

PathLights

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path"
Psalm 119:104*

February 21, 2016

Context

by Frank Himmel

The Bible is God's communication to man. Its message is straightforward: "For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand" (2 Corinthians 1:13a). Interpreting the Bible text does not require a special set of rules. The principles by which you would determine the meaning of a set of instructions or a novel or a note from your mother are the same means by which you interpret Scripture.

Ironically, one of the most basic rules of interpretation is often one of the most ignored: *keep every statement in its context.*

Context Matters

How often do you hear an athlete or a politician complain that his statements, as quoted by the press, were taken out of context and thus made him appear to say or mean something he did not? At times that complaint is merely a dodge; nevertheless, context is critical to correct interpretation.

The Corinthians misinterpreted Paul's instruction not to associate with immoral people because they failed to keep it in its context: the Apostle was writing about immoral Christians, not people of the world (1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

The fact is, when context is ignored, the Bible can be made to say just about anything. Surely you agree that

plucking isolated statements from here and there, then stringing them together as though they had some direct connection, is an unfair way to approach any text, especially God's word!

Context's Effects

Context affects interpretation in numerous ways.

Seemingly opposite statements can both be true, depending on the perspective from which they are made. For example, Christians are both free and slaves (1 Corinthians 7:22). Man is both mortal (Hebrews 9:27) and immortal (1 Corinthians 15:54).

Context is key in determining word meanings. The Bible says, "For God so loved the world..." (John 3:16), yet it warns us, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). Obviously, *world* is being used in different senses in these passages.

Context is vital in analyzing commands and promises: it tells us whether they are generally applicable or intended only for one or a few individuals. Context is also critical in determining what a prophet is foretelling.

Determining Context

Just what is context? What constitutes the setting of a passage? We'll talk about that next time.



5 Trustworthy Statements

by Frank Himmel

Five times in writing to Timothy and Titus, Paul said, “It is a trustworthy statement.” This does not imply that other statements in these letters are unreliable, it just emphasizes that these worthy concepts should especially be taken to heart.

“It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all” (1 Timothy 1:15). Jesus provided our salvation by giving His life as a ransom for us (Matthew 20:28). “Full acceptance” requires us to put our faith in His atonement and claim its benefits by becoming His disciples. Paul, who in retrospect considered himself the foremost of sinners because of his past violent opposition to Christianity, did that. Have you?

“It is a trustworthy statement; if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do” (1 Timothy 3:1). *Overseer* is the same role elsewhere referred to as elder or pastor (see Acts 20:17, 28). It is an office in the functional, not honorary, sense (1 Timothy 5:17). It is a fine work to desire. To take it on, one must also aspire to it. *Aspire* is a stronger term than *desire*; it means to reach or stretch out; it reflects the effort and growth necessary to prepare for the work.

“...Godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance” (1 Timothy 4:8-9). *Godliness* is a godward focus. It results in living to please Him. This passage assures us that it is absolutely the best way to live. Godly living makes this life the best it can be – God’s way works! And when this life is over, godly living will have readied us for the life to come.

“It is a trustworthy statement:
If we died with Him, we will also live with Him;
If we endure, we will also reign with Him;
If we deny Him, He will also deny us;
If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:11-13).

Some think these lines are from an early hymn. Their point is simple: we must remain faithful, even amidst hardship (see vv. 1-10). If we do, Christ’s promises of victory will be ours; if we do not, His promise of punishment will just as surely come.

“ But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy statement” (Titus 3:4-8a). In a letter that emphasizes right living, Paul reminds us salvation is never earned; it is always a matter of God’s grace in Christ. This is the essence of the gospel!

Service Leaders for the Week

	Sunday Morning	Sunday Evening	Wednesday Evening
GREETER	Adam Gibson	Chad Brock	Mark Clifton
SONG LEADER	Carlos Garcia	William Lefort	John Baucom
OPENING PRAYER	Mark Clifton	Bruce Williams	
LORD’S SUPPER			
BREAD	Brian Wilson	Brian Wilson	
CUP	John Baucom	John Baucom	
ASSIST/PRAYER	Kerry Gray		
SERMON/INVITATION	Frank Himmel	Frank Himmel	Clifton Lefort
CLOSING PRAYER	Don Rapp	Lee Davenport	Albert Lee Harrison