
Words of Truth

The Context Of A Statement Really Does Matter

By: Brian A. Yeager

The study we are about to engage in applies to all forms of communication. We will be focusing on the principle of keeping biblical statements in context. Yet, the applications to what we will be considering apply to all other forms of communication as well. Therefore, don't limit your thinking about the principles we are about to address just to how we study the Scriptures.

When we study the word of God we are told by the Lord not to pervert His words. Both the Old and New Testaments warn against adding and/or removing from what the Lord has said (Deuteronomy 4:2, Deuteronomy 12:32, Proverbs 30:5-6, Galatians 1:6-12, and Revelation 22:18-19). By inspiration, Peter wrote this: *“And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen”* (II Peter 3:15-18).

With how clear our Lord has been about not perverting His word, we want to be very careful to handle the truth properly (II Timothy 2:14-18). Yet, most people that cite, paraphrase, or quote Scriptures have very little understanding of the context of the Scriptures they use. In years of teaching, I have found that most simply do not understand how greatly context changes statements. I know that I stress this point often, locally, in classes and sermons. So, let's take another stab at this by examining some points to illustrate just how important context is.

Consider The Impact Context Has On Statements

Did you know that the Scriptures state, even in the New Testament, that one must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses? Notice: *“...That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses”* (Acts 15:5). The fact is, you must then keep the whole law too because Paul said: *“For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law”* (Galatians 5:3). If you do not look at the context of the

statements I just quoted, you could be taught that circumcision and obedience to the Law of Moses is binding today. The fact is, the contexts of both of the Scriptures I just used say the opposite of what I turned them into (Acts 15:1-35 and Galatians 5:1-6).

Did you know that the Scriptures state that God has a plan for everyone that will turn out for everyone's good? Notice: *"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end"* (Jeremiah 29:11). I have seen this passage twisted more times than I can count. People are ignorant to the context. Erringly, it is often thought that "you" means YOU instead of whom was addressed in the context. The "you" is Judah that were in Babylonian captivity. God was telling them, not ANYONE today, that He was going to bring them out of that captivity (Jeremiah 29:1-14).

Did you know you are supposed to drop everything you're doing, quit your job (Matthew 10:9-10), and go preach the Gospel to the whole world? Notice: *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"* (Matthew 28:19). Haven't you heard, "go ye" means "go me"? Go read Matthew 10:1-11:1 and Matthew 28:17-20. Jesus was not talking to you or me. He was talking to the Apostles. He was giving them commands that THEY had to fulfill. When you study through the New Testament you see that THEY did fulfill them (Romans 10:14-18, Romans 15:18-19, Romans 16:26, Colossians 1:5-6, and Colossians 1:23).

Did you know that "all have sinned" means everyone, without exception, because the word "all" is in Romans 3:23? So, does that mean babies and even Jesus are sinners? Of course not (Ezekiel 18:4; 20, Hebrews 4:14-16, I Peter 2:21-22, and I John 3:1-5). Romans 3:23 is another famous passage people do not understand the context of. Romans 3:1-23 is discussing the history of both Jews and Gentiles who needed salvation in Christ equally. Paul was looking back at the Jews and Gentiles during the time when the Law of Moses was in effect. They both needed a Savior equally (Romans 3:24-31).

Ignorance, as it relates to the context of statements, will cause many to be lost. Most statements are not always right when taken out of context. Someone could say that the Bible teaches there are "many gods" by citing I Corinthians 8:5. The context is about idolatry and we know those are false gods, yet the statement left alone could be very misleading. We have to be careful to be sure we are using the Scriptures correctly. That requires contextual knowledge of statements we quote, reference, cite, etc.

Conclusion

If you walked by someone's house and heard someone scream, "I AM GOING TO KILL YOU". What is your gut reaction? What if that person is playing a video game? Does that change the meaning of the statement. Think on these things! Context changes everything.