

Christianity Clarified Volume 33

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Date: 01 October 2020

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[0 : 00] What is Christianity really all about? Here, in an ongoing effort to try and dispel some of the confusion, is Marv Wiseman, with another session of Christianity Clarified.

Introducing the Law of Context, Part 1. The hermeneutical law, called the Law of Context of Scripture, is one of the very most basic and important to be undertaken.

It is one of the most cardinal of rules in all of the subject of hermeneutics. We have all heard the complaint, often stated by a public figure, and often a politician, who claims the statement attributed to him was taken out of context.

Their complaint may very well be justified, because when one's statement is taken out of context, it makes them appear to have meant the very opposite of what they actually said.

A simple but telling example may be given of the psalmist, who could be quoted in Psalm 14 as having said, There is no God.

[1 : 11] Does the psalmist actually say there is no God? Well, yes, he does, in so many words. But, only if you take his statement out of context does he say there is no God.

And if you take his statement in context, one readily sees the psalmist to actually state the opposite. What he really said, when kept in its context, is, The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.

Taking a statement out of context can make it say the complete opposite of what was meant when taken in its context. Taken out of context means you get only a portion of the whole story, not the whole story, and often not the truth of the story.

This reveals the old Saul that you can make the Bible say anything you want. It's all in how you interpret it. This becomes obvious when one lifts a portion of a statement out of its surrounding words, and takes only that portion one wishes to use to make a point often far removed from what the writer intended.

It's an expression of intellectual dishonesty if one does it intentionally. And, as stated, this goes on almost daily in the world of politics.

[2 : 36] Particularly, we see this practice time and again, when elections roll around and the political charges and countercharges crowd the airwaves of television and radio.

One can easily make an opponent look bad by quoting a position taken on a given issue and lifting a statement made out of the greater context.

The one doing it is counting on listeners focusing on the few words out of context that get people's attention, with no thought to be given to the whole of the article from which he or she is quoting.

The fact that doing so is intellectually and morally dishonest does not concern them. Their only objective is in making the gullible public believe it, despite the fact that it is an untrue misrepresentation of their opponent.

The issue of context is one of the very most basic premises of hermeneutics, and it must not be ignored, but consistently appealed to. We shall seek to do this by way of explanation and application upcoming.

[3 : 51] Introducing the Law of Context, Part 2 By the Law of Context, we mean nothing more than the words that go before or come after the word or words we are interpreting.

And, there are two types of context to consider. The immediate or near context simply has to do with the words that are in close proximity to the word or phrase in question.

They may be words closely nearby, as in the verses just before or just after, and are thus called the immediate or near context.

Or, in the case of the remote or distant context, there is no close proximity, but a distance removed from the verse in question.

In fact, the remote or distant context may not even be in the same book of the Bible we are considering. Further still, the remote context may even be removed from the testament we are considering.

[4 : 56] It may be that the context we need to consider is in the Old Testament, while the actual passage we are trying to interpret is in the New.

Such readily reveals how very connected are the truths of God's word. Actually, an example we might consider extreme as regards the remote or distant context occurs quite frequently when one is considering passages from the book of the Revelation.

Repeatedly, we find clues to a Revelation passage and the meaning thereof in, of all places, the book of Genesis. That's as remote as we can get.

Yes, you heard me. The book of the Revelation, the last book in our Bible, is connected to Genesis, the first book in our Bible. There are times when one must be consulted to shed light upon the other.

These books, the first and the last of Scripture, are as removed from each other as can be. Yet they, like all the rest of Scripture, are intricately connected.

[6 : 10] Such merely serves to verify the principle we have often stated, everything in the Bible is connected to everything in the Bible.

Of course, there are times when the connection is not always obvious to us, but that does not negate its connectivity. And really, what else would you expect but this kind of coherence and continuity of the Bible, since it is, as we have so often said, the product of one divine mind and source, that being of God the Holy Spirit.

It was He whose job it was to so inspire the minds of the 40-plus human penmen He used to actually write the texts of the Old and New Testaments. All this serves to demonstrate another principle often stated.

The Bible is its own interpreter. The Bible explains the Bible better than any human commentator or interpreter ever could. And, since interpretation of a text and the meaning derived from that is all-important, the context, both near and remote, play a critical role.

Long live the context! An Example of Near Context, Part 1 1 Corinthians 2.9 is our text in question for this example of the near context of Scripture.

[7 : 37] And if you have access to this passage now, it would be helpful to find it. 1 Corinthians 2.9 states, But just as it is written, Things which eye has not seen, an ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him.

Many have stopped right there after that intriguing truth and began to contemplate how wonderful heaven must be. We, say they, cannot begin to imagine all the wonderful things that await those who love God when we get to heaven.

None of us have seen those things or heard those things, but God is now preparing them for us who love him. Well, there is no doubt that that provision is true, nor is there any doubt as to the wonder of it all.

But that is not what this text means, nor should we use it as a proof text to remind us of what awaits us when we all get to heaven.

How do we know that is not the proper interpretation of that text here in 1 Corinthians 2.9? Because of the context, the near immediate context revealed in the very next verse that says, For to us God revealed them through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

[9 : 10] This, what God has already revealed, is the interpretation of those things that man has never seen or heard. This has nothing whatever to do with heaven.

Yes, yes, I see that, someone says. But are there not unheard and unseen things God has prepared for us true about heaven? Yes, it is true, and such may be used as an illustration or an application of the thought of this verse, but not the interpretation.

Remember, the interpretation of a passage is determined by what the writer intended to convey when he wrote it. Recall, if you will, we discussed on an earlier segment of Christianity Clarified that the meaning of a passage is determined by what was in the mind and intent of the writer when he wrote it.

Not what is in the mind of the reader when he reads it. Such would then be assigning a meaning to the passage never intended by the writer.

That does not produce communication. It produces confusion. By continuing on with the immediate context of the passage, the meaning is clearly identified as the great spiritual truths and realities that no man ever saw or heard of until God revealed them through his Spirit.

[10:37] They are further described in the context as the things freely given to us by God in verse 12. And in verse 13, Paul tells us these are the very truths he is speaking to the Corinthians, and they are not derived from human wisdom.

Let's pursue this further, upcoming. Upcoming. The Context of Falling from Grace Understanding the context in which a verse is found remains one of the very most critical of all the laws of interpretation.

In fact, failure to do so can result in spiritual and emotional anxiety, even to the point of confusion as to whether one is truly saved. Such a verse and its context is that found in Galatians chapter 5.

The verse in consideration is verse 4, wherein the apostle states, Christ has become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace.

Nothing can produce such anxiety, such unease, even sleeplessness, than the fear that one is not truly saved, or if one has been saved, no longer is, because he or she has fallen from grace.

[12:03] That's what the text says, right there in Galatians 5.4. The verse does say that, but the context, the surrounding verses, provide the very meaning of that phrase, fallen from grace.

Clearly, Paul is writing to refute the teaching of the Jewish legalizers who were touting the necessity of physical circumcision for salvation. In verse 2, Paul is saying, If circumcision is what justification is all about, then what good is Christ?

Do you see his argument? Christ is of no value, no profit to you, if our salvation is wrapped up in physical circumcision. If this be the case, then salvation by grace through faith in Christ goes right out the window.

You have abandoned, fallen away from, turned your back on the very principle of grace, and reverted to the law principles that never could save.

Striving to keep the law does not save anyone, because the law was never provided to save us, but to reveal sin and our need for salvation.

[13:20] Earlier in chapter 2 of Galatians, Paul says, I do not nullify the grace of God. I do not frustrate grace, or make grace of none effect.

For if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ is dead in vain. Do you see this? If circumcision, or keeping any other part of the law, gives us a right standing before God, then Jesus Christ came and died for nothing.

He may as well have stayed in heaven. The law came by Moses, and was never given to save anyone, but to reveal the need for everyone to be saved. It was grace and truth that came by Christ. Neither circumcision nor the lack thereof have anything to do with our justification, and anyone who teaches that it does has fallen away from or abandoned the very principle of grace.

God has established that through Christ to save us. Crystal clarity is brought to this important issue merely by observing the hermeneutical principle of the law of context.

[14:35] Tribulation is not translation. That the New Testament teaches the truth, often called the translation of the church, or rapture of the church, as it is sometimes called, is indisputable.

Besides lesser inferences, it is set forth in Paul's letters as part of the mystery he was called upon to reveal. 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15 both provide detailed descriptions of this blessed hope, as Paul declares it in chapter 2 of Titus.

Yet, well-meaning believers often appeal to Matthew 24 in the Olivet Discourse, which they believe also describes the rapture. It does not.

And here is a clear case where the context gives us the accurate interpretation. No doubt what leads many to associate this passage with the rapture is the phrase found in Matthew 24, 40 and 41.

On the surface, it has a rapture-like sound to it, does it not? It says, Then there shall be two men in the field, one will be taken, and one will be left.

[15:51] Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken, and one will be left. While this is true, this is the kind of description that will also be true of the rapture.

But their having similarities does not make them the same. The context surrounding these verses clearly establishes that Jesus is not speaking of the rapture, but of his own coming again.

This is second coming truth, not rapture truth. The entire context of this passage deals with judgment that will prevail during the tribulation period.

And not at all is it speaking of the rescue or deliverance of the rapture. When the text says one will be taken, the context requires that he is taken in death and destruction, even as the world's population was taken in the days of Noah.

They further confuse Noah and his family as rescued by the ark and made to be a type of the rapture. In the context, the clear statement by Christ made in verse 27 insists this is second coming teaching and is not related to the rapture.

[17:09] And when verse 28 follows by describing corpses and vultures, this is a massive death scene with an incredible body count.

This Olivet Discourse in Matthew 25 has a clear parallel account in the remote context of Revelation 19, and that depicts the second coming as well.

Again, not to be confused with the rapture. The rapture for believers speaks of rescue and deliverance, while the second coming spells the doom of an unbelieving world at the time of our Lord's return.

In these two passages, if they are connected, one sheds light on the other and provides its own interpretation. And such is far better than the often erroneous interpretation provided by us mere mortals.

Such is another example of the hermeneutical principle called the law of context. Chosen in Christ in Context, Part 1 Christians have wrangled and fumed for centuries over the issues of predestination, foreordination, election, and issues connected to these great theological themes.

[18:25] There are Calvinists, Arminians, and some who even were the label Kalmenian. And at times, there is a lot more heat than light that is generated from these debates. Whole denominations, representing each of the views, line up on one side or another, and ne'er the two shall meet.

At least, part of the controversy surfaces from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, where clear-cut statements are made beginning in the very first chapter. And we get no further than verse 4 when we encounter, Just as he has chosen us in him.

It is regrettable that so much emphasis is placed upon he chose us, and so little is placed upon in him. And it is all throughout this context that the words, in him, appear to be so critical.

And what believer would deny that as regards our relationship to God, it is all summed up in the person of his Son? Thus, the oft-repeated phrase, in him, we are chosen in him.

And in other words, our being chosen is inseparably connected with Christ being chosen. But some would object that this issue is not Christ being chosen, but us being chosen.

[19:40] And our response is, the chosenness of both are inseparable. Before the foundation of the world, the Son of God was the Lamb of God already slain from God's point of view.

The Father chose, appointed, delegated, selected, elected, anointed, his Son to be the Savior of the world. And as yet, the Son didn't even have the name Jesus.

That wouldn't be given to him until he was incarnated as a human, born of the Virgin Mary.

Remember, it was the angel Gabriel who told Mary she was to name him Jesus, which is the New Testament name for the Old Testament name Joshua, that means Savior or Deliverer.

That's to be his human name, said Gabriel, for he shall save his people from their sins. As

believers, to whom Paul is writing in Ephesians, he tells them that since God the Father chose God the Son for this special mission, then all who are joined to this Son by faith, share in all the Son is and has.

Christ's chosenness by his Father provides for our chosenness as well, but only if we are in him.

His death also becomes our death, his resurrection, our resurrection, his ascension, our ascension.

[21:01] All of this is critically related to the oft-repeated words in him, or in Christ, or through him, or in the beloved. All found in chapter 1.

Verses 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 2 times, 13, 2 times, verses 15 and 20. So, yes, all believers in Jesus Christ are chosen and destined for salvation and heaven, but only because we are in Christ.

He is our everything, including our chosenness. It's all in the context. Chosen in Christ in Context, Part 2 After nearly six decades of reading and studying the Bible, the conclusion has often been reached that we know far less than we think we do.

The conviction continually nags at us that we all have flaws in our theology, and when we get to heaven we will all get straightened out.

Of course, some of us think the other fellows will need a lot more straightening out than we will. Still, I think all of us will experience our share of surprises. I wonder how many of our doctrinal errors will have been because we ignored the law of context when we studied and preached the word.

[22 : 30] Remember, if we ignore the context, we can make the passage say almost anything we want. In Ephesians chapters 1 and 2, the Apostle Paul is reminding his audience of believers that their being in Christ is their everything.

It is on that basis that they are heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ that he mentions in Romans 8.17. In the same 8th of Romans, he makes clear as well that our being predestined, called, justified, and glorified are as well all wrapped up in the first verse of the chapter saying, There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

When he says there is now no condemnation, he infers that was not always the case. And what now makes all the difference is our position in Christ Jesus.

This is precisely the same idea conveyed to his Ephesian audience we have been tracking in chapter 2. In addressing the Gentile or non-Jewish element in his letter, he reminds them in 2.12, Remember that you were formerly separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now, in Christ Jesus, you who were formerly far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. And how close is brought near?

[24 : 16] Verse 13 says, In Christ Jesus. How can one be any nearer than in Christ Jesus? We are, as it were, members of his body of which he is the head as related in Ephesians and Colossians.

Again, and oh so clearly, the inspired apostle insists that our entire destiny and all it concerns is now under the authority and provision of our loving Lord and we are in him.

And if we are not in him, we are in the same plight as those Gentiles whom Paul mentioned in 2.12 when he reminded them they were separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

That is the one and only opposite condition of being in Christ and everyone is in one or the other.

Do you know which is true of you?

It's all in the context. Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, and Pastors in Context Ephesians chapter 4 contains one of the most clear expressions of the purpose of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors to be found anywhere in the Bible.

[25 : 37] In fact, we might say it is so clear it becomes embarrassing. How so? So many have ignored its clear directives for so long that many in our churches today are unaware it even exists.

We speak of the very purpose, the divine rationale for God even raising up these gifted men for the offices to which he has assigned them. For all too many of the saints in the pews, these people are the professionals, the experts.

They are those who are educated, trained, equipped to carry out the function of ministry. After all, isn't that what we pay them for? No, it isn't.

Oh, it's true, they do carry out the work of ministry, but that is not their only objective. That's found in verse 12. And their main ministry is for the equipping of the saints so they can carry out the service of ministry.

In other words, job one for these trained, gifted servants is to function as saint equippers. They are to do this in such a way that they bring those under their care to spiritual maturity.

[26 : 55] If people in Christ do not develop and mature as believers, they remain as spiritual children, babes. verse 14 of chapter 4 describes them as tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine and the trickery of men engaged in deceitful scheming.

A true believer in Jesus Christ may be 60 years of age, saved for 50 of those years, but has never grown spiritually past spiritual adolescence.

They have never been equipped. Maybe they have sat under pastors whose ministry never taught or edified them. Maybe they never had an ear to hear, but whatever the reason, they became vulnerable to every scam and scheme that comes down the pike.

Such saints, though truly saved, lack spiritual and often moral discernment that opens them to being used and taken advantage of by unscrupulous predators.

And they are out there and on the lookout for their next mark. Don't let that mark be you. Are you growing spiritually and maturing as a believer?

[28 : 17] If so, then you also are to be engaged in a work of service, whatever that work may be. This employs the whole body of Christ for the work of ministry and escapes that unbiblical concept that the professionals are to do it all.

In the body of Christ called the church, there is plenty and enough of service needs for all to perform, and each believer should be about his father's business.

Mere warming of a pew was never God's intent. The Twelve Apostles in Context Part 1 Beginning early in the earthly ministry of our Lord's three and a half years in the public eye, there were literally thousands of Jewish men and women who enthusiastically followed him and sought him out for his presence and his teachings.

These were called disciples or followers. And out of this significant number of followers, he enlisted twelve into a special role and office called an apostle.

One might well say that all apostles were disciples, but not all disciples were apostles. The twelve he personally chose are listed in Matthew 10, along with the strict instructions he gave them.

[29 : 44] The word apostle also means a sent one who carries the authority of the one sending him. Matthew tells the twelve listed here received delegated authority from their Lord over unclean spirits and the ability to heal every kind of sickness.

They certainly did not possess this ability in and of themselves, but only because Christ endowed them with it. And what is often overlooked is the target audience to which Jesus dispatched the twelve.

Verse five actually forbids them to go to anyone other than their own Jewish people. This is very significant, and it even ties in with the number of apostles Jesus chose.

Twelve. Why twelve? The immediate context, that is, that found immediately preceding and following, does not tell us. But the more remote context does so very clearly in Matthew 19.

Here, Jesus informs the apostles that you who have followed me, when my kingdom is established on earth, and the Son of Man is enthroned at the time of regeneration, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones of your own, and you will serve as judges over the twelve tribes of Israel.

[31 : 08] And here again, is the exclusivity exclusivity of Israel, the very select group of people to whom they were to minister. The significance of twelve is also found in the Revelation, chapter 21.

Here in the future New Jerusalem, John says, he saw coming down out of heaven, the city that has a high wall with twelve gates. On the twelve gates is the name inscribed of each of the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel.

And there is more. The city has twelve foundation stones, which also bear the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, who is, of course, Christ himself.

Numbers mean something to God, and they are not without connection. Twelve is significant, and in each of these uses of twelve the exclusivity of Israel is undeniable.

The twelve apostles, and the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel, will all have a strategic identity and role in the kingdom of heaven when it comes to earth. Rest assured, adequate place will be provided for Gentiles as well.

[32 : 17] But this provision, numbering twelve, has Israel written all over it, and the remote context clinches it. The twelve apostles in context, part two.

The charge has been put forth by numerous teachers over the years that it was God's intention for Paul to be the replacement for Judas, who betrayed our Lord and then did away with himself.

The argument charges the remaining eleven apostles with having acted in haste and running ahead of God. Further, they insist, had the eleven simply been more patient, God would have made his choice of the apostle Paul known to them.

And then, they add, as if to cement their argument, we know Matthias was not God's choice because you never hear of him again all throughout the book of Acts that follows his having been chosen by the twelve.

But, neither do you hear again of Andrew, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, or Simon the Canaanian, all of which proves exactly nothing regarding their choice of Matthias.

[33 : 43] A simple consulting of the immediate context in Acts 1 declares in no uncertain terms that the apostle Paul was not God's choice to replace Judas.

How do we know that? The twelve tell us that Paul, the former Saul of Tarsus, simply was not qualified to have been one of the twelve.

They well remembered the words and promise of Jesus that the twelve apostles would occupy twelve thrones judging Israel when the kingdom would be established. Now, they were down to eleven since Judas eliminated himself.

Acting under the authority Christ had already given them, they set about their responsibility of selecting the replacement to bring them up to their full complement. Clearly, they were anticipating the arrival of that kingdom soon, based on the question they asked in Acts 1.6, and then they had no idea it would be held in abeyance, even to our present day today.

So, in nominating two men, they recounted what their qualifications needed to be in verses 21 and 22. For one to be eligible to serve as a replacement for Judas, he would have to have been one who had been with Jesus and the twelve from the time they were baptized by John the baptizer, clear up until the day Jesus ascended back to heaven.

[35 : 14] In addition, the replacement would have to be one who had seen Jesus after his resurrection. Paul qualified in having seen the resurrected Lord on the Damascus road, but he certainly did not qualify by being present with the group from the baptism of John on and throughout Christ's earthly ministry.

If anything, Paul, or Saul of Tarsus, would have been hostile to that whole operation. No, Paul was not qualified to be the replacement for Judas.

However, Christ would qualify him for a later, altogether different apostleship that would not only include the Jew, but of all things, the Gentile.

Context can disturb our comfort. Without apology, we continue to beat the drum regarding the hermeneutical law of context, and we do so because so much of arriving at a correct interpretation of a verse or passage hangs in the balance.

One would not object even to developing a mantra to invoke on its behalf, and let's call it context is king. In fact, we can think only of one other issue that might take precedent over the role of context, and that would be the meaning or definition of a word in the text.

[36 : 48] Nothing else that comes to mind is more critical when interpreting the Bible than arriving at the meaning or definition of a given word and the context in which it is found. Ignoring either of these items, word meaning or the context, will surely lead to a misunderstanding of the passage.

And understanding the passage is likewise critical, for there can be no intelligent response to what is not understood or is misunderstood.

To not understand simply means we admit we do not know what it means. But to misunderstand means we think we know what it means.

But it doesn't mean that at all. Both deficiencies prevent an intelligent response to whatever the passage is saying. What follows then is a defeat of the whole purpose of the content even being revealed, which is to communicate.

We should all honestly realize as well that each of us has a built-in tendency, even a desire, that the text of Scripture under consideration means what we want it to mean.

[38 : 01] We all want to think that God agrees with us on whatever the issue is that we are considering. This built-in bias stems from our fallen ego and seeks confirmation from God.

That enables us to shade the meaning of a passage to favor what we want it to. If we interpret it in a way that is contrary to what we have already believed, then that tension is created within which makes us uncomfortable.

Such would then present a need for us to dismiss our formerly held view in favor of what the passage is really saying. And that is tough to do.

It's painful to our ego to discover we have been wrong about something, especially if it is in an area we hold dear and had always assumed to be correct.

Over the past six decades of studying the scriptures, it has occurred several times to me that a change in position was necessary. And refusal to make that change of position when we know we should because we have been wrong will result in no more light forthcoming until we do.

[39 : 19] This is called walking in the light. And every student of scripture must be committed to it. Very often it is in connection with a renewed understanding of a context that brings us to that.

Let's practice this diligently. Misunderstanding Missions There are sincere believers and mission organizations who believe that the world is to be evangelized by Christians and only when it is will

Christ return to earth.

This is called postmillennialism and it is not now so prevalent as it once was. The thinking was that the Christian endeavor and success in the missionary enterprise worldwide will result in bringing in that kingdom of God to earth over which Christ will then rule.

And a favorite verse often appealed to and written in large letters on a banner above the missionary convention platform, is Psalm 2.8.

Unquestionably, it is used to encourage and embolden those going forth as missionaries. And here is the quote from Psalm 2. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

[40 : 48] Thus, fervent prayer is to be engaged in, and the missionaries are to claim that promise in their going forth to evangelize. But, what saith the context?

The verses immediately following indicate nothing at all of a missionary or evangelistic enterprise on the part of anyone. This is a messianic psalm, revealing the ministry of Christ long before, perhaps even a thousand years before his birth in Bethlehem.

And far from being anything related to evangelism, it is all about the Son of God bringing judgment upon the heathen. The context then states, Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron.

Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Well, is this not far from missionaries preaching the gospel?

This Psalm 2? And it relates to and predicts the absolute supremacy that will be exercised by Jesus the Messiah when he returns in power and great glory.

[41 : 59] We do not send missionaries forth to dash anyone in pieces. And this text has nothing to do with evangelizing the heathen, but everything to do with a severe judgment of the heathen at the hands of the victorious Lord Jesus Christ.

No doubt these heathen will be those who rejected the grace of God and must now suffer the justice of God. And for those who might object to our criticism about ignoring the context by saying, okay, maybe it doesn't actually mean that literally, but we want to use it merely as an application or inspiration for those we send forth.

But whatever is stated here that in any way can be an application? Absolutely nothing. Psalm 2 is not applicable to the situation.

This psalm represents the father addressing his son regarding his worldwide victory over the heathen and the earth and his rule with a rod of iron.

Hardly an application for mission. Thus said the context. From immediate to remote context.

[43 : 19] Part one. The importance of attention to the context in which a scripture is found has been illustrated. And many more examples could be given that show how wrong conclusions about a passage are reached and are unfortunately then passed on to others.

Pulling a verse or passage out of its contextual setting goes on all too frequently. Let it be noised abroad loud and clear that when determining the meaning of a word or phrase context is king. Someone has coined the phrase that a text without a context is a pretext. We completely agree. Yet context has two aspects to it.

One we have already considered with multiple examples and we labeled it the near or immediate context. And it consists of the verses found immediately before or after the verse in question. Violations that ignore the immediate context are easier to spot because the context of the verse or verses in question is right there before you.

[44 : 35] Equally important but not nearly so easy to spot are those verses or passages that are not explained in the immediate context. But must be found in the remote or distant context.

Now if the near or immediate context deals with verses that are found nearby. What then is the scope of the remote or distant context?

The answer is all the rest of the Bible. Light that is not revealed in the immediate context of a verse may have great light shed upon it by a passage far removed from the verse in question.

In other words, a verse in the last book of the Bible, the book of the Revelation, may have the most light shed upon it in the book of Genesis. And that context is as remote or distant as it can be.

Most people would not expect a great deal of light to be shed upon a passage that is so far removed. Yet this is the very nature of the Word of God, which has always led us to say everything in the Bible is connected to everything in the Bible.

[45 : 56] There are times when the connection may escape us, but that does not mean there is no connection. It only means we fail to see it. By the way, this is one of the most important reasons why serious-minded believers are not content with merely reading the Bible.

They become students of the Bible. To maximize the benefits of biblical truth that fortify and stabilize the soul, one must engage in the serious study of the Scriptures.

And failure to do so results in a population of immature, insecure, and spiritually impoverished people. Ask any pastor, and most will admit they have their fair share of these saints in their pews. But they need not remain that way. Upcoming. From immediate to remote context, part two.

We have often made the statement that everything in the Bible is connected to everything in the Bible. It is another indication that, while the Bible writers were many, some forty or so, nevertheless the author was one, the Spirit of the Living God.

[47 : 14] And it was he who orchestrated and coordinated the Bible in such a way that demonstrates its coherence and its cohesion. Properly interpreted, the Bible in all its parts fits into one magnificent whole document that is non-contradictory but consistent with all that is within its pages.

Another telling example of consistency that on the surface comes across as a glaring inconsistency is found in Genesis chapter 37.

In verse 28, we are told that Joseph's brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver.

Then, in verse 36, we are told it was the Midianites who sold Joseph to the Egyptians. The critics howled with glee, certain they could lay an obvious contradiction to the scriptures.

See, said they, the Bible really can't be relied upon for accuracy. One place says Joseph was sold to the Midianites, and the other says he was sold to the Ishmaelites.

[48 : 29] Well, their so-called contradiction melts into oblivion when the remote or distant context is considered. In the remote context of Judges 8.24, what appears to be an unimportant passing reference is not unimportant at all, but very enlightening regarding these two groups, the Ishmaelites and the Midianites.

The text tells us the Midianites, whom Gideon defeated in battle, wore golden earrings because they were Ishmaelites.

Well, how could they be both? Very simple. The Midianites were simply a smaller contingent of the Ishmaelites that comprised the larger group.

A characteristic of all the Ishmaelites was that they wore a golden earring. The Midianites were also Ishmaelites.

In other words, all Midianites were Ishmaelites, but not all Ishmaelites were Midianites. The Ishmaelites were simply the larger group to whom the Midianites were related, but comprised the smaller number within the larger.

[49 : 47] We may say, all Londoners are Britishers, but not all Britishers are Londoners, or all residents of St. Thomas are West Indians, but not all West Indians are St. Thomasites.

What on the surface does appear to be contradictory is readily explained in the distant context. The Midianites were Midianites who were also Ishmaelites.

No contradiction. Case closed. Thank you. From Immediate to Remote Context Part 3 The point has been made in numerous segments of Christianity Clarified that the best and most accurate interpretation of any passage of Scripture is that which the Bible itself gives.

It does this by making connections between what the Bible says in one place, being enlightened by what is said in another place. Sometimes the another place may be nearby to the text in question, called the near context, but for now we are considering the remote context and how a passage at hand may be far removed from another that sheds light upon it.

The context of a passage in the book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible, cannot have a more remote or distant context than that of the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible.

[51 : 21] The text in question is Revelation chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, that read, And there appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.

And she, being with child, cried, travailing in birth and pain to be delivered. This is clearly symbolic, as are many things depicted in the Revelation.

Yet, symbols always mean something real, and are consistent in their usage. Commentators have been all over the map with their interpretations of this passage.

The imagination of man's mind seems to know no limitations. And such is the difficulty encountered when we depart from the plain literal meaning of a passage in question.

Because doing so leaves no limit to man's imagination and the multitude of interpretations he gives it. Among the most popular, but still erroneous, has the woman being the Roman Catholic Church, which many see the Church as producing Christ.

[52 : 38] This is completely opposite to what the Bible teaches, because the Church did not produce Christ, but it was Christ who produced the Church, of which he himself is the Head, as stated in Ephesians and Colossians.

Neither will it do to say the woman is the Virgin Mary, into which the stars, sun, and moon do not fit. The woman laboring to give birth is none other than the nation of Israel that is responsible for producing Christ who gave birth to the Church.

It is the Church, which is his spiritual body, of which he, Christ, is the Head, as depicted in Ephesians and Colossians. The woman, in chapter 12 of Revelation, is Israel.

The symbol need not be stretched or forced to mean something else, but is amply confirmed by both the immediate and the remote context. Another clear example of the Bible being its own best interpreter.

Our next segment will confirm this interpretation as we call upon a remote context found in Genesis, chapter 37. From the immediate to the remote context, part 4.

[54 : 06] Admittedly, the text of Revelation, chapter 12, is an enigma on the surface, with the symbols it records. We have already, in the previous segment, rejected the interpretation of the woman giving birth as being the Roman Catholic Church, or as others have proposed, being the Virgin Mary, and some say the Protestant Church.

When we allow the Bible itself to give us its meaning, it does so with the passage from the context far removed from the book of Revelation. It is found in Genesis 37, and relates to a dream Joseph had over 3,000 years before John wrote the passage in Revelation.

Joseph shared the dream with his brothers, and stated, In my dream we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose and also stood upright.

And, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and bowed down to my sheaf. And his brethren said to him, Shall you indeed reign over us?

Or shall you have dominion over us? And he dreamed another dream, and, behold, the sun and moon, the eleven stars, bowed down to me.

[55 : 27] And he told it to his father and his brethren, and his father rebuked him, and said to him, What is this dream thou hast dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee?

They all thought the dream to be preposterous. Yet that would be precisely fulfilled when they would all arrive in Egypt many years later. No one, including Joseph, knew what the dream meant when he had it, but years later in Egypt the fulfillment would become obvious.

Joseph would be in a position to exercise authority over his brothers and his parents. In the Revelation 12 passage, the mysterious woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, plus the crown of stars upon her head, can be none other than the nation of Israel.

Not only does the Genesis passage make it clear from the remote context, but the Revelation passage itself makes it doubly clear from the immediate context.

The child to be brought forth is Jesus the Messiah. The woman bearing the child is the Jewish nation of Israel, that will flee into the place prepared by God when the Antichrist tries to destroy them.

[56 : 55] Efforts to make the woman be the Roman Catholic Church who gives birth to the Church simply will not fit. It was not the Church that gave birth to Christ, but Christ the Messiah that would produce the Church.

The symbol of Revelation 12 perfectly fits the dream of Joseph. The stars symbolized Joseph's brothers, the sun symbolized the father, and the moon the mother, all of whom would make obeisance to Joseph when arriving in the land of Egypt.

The image is unmistakable, and the remote context explains it beautifully. Ignoring context can be depressing.

If ever a book of the Bible appears on the surface to be downright depressing, it is the book of Ecclesiastes. Perhaps this is why it isn't mentioned often, and is seldom preached on by many pastors.

The writer of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon, laments that life is simply not worth living. He should know, says he, because he had tried everything the world had to offer, and found it all to be lacking. [58 : 07] And the word he used so often, vanity, or vain, which means empty, devoid of purpose, value, and meaning. If you read Ecclesiastes, without allowing it to be harmonized with the context, you might look for a bridge to jump off of.

Listen to this one, purported to be the wisest man who ever lived. Now, brace yourself for this. Solomon pursues what might be called the meaning of life, and he testifies to having had it all and done it all, and it all came to nothing but vanity, emptiness, and futility. In Ecclesiastes 2 and the first 11 verses, he recounts his search for significance. If Solomon, a man as wise as he, flushed with wisdom, power, and great wealth at his command, if he found life pointless and unfulfilling, what chance is there for the rest of us?

History is filled with the bored, burned-out lives of like kindred people who had it all, yet found it all so unfulfilling and worthless, they took their own life.

Is life really that unrewarding? These verses in Ecclesiastes say it is, unless, unless you take into consideration that all-important law of remote context we are considering.

[59 : 38] And when you do, you'll arrive at the last chapter of Ecclesiastes, where Solomon counsels his readers that the life that leaves God out of the mix truly is vanity, abject emptiness.

This is why, says Solomon in chapter 12 as he closes, remember, take God into consideration, the one who created all things, including you.

Leave him out of the mix, and you will arrive at a meaningless life. Nothing will truly satisfy. How can the most important component of anything be omitted and remain satisfying?

Solomon's advice is, to the youth especially, remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, get God in the picture, keep him there, right in the middle of it, keep everything else peripheral, and you'll have a God-centered life filled with meaning, purpose, satisfaction, and fulfillment.

And, says Solomon, get with this in your youth. It will serve you well. All else is vanity and vexation of spirit.

[60 : 58] So, how do we account for such a man, as wise as he, ending his life so miserably? He did, you know, upcoming. Available Wisdom Unused King Solomon remains one of the most enigmatic characters in all the Bible.

Early on, when coming to the throne left by his father, King David, God offered Solomon a blank check to fill in by way of anything he wanted from God. And Solomon said he wanted wisdom, and God gave him wisdom.

Wisdom so he would know how to best govern his people. Here and after he is called the wisest man who ever lived. But how then do we account for the multitude of miserable choices he made later in life?

Those in Israel who were to wear the crown had already been forbidden by God to take multiple wives, as related in Deuteronomy 17, 17. Yet, this is precisely what Solomon did.

And not just nice Jewish girls did he take as wives, but pagan women as well. The text saying, Solomon loved many strange women, and they turned his heart away from serving the Lord, even to the extent of idolatry.

[62 : 23] And thus, an old saying is validated, there's no fool like an old fool. So where was all this wisdom he had earlier been granted? He did make good use of it on numerous occasions, and everyone was benefited by it and impressed.

Still, even with the granting of divine wisdom, God did not remove Solomon's power of free choice. And obviously, the granting of wisdom to Solomon did not contain a guarantee that he would always draw upon that wisdom, only that it would be there for him to draw upon.

But Solomon still possessed an independent will, a will he allowed to succumb to pagan feminine charms, for which he, with his fully intact masculine ego, was no match.

His later years were a downright embarrassment. In his earlier life, as a young king, he no doubt drew upon the wisdom God gave him, and it was then that he remembered his creator.

Then, in the days of his youth. But he certainly did not continue to do so later in life. Perhaps, he should have applied that wisdom to the middle age and older years of life as well.

[63 : 44] The record shows, he forgot his creator and paid a terrible price for doing so. And here is a principle. God gives gifts and abilities to people, but he does not force them to use them.

Their volition remains intact as to whether or not they will, and their volition becomes the basis for their accountability to God with all he has given them. It truly is a serious business to possess this thing called human volition.

Besides, next to our being made in the image and likeness of God, it appears that our volition is that which makes human personhood what it is. Not even God's granting wisdom to Solomon would negate Solomon's volition, his own ability, whether or not to invoke God's wisdom.

In his later years, he certainly did not. And let that be the lesson to us all. The Law of First Mention, Part 1 Considerable time was spent on the preceding Law of Context, and unapologetically so.

This is because it is so very critical to understanding the meaning of any literary work, and because the Bible is very literary work and communication from God himself, understanding that is critical beyond comprehension.

[65 : 16] The point was made that the only thing transcending the importance of the context is the actual meaning or definition of the words within the text itself.

It is safe to say, and no exaggeration, that the definition of the words and the context in which they are found are in themselves the major contributors in the understanding of any work of literature, whether the content is from the Bible or the daily newspaper.

Context is king, deserves to be our mantra. Please don't ever forget it. The next indispensable law to which we turn our attention in applying the principles of hermeneutics is called the Law of First Mention.

As its name implies, this law states that the meaning of a given word in Scripture is determined by its meaning wherever in the Bible it is found used for the first time.

When any word is thus used, that is, the first time it is used, it establishes a precedent as to the meaning of that word.

[66 : 33] As in the legal term, case law, precedent sets the standard for the meaning of a given term and how it is applied. When arguing a legal case before a court on any level, the ruling judge is always interested in how previous findings were made in cases that preceded the case before his or her court.

Great weight is then given to previous rulings in similar cases. And, because there have been so many untold thousands of cases litigated in different state and federal courts, there is almost always a precedent established that then becomes the model or the pattern for new cases to follow.

In other words, previous rulings have cast a die, established a formula, or set a precedent for like cases that follow. The interpreter of the Bible will seek to use this law of first mention in the effort to determine the meaning of a given word.

What is the meaning of the word in question when it is mentioned in the Bible for the first time?

What it means there will determine its meaning in all the places in the Bible where that word is used thereafter.

Hence, the law of first mention. find it. Find where that first occasion is that this word is used because that establishes the precedent, the pattern, the standard, the already fixed meaning of that word.

[68 : 09] And what it means the first time is also what it means thereafter. It's the law of first mention. Sanctified and the law of first mention part two.

The Bible is a big book. How can we possibly locate the place where a certain word is used in it for the very first time so we can apply the law of first mention?

Good question. And this is why we urged you, if you wish to become a serious student of the Bible, to obtain a concordance, preferably one that is exhaustive. This invaluable volume lists every single word used in the Bible and reveals where it is used from Genesis through Revelation in that order. There are abbreviated concordances found in the back pages of many editions of the Bible, but only the most frequently used words are listed and even then not in all the places where the word is found.

An exhaustive concordance contains them all and is a rather large volume. In fact, it's one you would not want to talk to church every Sunday. Also, keep in mind that a concordance is tuned to only a particular version of the Bible.

[69 : 25] So, if you obtain one, make sure it is compatible to the version of the Bible you are using. An exhaustive concordance may be priced in a range of \$12 to \$30 depending on your sources of availability and it would be an excellent investment rather than merely an expenditure.

Now, let's take a word and apply the law of first mention in trying to interpret its meaning. And the word chosen is sanctify. And it is a word given to many interpretations.

This is usually because so many interpret the word sanctify in accordance with a denominational or doctrinal meaning rather than a biblical meaning. And all too often denominational meanings are given to words rather than the biblical meaning which is precisely why we have so many differences and disagreements among Christians.

If you have a concordance we have mentioned whether strong's, young's, or another, you will find the first time the word sanctified is used in the Bible is in Genesis chapter 2.

And one reason we have chosen the word sanctified is because it is a word used early on in the Bible, Genesis 2, and because there are many different meanings given to it whereas God gave it only one.

[70 : 43] In looking at Genesis 2 we find the word sanctified first surfacing in Genesis 2 and verse 3 that reads, And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

This tells us the seventh day was different from the six days preceding it. They were all days of creation but the seventh day is different.

It is not a day of creation but a day of cessation. This day was distinguished from all the other days thus setting it apart from them.

It signified a special status that honored the completion of the created order. Special Different Extraordinary Unusual It is as if this day the seventh were pulled aside from the previous six days all of which had to do with creative acts.

But this day is different. That's the point. That's where we're going upcoming. You've just heard another session of Christianity Clarified with Marv Wiseman.

[72 : 01] A preview of volume 34 upcoming.

We have begun engaging the very thick of biblical hermeneutics. Recall if you will it is described as the science and art of interpreting the Bible.

It is a science in that it functions within a prescribed mix of principles and logic to be applied to the interpretation of all literature whether the Bible or the daily newspaper.

And it is an art because the application of those principles requires a skill level that can be sharpened and honed as the practice continues to be applied.

Right now we are involved in defining and applying the laws of logic that are so critical to our understanding of the Bible. Recall if you will how we emphasize that there can be no intelligent response to what God in His Word promises us or requires from us if we cannot understand what is being said in this grand old volume.

[73 : 15] So enter hermeneutics. And in our list of laws we need to invoke we have already dealt with the authority and inspiration of the Bible as the Word of God.

After all unless we are convinced of the veracity and authority of Scripture there is no rational or urgent reason to know how to interpret it. Consideration was given to the Bible's translations and versions the popular appeal of the Bible as well as its opponents and detractors the fulfilled prophecies of the Bible the definition and necessity of hermeneutics Miles Coverdale's rules for biblical interpretation the critical necessity of grasping the whole of the Bible before its parts the continuity of the Bible between the Testaments the principle of the progressive revelation of Scripture how the Bible itself is its only dependable interpreter the old and new covenants and how that the church is not Israel and Israel is not the church the Bible and its Jewishness the pivotal character of the book of Acts necessary tools for the serious Bible student unfortunate chapter divisions of the Bible how the meaning of a text is derived from the writer how wrongly mixing truth divides Christendom seeming contradictions of Christ major help with hermeneutics the law of the literality of language and the primacy of literality the bridge between literal and figurative major figures of speech in the Bible we noted that prayer does not replace hermeneutics the figures of speech including simile metaphors metonymy synecdoche personification anthropomorphisms and anthropomorphisms and their frequent usage in the Bible as well as the figures of irony euphemisms rhetorical questions why God stoops to man the Bible's frequent usage of hyperbole

and how intentional hyperbole is not falsehood the totes the opposite of hyperbole puzzling oriental idioms found in both testaments

Jesus and his use of idioms and Paul the apostle and his use of idioms these were all dealt with in greater and lesser fashion and they bring us to the point where we are now all the aforementioned are available for free download at our website www.gracebiblespringfield.com that's all one word www.gracebiblespringfield.com as well they may be ordered on compact discs free of charge no strings attached at the mailing address listed on the cover the entirety of the content to date consists of 33 compact discs these are provided through the generosity of the Barbara Wiseman Memorial Fund established by the good folks of Grace Bible Church shortly after Barbara's unexpected death in 2006 thank you for informing others of the availability of this content this is Pastor Marv Wiseman Pastor of Grace Bible Church since 1970 thanking you for your interest and for being a participating student on Christianity Clarified may God richly bless you as you listen