

STUDYING YOUR BIBLE WITH OTHERS

Many times one may have the opportunity to study the Bible with others who may have completely different points of view. In times like these, it is very helpful to have some universally established rules that both parties are willing to follow that will enable them to see what the scripture is saying and avoid the errors that would undermine the authority of God's Word. Two of the most important rules are the context principle and the harmony principle. Here is a classic example of how Satan violated these rules to try to lead us astray.

Matt 4:5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, 6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: 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. 7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Satan decided to have a Bible study with Jesus, and he used some verses from Psalms 91 in which he distorted the context and misapplied the intended meaning to tempt the Lord Jesus Christ to do something that was out of harmony with other verses of scripture. Let's take a look at these verses and see how he undermined the authority of scripture and tried to establish his own authority by violating some important principles of Bible interpretation.

Ps 91:9 Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; 10 There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. 11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, **to keep thee in all thy ways.** 12 They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Satan chose to leave out the clause "to keep thee in all thy ways" as it was quite unsuitable for his purpose. By doing so, he distorted the context and changed the intended meaning, just ever so slightly, which gave him the opportunity to present the verse in a way that would make it appear that Jesus would not be tempting God. The fact that God has promised to protect and support his servants is not in dispute; but, as the path of duty is the way of safety, so is the path of disobedience the way of danger.

Any method of Bible study that distorts the context of a verse of scripture and gives it a meaning different than the Author intended undermines the authority of God's Word and reestablishes that authority with the one who is leading the Bible study.

ERRORS THAT VIOLATE THE CONTEXT & HARMONY PRINCIPLES

1. The error of going to a different passage of scripture to prove what it means rather than getting the meaning from the immediate context of the verse that was just read.
2. The error of setting up a single passage of scripture, or several passages of scripture, as proof of a doctrinal point that is not in harmony with the teachings of the rest of the Bible. It is, in effect, to take one or a few scriptures out of their clearly given context and make proof-texts out of them to support a teaching that is not in agreement with the whole context of God's Word.

This is an example of what it means when some people say their literature is Biblically based (which all the verses are), but the error of proof-texting is used to establish the thought.

Matt 27:5 And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and (Judas) went and hanged himself.

Luke 10:37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

John 13:27 And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly.

By taking the above verses out of their context, the following erroneous thought could be established. Anyone who is unskilled in the principles of hermeneutics may be led to believe that this statement is true and be misled into doing something that is completely out of harmony with God's will and His Word.

Judas went and hanged himself. Go, and do thou likewise and what thou doest, do quickly.

Biblically based and contextually based may very well be two different matters altogether. The statements above are all Bible-based statements, but like the example given they do not represent, in their context, what the verses are truly saying. The practice of explaining one verse by taking another verse that does not directly relate to its context is misleading and hermeneutically incorrect.

Knowing that proof-texting and doing anything that changes the authority of scripture by distorting its context is wrong, we will agree to avoid these and all practices that would hinder one from "rightly dividing the word of truth." Do you agree? Yes! Well then, let's have a Bible study!