many years, may still be, on the New Testament.

You can also get commentaries on individual books. In other words, you don't have to buy them in a set, you just buy a commentary on a particular book. How do you know which one to buy? Well, there are a couple of lists you can look at to see. In the back of the book I recommended to you, Gordon Fee's book *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, in an appendix back there, there is a list of recommended commentaries that's a pretty good list actually. A second thing you can do is Jim Rosscup, who taught at the Master's Seminary for many, many years, put together something called *Commentaries for Biblical Expositors*, in which he gives a little review of each of them. Another really helpful site, if you don't want to buy a book for this, is online. There's a website called bestcommentaries.com and they divide the commentaries by technical and devotional, pastoral, so you can choose that and then it'll help you analyze which commentary you may want to get if you're studying a particular book. So those are some ways to choose some commentaries.

But how do you use them? Once you have them, whether it's a one volume or multi-volume or individuals, how do you use commentaries? What is their proper or legitimate use? Number one, they provide good models of interpretation. If it's a good commentary, it helps you see how to interpret the Bible, how to go about understanding the Scripture, so it can be very helpful. Secondly, they really help you with difficult passages. You come to Hebrews 6 where it looks like people are being saved and losing their salvation, what's that about? A good commentary is going to help you sort through the options. In fact, the best commentaries will give you the options and then argue for the one that is the strongest one, but they give you help with difficult passages. A third proper use is, and this is the essence of what I'm saying here, is they provide a check against novel or erroneous interpretations. You can check yourself and if you're not finding anybody else saying about that passage what you're saying about it, the warning light on

the dashboard of your Bible study computer should go on. That's a problem, and that's the benefit of commentaries.

How not to use them? Don't do this. What are some warnings when it comes to commentaries? Number one, never use them in place of your own study. You know, you remember, some of you have kids and you remember when you were, when they were very young and they were just getting past the milk stage and starting to eat food, and you went to that aisle in the grocery store where there were all those tiny little glass bottles. And there were carrots and peas and other things, and you looked at what was in those bottles and somehow it just didn't seem to look like what they were telling you was in that bottle. That's because it had already been chewed up, hopefully by a machine and not another person like they used to do, but it had been all chewed up by somebody else and you were not getting the full nutritional value, that child wasn't, particularly if it had been chewed by an adult like they used to do, and then given to the child. That's what using a commentary in place of your own study is like, all right? It's getting somebody else's chewed food, and you're not going to get as much nourishment from it, so don't do that.

Secondly, never use them before your own study. Why? Because you want to come to that text with a freshness and with the desire to discover what it means and to learn what it says. It's, you know, when I was teaching in college, my students always wanted like a syllabus of everything I was going to say in front of them before I said it. And to me, that just stole the joy of discovery. It's like, why do they even need to listen if they know everything I'm going to say before I say it? That's what using commentaries before your own study will do. It erases that drive to know and understand because somebody else has told you, rightly or wrongly, what it means.

A third warning is don't accept a commentary's authority as the final authority. The Bible is the only final authority. Make the commentator prove his point. A commentary or a study Bible is essentially a teacher presenting his case and telling you what he thinks the passage means. So be a Berean even when it comes to commentaries and study Bibles. They're not always right. You'll find, if you get several, they disagree with each other. Make them prove their case. Remember Acts 17:11? "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, because they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." Luke commended the Bereans, are you ready for this, for checking up on the apostle Paul's teaching. How much more important is it for us to check up on a commentator or a study Bible that we're using as a tool? So even if you had a commentary on the Bible written by Paul himself, you should still test it by the Scripture.

A fourth warning is avoid the merely devotional commentaries. What you want to know is what the text says. That's what you're trying to get to. You don't need somebody to tell you how to apply it. You can get there, now that can be helpful, I'm not saying there's no place for that, but first you've got to get to what it means. You've heard me say that again and again and again. So

start with the ones that are going to help you understand what it means, not that are necessarily warm and fuzzy, not mere devotional thoughts. And then finally, watch out for guesses and conjectures without evidence. Commentators and study Bibles are human; they're authored by humans. And so you'll get some guess, some conjecture, and sometimes it will be given without any evidence. So beware of that.

That's your evaluation. You're checking what you've come to conclude that the text means against what others, who perhaps have more experience, more tools, have come to conclude that it means, and you're making sure that, in fact, your interpretation is right. Now when you get done evaluating, when you get done looking at study Bibles and/or commentaries, you may go back to your notes and say, "Oh, you know, I was a little wrong there. I'm not sure that I can make that point. I see this argument over here and I need to adjust that." You adjust it and now you're ready to go. Once you've finished your evaluation, you're ready to move to the sixth step which is application, application.

Application is simply planning what you should do in response to the text you've studied, planning what you should do in response to the text you've studied. It comes down to this; the consistent message of Scripture is that God intends the teaching of His Word to be applied. Absolutely. You see this in so many places, but our Lord in John 13:17 told His disciples, "If you know these things," if you know what I've taught you, "you are blessed," not by knowing them, but "by doing them." That's where the blessing comes.

Look at Romans 15:4. As Paul finishes up the section on issues of conscience, on Christian liberty, that he dealt with in all of chapter 14, he gets to the beginning of chapter 15, he's still on that same subject, and he, in verse 3, uses Christ as an illustration. He says, "For even Christ did not please Himself," you shouldn't live for yourself when it comes to Christian liberty, even Christ didn't do that, "but as it is written," and then he quotes from the Old Testament, from Psalm 69:9, "'THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME.'" Now, it may be the Romans are going wait a minute, that's about Christ. So he throws in this little line. Look at verse 4, "For," here's why He can do this, he said, "For whatever was written in earlier times," what's he talking about? The Old Testament. "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our," what, "instruction, so that through perseverance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." He takes a passage from the Psalms; he applies it to Christ and says we can apply that same principle to how we live out our lives. And then he says, just in case you're wondering what I'm doing, let me tell you what I'm doing. "Whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction." The Bible is to change us in some way, to instruct us, to change our thinking, to change our behavior, to change our worship, to change something.

Another text I want you to turn to is 1 Corinthians 10 because Paul does the same thing here. And interestingly enough, it's in the Corinthian section about Christian liberty. Inserted in the

Corinthian section about Christian liberty in 1 Corinthians 10, he goes back to the wilderness wanderings. Starting in verse 1 and going really down through verse 13, he applies something that happened to Old Testament Israel, after they came out of Egypt in the exodus, to us. He first of all describes what happened to them, how they, verse 6, well, go back to verse 5,

With most of them, [*even though they had spiritual life,*] with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened, [*watch this,*] as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were.

You see what he's doing? He's basically saying this is what the Old Testament text says happened. You need to learn from that. It's an example for us. Verse 8, "Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did." Verse 9, "Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did." Verse 10, "Nor grumble, as some of them did." Now watch verse 11, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our," what, "instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." Paul wants us to know that the Old Testament, the Scripture as a whole, but here he's talking about the Old Testament, is written for our instruction, for us to learn, for us to change, for us to be affected by the truth and not merely know what it says.

James 1, of course, makes this point very clearly when he's talking about our response to Scripture. In James 1:22, he says this, James writes, "prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers," because if you're just a hearer, if all you do is take in and take in and take in and you never do, you're deceiving yourself.

In fact, if you want to read about the ultimate deception, you look at Matthew 7 and what happens in Matthew 7? We'll look at when we get there in the Sermon on the Mount. You have people who stand before Christ on the judgment day claiming to know Him, and Christ says to them, "Depart from Me, you lawless ones. I never knew you." Why? Because they were hearers, but not doers, they were lawless in their lives, they didn't respond to the truth of God's Word. They were knowledgeable, but no response.

Johann Bengel captured, I think, the thrust of the Scripture when he wrote this back in the 1700's, "Apply yourself wholly to the text," that means study, "apply yourself wholly to the text," to know what it means, to know what it says, "and apply the text wholly to yourself." "Apply yourself wholly to the text and apply the text wholly to yourself." That's what our job is as students of the Bible.

Now, with that background, let's talk about how. How do we apply the Bible? Well, let me give you a framework. Look at 2 Timothy, 2 Timothy 3, these familiar verses, look just at verse 16. Here's what the Scripture is supposed to do. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable," in other words, God spoke it, "and it's profitable," it's beneficial, "for," and then he

lists four areas, “teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” That’s how the Scripture is supposed to be applied.

So let’s look at that. First of all, for teaching. Ask yourself what does this passage teach? To whom did it or does it apply? Has it been changed by any subsequent revelation? For example, you read the Old Testament and you’re reading about the laws of sacrifice. Has that been changed by New Testament revelation? You bet, both in Colossians 2 as well as in the book of Hebrews. What about the food laws? You’re reading those in the Old Testament Law. Have those been changed? Yes, they have. Jesus declared all foods clean in His own ministry. We saw that back in Mark’s gospel and you see it in the book of Acts as well, in Acts 10. So you ask yourself what is this teaching?

The second part of the framework for application is reproof. So does this passage confront errors in my beliefs? Or does it confront errors in my thinking or my behavior? Is this passage confronting me in some way? That’s what the idea of reproof means. It means to point out that which is wrong. What about correction? Does this passage identify changes I should make in my belief? Not only does it confront what’s wrong, but the Bible sets straight what’s wrong, it corrects it. So does the passage I’m studying identify changes I should make in my beliefs? Or does it identify changes I should make in my thinking or my behavior? And then the final part of the framework is training in righteousness. That’s the last thing Paul says in verse 16, “for child training in righteousness.” So are there instructions in this passage to me as God’s child that I am to put into practice? That’s the framework for application.

But how do you do it? What are the principles for getting to the right application? Let’s talk about those. There are several of them. First of all, the right kind of application should flow, and you’re probably tired of hearing this at this point, but this is the essence of Bible study, from the author’s intent. In his book *Between Two Worlds*, John Stott makes the point that as Bible students we live between two worlds. If you’re studying the Bible, you’re living in two worlds. There’s the world of the Bible and its times and there’s the modern times in which we live, the Biblical world and the modern world. And when it comes to these two worlds, as Bible students, there are two great dangers. The first danger is starting our study not in the Biblical world, but in the modern world, and starting with what does this mean to me or trying to be contemporary and relevant. Listen, the meaning of the Bible can only be discerned by going back into the Biblical world and understanding what the author was saying in his time and in his world. That’s the essence of Bible study.

But there’s another danger. There are a lot of people who do that, who go back in time, go back to the Biblical world and they love rattling through the pages of Scripture and finding out what it means, but the danger for those folks, for us, is staying in the Biblical world and never taking that truth and bridging it into the modern times, never applying the Word to today. God intended

us to do His Word, to respond to it personally. Most of our study takes us back into the Biblical world, but application is the bridge that moves us from the Biblical world to the modern world.

Sometimes that bridge is a really short bridge because the application is obvious and immediate. Take the command “love your enemies.” Folks, that doesn’t need a lot of translation. What part of “love your enemies” do you not understand? Okay, that’s a very short bridge from the Biblical world to the modern world. Sometimes the bridge is really long and really high to get from the Biblical world to the modern world. For example, you come across the command in the law that says, “don’t boil a kid in its mother’s milk.” Okay. What do I do with that? Well, you’ve got to go back into the Biblical world, understand why that command was given; you’ve got to do your study. You come to understand that was connected with idolatry in the nations around Israel. And so the bridge from that command to the modern world is, don’t allow the idolatry around you to influence you.

So, until you’ve answered the question, what does the text mean in the Biblical world, you’re not ready to answer the question, what does this text mean to me in the modern world. In fact, a better question than what does this text mean to me, is what am I supposed to do in response to what this text means? And this is where I want to come. The most powerful and important application of any passage is always what the Holy Spirit intended when He inspired that passage. And every student should use every tool at his disposal to strive to discern exactly how the Spirit and the human writer intended, are you ready for this, the first readers to apply that passage. How did the author expect the original readers to respond to that passage? Was there some thinking they needed to change? Was there some commands that they needed to obey? Were there examples that they were to follow or perhaps to avoid? Are there sins to confess and forsake? Are there errors to avoid? Are there emotions to be felt? Are there promises to believe? Are there ideas about God that ought to turn into adoration and praise? What did the original author want the readers of that passage to do? It was one of these. You may come up with a category I haven’t included, but it’d be unusual. These are the most common categories. What did the original author want from his readers?

You see, I’m going to take that original intention and I’m going to try to build the bridge into the modern world once I understand that, so even my application, in a sense, goes back into the Biblical world. What was the original response intended? And I want to get as close to that in my own world as possible. Now understand this, although every passage has only one meaning, it can have multiple legitimate applications. There is only one correct interpretation, but there can be many legitimate applications. But you want to start with, and allow your application to flow out of, as much as possible, the intent of the author and his application.

A second guiding principle, and we won’t take as long on the rest of these, should, first of all, or secondly, should distinguish between commands to specific individuals or groups and commands that are universally given. This is where a lot of Christians go wrong. In applying a text, they

think, okay, that command was given to a Christian or to a believer, perhaps in the Old Testament just a believer, not yet a Christian, and so maybe that command's given to me. An example of this would be, and not legitimately, but this is where you get in trouble if you try to do this, what about the command in Genesis 22 to Abram to offer up his son Isaac? Now there may be times as a parent you, for just a split second, contemplate the potential value of that, but you move on and you should move on. You get my point though; you can't take a command that was specifically given to Abraham and assume that command is to you. What about the command to Joshua to kill all the Canaanites? This is where in times, Christians have misunderstood this principle and have assumed that they have some warrant to take the lives of pagans. Instead, in these passages, we look for the timeless principle that lies beneath the specific command. So in the case of Abram sacrificing Isaac we're reminded that God may require for us to give up that which is most precious to us in obedience and service to Him. In the case of Joshua commanding to kill the Canaanites we're reminded that we must be so careful not to be influenced by the pagan idolatry and influences around us. But don't look at the command itself unless it's given to you and universally.

Number three, when you make application, carefully distinguish between what the Bible records and what it approves. There are a whole lot of stories in the narrative sections of Scripture that the commentator, the writer, doesn't comment on. He just tells the story and you are very tempted to build your life around that. I think the most famous example of that is Gideon's fleece. There are so many Christians who think they're supposed to follow that example. Listen, the Bible records Gideon's fleece; it doesn't command you to lay out a fleece of any kind to sort of test God to see what job you ought to take or who you ought to marry. In fact, interestingly enough, if you look at the context, even Gideon knew he was treading on thin ice because toward the end he's really apologizing for asking again. Gideon's fleece was a sign of unbelief, do you understand that? But make sure you distinguish between what the Bible just records and what it approves.

Another important part of application is when you're dealing with narrative, be really careful. Application is a challenge in narrative sections, in the story sections of the Bible, but the Bible's like seventy percent, between sixty and seventy percent, narrative, so it's really important to know what to do with this. It is legitimate to make application from narrative. We just saw in 1 Corinthians 10, didn't we, where Paul did that and in Romans 15 where he said that was legitimate. So how can we do it? Well there are a couple of tools to help us in the process. When you're looking at a narrative section, look at the comments the narrator makes. See if there's some statement that makes it clear what's really going on. Here's one example; this is from 2 Chronicles 16:12. I thought of this, I went down to the hospital on Friday morning, was meeting with Dwight, and as he was anticipating his surgery on Friday, Dwight Custis, and this verse came to my mind. Second Chronicles 16:12, "In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet," he had some sort of malady. "His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians." There is a very clear disapproval of his

behavior by the narrator of this passage. It's not that he sought the doctors; it's that he didn't seek the Lord. It's that he put more confidence in the doctors than he did in God. So you can look at the comments the narrator makes and discern what's going on.

Sometimes the words of the main characters are very helpful. Remember when a narrative section records the words of the people that are talking back and forth, much more was said than is recorded. You can't capture an entire day's conversation. So the author, under the inspiration of the Spirit, has carefully chosen what quotes to include. That means the author thought those particular quotes were very important to get his point across. So pay very close attention to the words of the main character. A good example of this would be in 1 Samuel 17. Look at, sometime, the story of David and Goliath and notice what the key characters say. That's really the point of the story.

Another helpful part when you're looking at narrative is to remember the purpose of the entire book. So if you're looking at Joseph's life, look at the whole purpose of Genesis. It's to demonstrate beginnings; it's to demonstrate how God was setting apart a people for Himself from the beginning through Abram and then through his descendants. So when you read it, then you see that constant refrain over and over again in Joseph's life. God's hand was upon him, God granted him favor, and you realize, boy, God is doing this to preserve His people, promote His people.

Same thing by the way with 1 Samuel 17, why does God record the story of David and Goliath? Because it makes great flannel graph? No, because it fits the purpose of that book. Why was 1 Samuel written? First Samuel is the transition from the rule of judges to a king, and then from king to king, but what is the essence of being a king? What distinguishes kings from other rulers? Normally, their children rule in their place. Okay, so Saul is the first king of Israel and David's the second. How did that happen? We haven't even had one son yet of Saul. How did this happen? So Samuel includes an apologetic for the change of dynasties, and it's because of Saul's disobedience and David was a man after God's own heart. And 1 Samuel 17, the story of David and Goliath, illustrates that. Also you can look at God's assessment, or application, in the context.

All right, let's move on. One other important applicational principle, only embrace the promises made to us. Bernard Ramm writes in his book on Protestant hermeneutics, "Every promise in the book is mine, is one of the overstatements of the century." Think about that. Every promise in the book is mine, you ever heard that? Every promise in the book is mine. Yeah, I know, you get it. Is that true? No, that's not true. God didn't make every promise in the Bible to you or to me. So, be very careful when you look at promises. Is the promise universal in scope? Some of them are. You end Revelation with that promise that you can come to Christ and find the water of life without cost. That's a universal promise. Is the promise personal? Is it just made to one person? You read Acts 18 and it was very personal. "The Lord told Paul in a vision by night,

‘Don’t be afraid, I am with you, no man will attack you in order to harm you.’” Folks, that’s not a universal promise. Now there are applicational principles that come out of it, and that is God does preserve and protect His own, but this is not a promise for God to preserve you from all harm. So be real careful what you do. I mentioned those two passages in John this morning so I won’t go back to those. Those are made to the apostles, the promise that they would be guided into all truth. Is the promise conditional? Is there some condition attached to it like James 4:8? “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” If you draw near to God, He will draw near to you. There’s a condition. Is the promise for our time? And a good example of there not being would be the promise of land to Abraham. So be careful when you deal with promises.

Now very quickly, let’s move on. Specifically, what does application look like? First of all, it’s focusing the claims of truth on our own lives. It’s asking the question, “So what?” What am I supposed to do with this text? Secondly, it is considering ways and means to implement the truth or it’s answering the question, “How?” How do I do this? So what, in response to this text, and how do I do it? And thirdly, it’s looking for the right motivation. In some texts it’s answering the question, “Why?” Why should I do this? That’s application, so what, how, and why.

So, with that in mind, let me give you the key questions, and I really want you to get these. This is the heart of what I’m trying to say to you tonight. I’m putting it together in a package, okay? Here are the key questions of application. Question number one, what did the author want the original readers to do in response to the passage? Ask yourself that question. What did the author want the original readers to do in response to this passage? Question number two, what am I supposed to do in response to this passage? As I told you earlier, it may be exactly the same thing. “Love your enemies” is the answer to number one. “Love your enemies” is the answer to number two. But if “don’t boil a kid in its mother’s milk” is the answer to number one, the answer to number two may be a little different. Okay? So what did the author want the original readers to do? What am I supposed to do in response to this passage? Number three, why am I supposed to do what this passage teaches? Now that is not always in the passage, that’s not always answered, so it may be there, it may not be there, but that’s a question you need to ask. And then the fourth question, what are some practical ways or means that I can think of to do what this passage teaches? That is application. Get those questions. Get those in your mind. This’ll be on the Internet by the way. This is key. If you don’t get anything else, get these. What did the author want the original readers to do? What should I do? Why should I do it? And what are some very practical ways and means that I can come up with to try to implement this in my life? That is application.

Let me give you an example. Let’s just take one passage. Exodus 20:14, “You shall not commit adultery.” Okay, we chose this cause it’s short, to the point, and we can develop it. What about the original readers? What was God intending the original readers who wrote, who heard God speak, first of all, the children of Israel, and then Moses wrote it, what did He intend them to do? God expressly forbid His people to have a sexual relationship with someone who was not their

spouse. Okay? That's the original readers. This one translates pretty directly to us. What was the authorial intent for us? If I'm answering this question, what am I supposed to do with this? It's worded like this; I may not enter into a sexual relationship with anyone who is not my spouse. That's the direct and immediate application. Why? Or, let me give you a second one, by the way. Because of Christ's refining of this, I can add, I may not allow myself to desire a sexual relationship with someone who's not my spouse. In addition, the tenth commandment makes that clear as well. So both the tenth commandment and what Christ teaches makes it clear that this also is authorial intent. Not only am I not to have a sexual relationship, I'm not to desire a sexual relationship with someone who's not my spouse.

On the third issue of motivation, there's really nothing in the text unless you go back to the beginning of Exodus 20 where God says, "I am the One who brought you out of the land of Egypt." The motivation becomes redemption, and perhaps that's valid, but there's nothing specifically tied to the command. What about that fourth question? What are some practical ways and means that I can do this, that I can deal with this in my life? Well, here's one, not allowing close relationships with members of the opposite sex who are not my spouse, not getting into intimate situations, not being alone in potentially intimate situations, with members of the opposite sex. That's ways and means to carry out the Biblical command. This is application. And now I'm going to try to, by God's grace, put this into practice in my life. This is what we're supposed to do with the Scripture.

Now very briefly, some dangers to avoid. When you're doing application, there are a couple of pitfalls that you really need to be careful of. Number one is making those principles, those timeless principles you derived from the text or from your application, to have the same authority as God's explicit commands. Let me give you an example. You go to Deuteronomy 6, and I picked this one because this is a struggle, I think, with folks in our church because people are serious about training their children. Deuteronomy 6 says that parents are responsible to teach their children God's commands. That was how He wanted the original readers to get it; that's what He wants us to do with it. We're to bear the responsibility, fathers, ultimately our responsibility, but as parents, we're to bear the responsibility to teach our children the commands of God, the Word of God. That's the Biblical imperative. That is the immediate responsibility.

One application of that might be for a family, our family feels that we can best accomplish that via home schooling. Okay? That's fine. That's a legitimate application for you to make. The problem comes when you take the next step and you make your application become binding on everyone else's conscience, when you say, "Every Christian parent should home-school their children." You see the problem? This is what we're tempted to do with the Scripture. And I picked that one, there, you can find all kinds of other examples, but you get the point I'm trying to make. You cannot make your application, or the timeless principles you derive from the text, to have the same authority as God's explicit command. Is there an explicit command anywhere

in the Scripture that says Christian parents should home-school their children? No. Okay? So be careful with what you do with those principles and application.

A second danger is failing to distinguish between cultural commands and timeless commands. For example, foot washing, that would be kind of the most obvious example. You know, there are churches, maybe you've been in some or you've seen them, where they take that command in John 13 when Jesus says you should do the same thing I'm doing to one another, they take that literally. And in modern times in the middle of a service, they wash each other's feet. Understand, if you understand where that came from, you understand that that was part of the culture. You walked in the house and a slave, the lowest person in the house, washed your feet. That was a culturally conditioned command. The timeless principle is clear, but that's what we need to pursue and not the cultural command. I believe, and this is my own belief, I'm sure there are other Christians who would disagree with this, I know there are, I believe head coverings falls into that category as well. And, and I have another issue with that interpretation besides that.

But number three, artificially identifying timeless commands as culturally conditioned. This is the opposite; this is taking what is clearly a timeless command in its context and making it "Oh well, that was just cultural; we don't need to do that." The most obvious example of this is 1 Timothy 2 where Paul says a woman is not to be in a position of leadership in the church over men or to teach men in the church. And they say, well that was cultural and so we don't have to do that. That's an artificial thing. How do I know that? Well, you look at the basis for Paul's argument. You look at the context and what does he argue? He argues the created order and the purpose that woman was created. Those are not culturally conditioned reasons or arguments. They are timeless, and so the command is as well, so be careful both ways.

And then number four, applying personal convictions rather than the author's intent. I heard this all the time when I was growing up from the churches I was a part of. First Thessalonians 5:22, "abstain from every form of evil", it says. In the King James, it says, "Abstain from every appearance of evil." And so the application that was made in our case was, there we go, we found a text against movie theaters. So don't ever go to a movie theater because of how it might look. Well, that wasn't being honest with the text. However you may feel about whether you should or should not go to a movie theater, that wasn't being honest with the text. You cannot do that. You can't read your personal convictions into a text. You have to look at authorial intent. Number five, and this is the biggest failure or danger of all, failing to apply the truth to your life. You cannot do that. James 1 is very clear, "must be a doer of the word."

I want to finish this series in a sense where I began it. Listen to R. C. Sproul, "We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy. Newspapers are easier to read than the Bible is to

study.” Let me challenge you to take what we’ve learned together, and this is not an inspired plan I’ve given you. I’ve just tried to give you some tools and some ideas that will help structure your study. But what, so you don’t have to follow my plan, but what you do have to do is get serious about studying the Scripture. First Timothy, excuse me, 2 Timothy 2:15, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God,” Paul tells Timothy, “as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” To apply that properly in its context, it was to a pastor, to a person who was handling the Scripture, but the application, legitimate application, that goes beyond that, is as Christians we are to be diligent students. We know that because the Bereans and others were praised for it. Christ urged us to know the Scripture, to read it, to understand it in its context. We have that responsibility and, therefore, it’s as important for us as it was for Timothy to “accurately handle the word of truth” by being diligent as students of it. May God help you to take the next step in your study of the Word.

Let’s pray together. Our Father, we thank You for the time we’ve been able to spend together this summer in looking through these principles of Bible study. Lord, help us to take Your book seriously. Forgive us for having Your mind on so many things that pertain to life in the world, that pertains to redemption. Father, forgive us for having Your Word and being so lazy and irresponsible with it. Father, may we be diligent students, may we be like the Bereans, may we be like those our Lord challenged to read and understand the Scripture in its context. Father, make us students of Your Word and Lord don’t let us just learn it to know it, but O God, help us to apply it. Help us to ask the questions about what we’re to do with it. May we be doers of Your Word and not hearers only, deceiving our own selves. We pray in Jesus’s name, amen.