

PLAIN SPEECH

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“Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech” (2 Cor. 3:12)

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TAKING LIBERTY WITH CONTEXT

When it comes to Bible study, here is the truth of the matter: it is impossible to draw proper conclusions from the Word of God by treating the Bible as some sort of spiritual cafeteria – taking a little of this and a little of that, while observing the “Passover” on other less desirable (per their mindset) items.

Yet, it is simply a sad fact that a great many people engage in such “Cafeteria Style” religion. One item that said types of folks feel they are at liberty to pass over is context – overlooking or ignoring it, while at the same time deriving their conclusions about any number of issues. This just will not do. It will not do at all.

Listen, the only way to actually arrive at proper understanding of biblical text is to (1) look to the context (the information surrounding a particular text), (2) consider said context very carefully, and then (3) draw a conclusion filtered through that context. This method applies whether the context be immediate (the verses before and/or after a particular passage) or extended (other passages found throughout Scripture).

Let’s now note some examples of how some take liberty with context to their own hurt:

- ▣ Mormons say **James 1:5** teaches man to ask God about the validity of the Book of Mormon. The contextual lesson of **James 1:5** is that Christians are to seek wisdom so as to handle trials aright (**1:1-4**).
- ▣ Baptists point to **Revelation 20:7** often. They claim this verse teaches Christ will have an earthly kingdom when He returns. The Baptists ignore the larger context of the book. **Revelation 1:1** states the book is written in symbolic language. Also, the Baptist “conclusion” fails to consider the greater context of the New Testament. **John 18:36** forbids the kingdom from being earthly in nature.
- ▣ **Acts 2:1-4** is a favorite “proof text” of Pentecostals and Charismatics. They claim this verse shows that all believers are baptized with the Holy Ghost. They ignore the context which clearly shows the only folks baptized with the Holy Ghost that day were the apostles (**Acts 1:1ff**).
- ▣ Most people think Satan is Lucifer. Do you know why? They ignore or overlook the immediate context surrounding **Isaiah 14:12**. When the context is considered, it becomes clear that the name Lucifer was applied to the King of Babylon, not Satan (**Isaiah 14:4**).
- ▣ Those who wish to allow for women preachers run to **Galatians 3:28**. The context of this passage is discussing equal candidacy for salvation in Christ and the folly of keeping the Law (**3:1ff**). The context has nothing to do with women being free from their proper roles, outlined elsewhere in the New Testament (**1 Timothy 2:11-12; 1 Corinthians 14:34**).
- ▣ Apostate Christians who subscribe to the sin of institutionalism cite **James 1:27** as the text authorizing “Church Sponsored Orphan Homes.” They, however, ignore the context of the passage, which clearly shows the command applies to individuals, not local churches.
- ▣ Apostate Christians who wish to allow for “unity in diversity” over doctrinal and moral matters run to **Romans 14:1-15:7**. The context of this section of text will not allow for tolerance in such matters. The context limits tolerance to opinions over matters of indifference (**Romans 13:11-14; 16:17-18**).

Many more examples could be given. Let’s resolve not to ever be like the denominationalists and the digressives. Let’s commit to be proper Bible students, and determine not to take liberty with context. Remember: ***a proof text, without the context, is a pretext.***