

Context, Context, Context!

The most overlooked factor in Bible interpretation



One of the leading rules in business is *Location, Location and Location!* If potential customers cannot find you, you do not exist to them. But, CONTEXT is the foundation to correctly interpret the Bible! Most all questions are answered in the context. Most all difficult KJB words are understood and many times defined in the Bible context.¹ Seeming Bible contradictions are unraveled and solved from the context. Where you test what people say about particular verses is in the context. Objective factors of context can include things like historical, location, customs, time period, who it's written to (audience), etc. A common error is to ignore or deny the context of passages because one has found that several different Greek or Hebrew words may be translated using one English word (or vice versa) in the King James Bible. All languages have this in common. It is how the word is used in the context that decides the intended meaning, not the former language. The translators understood this, so should the reader. God is often misunderstood and even misrepresented by overlooking Bible context. Let's see how this happens...

The following examples show how some Bible passages are commonly misused and then we will see what the Bible actually says in the body surrounding those passages (the context). Reading tip: If you're not used to reading a lot of bible material at once, I recommend taking one point at a time and digest it. Better to understand one or two points than none at all.

◆ **John 8:32 "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free"** is carved on various University, Library and Government buildings. This is one of the most quoted bible verses, usually by the non-Christian world. Is it a true statement? Jesus was the first to say it, so let's see how he used it originally.

CONTEXT = VS 31 & 32 *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32: And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* What these institutions fail to tell us is knowing the truth and being made free by it is the result of believing on Jesus **and** becoming Jesus' disciples...**if** they continue in his word. Being free, like most blessings from God, **is conditional**. By hiding the essential ingredient, vs 31, people may think they can know the truth without believing on Jesus and without having an ongoing relationship with his word. They may think they are free based on vs 32 alone, when in fact, that is the farthest thing from the truth.

◆ **Phil 4:13 "I can do all things thorough Christ..."** is often used to mean we can do anything. Many passages that use the word *ALL* do not mean "ALL". *ALL* in verse 13 refers to being content in vs 11 with specific things in vs 12, therefore, vs 13 *I can do all things...* Note the emphasized words in the verses below.

CONTEXT = vs 11-13. 11 *Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.* 12 *I know **both** how to be **abased**, and I know how to **abound**: every where and **in all things** I am instructed **both** to be **full** and to be **hungry**, **both** to **abound** and to **suffer need**.* 13 *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. All refers to the key word, **both**. "All things" in this passage is restricted to abounding (having more than sustenance) and suffering need (lacking sustenance).*

◆ **"Eat, Drink, & be Merry!"**, used in Dairy Queen advertisements in the 1960's -70's and a popular holiday slogan were taken out of context from the Bible. It is found in Ecclesiastes 8:15; Isaiah 22:13; Luke 12:16-21 (parable of the rich fool); and 1Cor 15:32.

CONTEXT = most of these verses are used in the negative sense. In fact, when Jesus referred to it in Luke, it was deadly!

◆ **Phil 2:21 "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's"**. The thinking is that NO ONE seeks the things which are Jesus Christ's, just their own things, however...

CONTEXT = vs 19-21 *But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. Again, "All" does not refer to everyone. All except Timotheus seek their own.*

See vs 1-4.

◆ **Titus 1:12, 13** Many believe that Paul agrees "The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies." Paul says, *This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith*; What does the context reveal?

CONTEXT = Titus 1:1-14 First, Paul has left Titus in Crete to set the Cretian Church in order and to appoint elders with godly qualifications in cities because there are false teachers run amok in Crete; even one of the prophets of the Jewish Christians (the circumcision) SAID, *The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies*, Paul is saying, vs 13, that this witness or report of what this Jewish Christian prophet said was true; not that Paul believed the Cretians were slow bellies, etc.; and Paul says further, to rebuke these prophets (of the Jewish Christians), vs 11 *Whose mouths must be stopped, ...teaching things they ought not, ...*, referring to the derogatory comments about their Cretian brothers.

◆ **Is 45:11 "Command ye me"** is often taught that God is saying WE can command HIM! This is usually done with good intention to express that God is accessible and we can ask or tell him anything.

CONTEXT = in reading the entire chapter,² you will understand this is a figure of speech. "Command ye me" is NOT a standalone phrase. Vs 11 *Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons and concerning the work of my hands command ye me*. Notice it starts with "Ask me" in the same sentence. "Command ye me" does not stand by itself. Neither does "there is no God" in vs 14 which reads *...and there is none else, there is no God*. We should not form doctrine where none exists.

◆ **Rom 12: 3** "...God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" **Are ALL people born with some faith? No.**

CONTEXT = again, "all" means "all" only in the context. The surrounding verses reveal it is talking about the brethren. The book of Romans is addressed to the church, not all men, Rom 1:6, 7. Further, 2Th 3:2 says, *And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith*

◆ **Rom 7:14-25 Paul is a "sinner"**. Read by itself, starting at vs 14, Paul is a "sinner" as he speaks in the first person.

CONTEXT = previous chapters show that he is talking about his past struggle with sin and chapter 7 is a continuation of his life *BEFORE* Christ. Read in context, we find that Paul **WAS a sinner**. He is not talking about his current struggle with sin except if he walks in the flesh, vs 24, 25. Full understanding comes by reading all of chapters 5-8, not by starting at 7:14.

◆ **1Jn 1:8 "We are sinners and if we say we are not sinners, we are lying"**. "I am a sinner saved by grace", a popularized Baptist belief, is increasingly espoused by Apostolic Christians and shows up in worship song lyrics we sing in church.³

CONTEXT = verses 1-10 show this is not the case. 1Jn 1:6 IF we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:... In 1-10, it is saying if we SAY we have no sin, while at the same time we are walking in darkness, it is at this point, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us, therefore, we are lying. It is NOT saying we are in a constant state of a sinner when we are walking in the light, but IF we sin and IF we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us (no longer sinners). If Jesus has forgiven and cleansed us from all unrighteousness how can we continue to be sinners?! Dear Apostolics, we *WERE* sinners, unless we live in darkness. (See also 1Tim 1:15 where Paul says "...sinners, of whom I am chief" - present tense, cannot be understood without reading vs. 13 where he prefaces this with past tense - who he was before Christ before obtaining mercy.)

◆ **Is Rom 10:9 telling sinners how to be saved?** : *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved*. Let's look:

CONTEXT = Rom 1: 1-7. Romans, like all the Epistles, is written to the Church (in general or individuals) who have already obeyed the gospel. This fact comes first, before other facts or claims or we misinterpret the Epistles. The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes...in the gospel (the death, burial & resurrection of Jesus) is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith (1: 16, 17). "If thou (you who are saved) confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus (the Messiah has come), and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead (this is the gospel; that Jesus has come, lived, died, was buried and rose again), thou shalt be saved". The Church has to continue in the gospel, not backslide and deny this truth, but live like we believe it to be saved. The very context of the epistle along with this verse (and many others) states that our salvation is conditional upon continuing in the gospel. See Col 1:21-23;

◆ In Psalm 31:23, why does God reward the "proud doer"? *O love the LORD, all ye his saints: for the LORD preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer.* If vs 23 is read by itself, the "proud doer" appears to be favored by God. This confuses many people since pride and being proud is so negatively expressed elsewhere in the KJB.

CONTEXT = in fact, ALL instances of pride and proud in the Bible are negative, so, how can God reward him? First, read from beginning to end of Ps 32. See that it is a cry of David to God to save him from his enemies and their devices against him. Pay particular attention to the words "proudly" and "pride" which describe his enemies in verses 17 & 20. God would not favorably reward the proud doer, but reward him according to his wickedness. See Mal 4:1 ...*all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble...*, Ps 91:8 ...*the reward of the wicked.*, also, Is 31:11 *Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.*

◆ In Ps 12:6, 7 shall God preserve his pure words or the poor and needy?

6) The words of the LORD are **pure words**: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

7) Thou shalt **keep them**, O LORD, thou shalt **preserve them** from this generation for ever.

This is the main scripture dealing with God preserving his word. The doctrine of preservation is a hotly contested Bible fundamental. Those that do not believe vs 7 is talking about God preserving his word (vs 6) say it is talking about preserving the poor and needy (vs 5). There are passages in the Bible saying God preserves the poor (This is rarely, if ever argued; instead, Hebrew Lexicons and commentary are sought to make this case.) Proponents of the doctrine of preservation of God's word(s) often react that best grammar dictates the "antecedent" of vs 7 is vs 6, not vs 5. Both arguments are plausible, however, only one can be valid. But, the issue is not resolved because neither considers the context. In this case, all arguments are smashed by the context.

CONTEXT = the entire eight verses of Psalm chapter 12 is a contrast between the words of the wicked and the words of the Lord; which is the subject, not the poor and needy. Look at the words of the ungodly in 2-5: speaking vanity, with flattering lips, with a double heart do they speak, the Lord cut off flattering lips in the tongue that speaketh proud things, who have said, with our tongue we will prevail, our lips are our own; vs 5 *For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth* (speaks evil) *at him* (the poor and needy). **God's response** to the evil speaking (words) of the wicked is his own words, which are tried and purified, vs 6 and he will keep them and preserve them forever vs 7.⁴ The often **overlooked context** takes the mystery out of what God wants us to know.

Footnotes:

1 In Noah Webster's first work, the 1828 edition of the *American Dictionary of the English Language*, Webster defined many words found in the KJB from the KJB's surrounding text. Due to N. Webster's desire to preserve English, the 1828 is most accurate and in my opinion, the most relevant dictionary to use with the KJB (now easily accessible in reprint and free online apps).

2 Chapter 45 is God speaking to King Cyrus about Israel.

3 For example: confusing lyrics in **I am** song by Kirk Franklin: "How do you do, I am a sinner", "I am so far from perfect" and "I am on my way to who I am", mixed with lines stating the opposite, disregards scriptural teaching on salvation, perfection and position of who we are in Christ. There are many strongly held beliefs, yet, not based on what the Bible **says**.

4 Most all Modern translations **interpret** *thou shalt preserve* "them" in vs 7 as speaking about the poor/needy in vs 5. See the NASV, NAS 1977, NIV, NLT, ESV, HCSB, ISB, D-RB, YLT, NET Bible, etc. Most all commentaries say the same. There are two problems with this, 1) disregard of vs 6 as antecedent (commentaries don't mention the verse) and most glaring is: 2) disregard of the context, thereby bringing verses 1-5 into question. Worse yet, the NLT rewrites the entire chapter to make the poor and needy the subject in apparent agreement with majority of sources. Believing something because modern versions or the majority of scholars say so does not make it true. A consensus does not decide truth; it has to pass the test of basic bible interpretation, otherwise we must reject it. If we allow a majority to decide truth for us we deny our ability to think and seek God for understanding.

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