

Your Lens

4 C's....we have been looking at the content. Now we begin interpretation. What did this text mean to those who first read it?

So far what we have been doing is pretty safe. Just noticing things. But moving to this step...to the interpretation requires that we put our guard up.

You can look in Scripture and find passages that will justify anything you want it to justify. Too often, people decide what they want the Word to say and then search for Scriptures to support it. They want to stand over the text and use it for their purposes. They depend upon the ignorance of others who do not know how to interpret Scripture. Believers who are wowed by charisma and charm and led like sheep to the slaughter.

The one thing that all cults and false religions and denominations have in common is that they deny the Deity of Christ. They move the line. They deny the truth that we studied last week in Colossians. Instead of acknowledging that He is the image of the invisible God....they make Him the image of their false god.

Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormon's, Jews, Scientologists, all deny that Jesus is God.

Others search the text filled with pride. They try to find something that will elevate them above others. They major in the minors. This often drives denominations. No musical instruments, King James only, tongues only, snake-handlers, hymns only, baptism methods, head coverings...there are innumerable options to choose for division. They take this verse or that verse and put them together to create something that is completely unbiblical. In Second Timothy Paul warns his protege about this exact point.

2 Timothy 2:14–17 (ESV) 14 Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. 15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. 16 But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene.

Notice that the approved worker handles the Word of Truth with integrity. That is who we must aspire to become. These manipulated misinterpretations spread like gangrene and ruins those who hear it. They quarrel over words and seem to love doing it. They develop a checklist...that they use to separate themselves as superior...it is actually gnosticism....we have special understanding and knowledge that other believers in Jesus don't have.

So we must be careful. We must know what God is telling us...How do you move correctly from what the Word says..to what that Word means?

The point is not my interpretation or your interpretation...It is not about my meaning and your meaning...it is not about making sure my opinion is correct. The goal is to come to the meaning of the text as best as we can.

We all know that even when we diligently do our best to interpret correctly.....through some of these things, there will still be some differences, some areas that are not completely clear, and we need to be okay with that. There are passages that are just not clear to us. Passages where honest lovers of Jesus...fully devoted to correctly interpreting the text...using the best interpretive methods and safeguards...come to different conclusions of what the text means....We have to be comfortable with that. Interpretation always brings in human limitations. Our hearts can be sold out for Jesus and we can still disagree about the minors.

Now obviously when two believers disagree, one of them is right and one of them is wrong. There are areas of my theology that I know are wrong...I just don't know which ones. I am sure that I have taught....unintentionally...misinterpretations over the years...I know that I now have a much deeper understanding of Scripture than I did when I started preaching 15 years ago.

Medical School Story.

But in Medical School....truth changes...What they teach can change. In Science, truth is a moving target. But when I got to Seminary...the truth didn't change...the depth of our understanding did. The Key essential truths of the faith never change....The majors leave no room for interpretation...the line never changes..The seven truths about Jesus that we learned last week...never change. Worship style, version of text, use of gifts, type of baptism...these are the minors that we try to make major. Doing so spreads like gangrene and divides God's people.

The best that we can do is to walk through Scripture as best we can making sure that we are being responsible with the text given to us.

This does not mean that if we apply solid methods that we are all going to agree on everything, but it does mean, I believe, that we're going to agree on the things that are most central to Scripture. And then, we're gonna have interpretation, good, solid interpretation that may lead us to accept a little different here or there, but it's not gonna divide us in the body of Christ. It's based on good interpretation from questions of content to questions of context. I want us to think about context. The definition of context is "that which goes with the text"

The dilemma created by context, two things. The Bible communicates eternal content, so what we've got in this book is eternal, but it also communicates through specific context.

When we read the New Testament...we must do so in the context of the First Century...When we read the Old Testament we must do so in the context of the time in which it was written. Both of these are dramatically different from the context we live in today. When we studied the Book of Revelation we did so in the context of our world and that of those yet to come.....

Every time we teach Scripture at Remnant we focus as much on the context as we do the content....they have to go together.

We need to step into the author's shoes and determine his original intent. We want to go to the original text and explore what it originally meant.... Please don't miss this truth.

THE BIBLICAL TEXT CAN NEVER MEAN WHAT IT NEVER MEANT

It can't mean today what it didn't mean then. Biblical text can never mean what it never meant. We've gotta step into the author's shoes and just recreate his ideas, his experiences, put ourselves in his shoes and try to think through how this was being communicated, how it was being read, what did it mean to those who first heard it?

Context shapes meaning but it doesn't change truth.....The truth is already there....waiting for us....the context unlocks the meaning of the text. It is context that allows us to correctly see the full truth that God wants us to see....

Once we have seen all that there is to see in the text, it is the context that helps us correctly understand what God wanted to tell us through the original author.

The truth of Scripture comes to us wrapped in the original culture, the historical background, the original language, the nuances of their words, and their methods of learning.

Often you will hear me say that a text has been ripped out of context and misinterpreted. That is what we are going to learn to avoid in this part of the process.

Let me give to you an example....

Imagine a stop sign, **PHOTO 1** a stop sign, a red octagon, "stop" written in white on the front of it. What do you do at a stop sign? Well you bring yourself to a complete stop before the crosswalk. You are going to be there for 8-10 seconds...You pause....you look to the left...then you look to the right...you then move up and make another stop at the end of the crosswalk and check again to the left and then the right. When clear you progress slowly through the intersection continuing to check the crosswalk on the other side....That is what you are supposed to do at a stop sign.

I don't think I have ever done that...but it is what is written...that is the meaning of a stop sign when you are driving a car....in the US...on public roads...

One day I was walking through an antique store with Tammy....we like to do that...I look for Antique Bibles...One day I came across some old signs hung up on pegboard in one of the booths....There was an old beat up but clear stop sign hanging in front of me.

I know what the sign means...I am to come to a complete stop...look both directions...etc...but what does it mean in this context?

Suppose you are driving up I75 and there is a sign...a billboard **PHOTO 2** ...that has a stop sign on it encouraging you to eat at a restaurant....Do you slam on the breaks...come to a complete stop...look both ways? What does it mean in this context?

Suppose you are saying nice things about someone...singing their praises to others...and they say "Stop"...does it mean stop?

I think you get the point....**CONTEXT RULES**...Misinterpret the stop sign's context and you might get a ticket, get into an accident, or get run over on I75 when you stop.
CONTEXT RULES.

If we ignore the context of this book, we can twist this book to mean all kinds of different things. We've got to know the context, and there's really **two contexts that we have to know**, the diversity of context. First context we have to know is our context, our context. And the second context we have to know is their context, their context.

1) Our Context

This might be a bit confusing because I have constantly said that we must understand what it first meant to the original audience and now I am talking about our context first.

But we can't remove the fact that we come to the text with preconceived notions, ideas, and expectations. These may be conscious or subconscious but they are the lenses that we look through...we often can't help it.

We have lenses that shade what we see....One Lens, for instance, **is Pride.**

Almost all of us look back in time with prideful arrogance...we are smarter than they were...we are more enlightened than they were...they were foolish and ignorant we are wise and intelligent.

We also get lost in our pride when we believe that we know a particular passage or story. "Well, I already know what this one means." Pride is this idea in Bible study that knows what it means before allowing the Holy Spirit to tell you what it means, In everything...and in Scripture...pride comes before the fall. We must humble ourselves...we must know that we have so much to learn...so much to be taught.

Psalm 25:9 (ESV) 9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

Proverbs 11:2 (ESV) 2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.

Another lens we bring to the text is **our Agenda.**

Sometimes we come to the text with a theological agenda, so we come to a text and we find in that text whatever supports our theological slant. Maybe you're a Calvinist and you come and you say, "Well, I'm gonna find predestination in this," or maybe you don't believe in predestination or something like that, and so you come and you twist Scriptures that talk about predestination. So come to the text trying to undo the sin of homosexuality....Or to justify abortion....or to validate materialism....When we put on the lens of our theological agenda, we always skew the meaning of different texts.

How do we avoid this? I say this all the time...We avoid standing over the text making it say what we want....We HUMBLY submit to the text...letting the Holy Spirit teach us what He wants. We don't try to find Scriptures that fit our agenda. WE LET SCRIPTURE DEFINE OUR AGENDA.

Another lens that we bring to the text **is familiarity**

I believe that the hardest texts to study are the ones that you think you know. You really have to guard against familiarity and pride.

Often we will say, "I can't believe that I never saw that before" But we saw it...we just we clouded by the lens of familiarity.

Once we guard against familiarity, often a familiar passage will come alive in new ways. You see things that you have never seen before...yet it is right there....in the text and it has always been there. It's not that you are uncovering something new. You are seeing what's been there and you had missed. It's almost like reading it for the first time...not new lenses...just no longer shaded.

Another lens that we bring to the text **is our culture.**

This is huge. Too often we discount Scriptural truths because we have already boxed things in to our belief system. Look at these words of Jesus..

Matthew 5:39–40 (ESV) 39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

Our first thought is....ok but let's be honest. Someone strikes you on the right cheek and you keep turning the other cheek, they're going to destroy you, so you, obviously, can't do that. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic and you let him have your cloak as well, they'd take everything that you have, so obviously, that's not what it means.

We have just shaded the text with our cultural lens.....We have just imposed a very self-centered, American, materialistic culture that says, "I need to do what protects myself and my stuff before anything else."

And yet...Jesus' words mean exactly what Jesus said. This passage says exactly what it is saying.

We bring our culture, and we don't even realize it sometimes. Consciously or unconsciously, we bring it to the text. Now, our culture involves a lot of things. It involves our language, words. We must realize that when some words were said in the 1st Century they meant different things words in the 21st Century, and so we need to know that the word meant in their culture...not ours.

That's part of what translation does, and why we need a good translation. We bring the lens of our customs to the table. Think about your family.....what the word family means to you. I guarantee you that your idea of what family means is very different that what it meant to a first century Jewish person. Family context in the Middle East is thick. It's tribal, really, in many parts of the Middle East where everything is about family and protecting the honor of your family. They lived under one roof their entire lives, we are scattered around the world. They were rigidly paternally led...not so much for us. They defended family honor at all costs...

So that means that somebody studying the Bible from the Middle East and studying the Bible from America are going to bring two different contexts to any understanding about teaching on family. When Jesus said that belief in Him would divide families and turn them against one another...they could hardly fathom that....we don't see it as that earth shattering. The lens of cultural context shades our understanding of Scripture.

We have to be aware of our cultural lens – our values, economics, politics, ethnicity, gender – gender, our views on gender according to our culture...the role of women...the role of men... we bring to the table. – When it comes to religion, arts, images. We bring all these things to the table whenever we begin to interpret Scripture

We don't set out to intentionally misread the Bible, but there's a lot of things in our subconscious world that we believe based on our culture,

Another Lens that we bring to the text **is our Faith.**

We have faith in God when we come to this text. We have faith in Christ. We believe that while we read, the Holy Spirit...God Himself...is teaching us and speaking to us. We have a belief in the power of God, and we believe these certain things that do affect the way we look at the text, the fact that we believe the Bible is inspired, that this is the Word of God, by his Spirit. The Bible is reliable. The Bible is unified. We believe that this Bible doesn't have errors or contradictions.

We believe the Bible is diverse, that there's all kinds of different ways that God's Word is communicated to us, and we believe the Bible is supernatural. What that means is, God is bigger than us, and there are some parts of the Bible that we don't completely understand, and we're okay with that. The Bible has tension and mystery to it.

These are presuppositions that are actually a good thing to bring to the text. Finally, the fact that the Bible is purposeful, and the purpose of this book is to bring us into the image of Christ.

And here's the deal, we can't be completely objective. We all have lenses...they shape what we read...we can't often get rid of them...but we must know that they are there...and that they have the potential to shade what we see.

Every time we pick up this text...we bring the lens of our Pride, Agenda, Familiarity, Culture and Faith. We can't help it. We just have to be aware of it and the impact those shades can have if we don't recognize them.

So, we bring context to the text....now let's look at the context that they bring to the text .

2) Their Context

Never forget that scripture was God's Word to other people before it became God's Word to us. So this Book wasn't written just for us. It was written for God's people throughout history and it was God's Word to them before it was God's Word to us. And that means two things.

1) God cared deeply about them to give them his Word. Remember that this is the place that God chose to reveal himself in that time period and it was just a picture of God's love for that region of the world. It is not just about them though. God cares deeply about us and he wants us to see the meaning of this Word that he originally revealed to them. There're all different facets of contexts.

First, **Literary Contexts.** We have to think about the type of literature that we are reading.

The Genre is important

When you read through this Book you will find all different kinds of genres. You will find stories, you will find speeches, you will find poetry, you will find prophetic oracles, you will find all kinds of different forms of literature. And what we have got in this one Book are a multiplicity of forms. And what we need to think about here when it comes to genres, we need to know the rules involved with different genres. And I say rules and I want to picture it like this.

If you try to play basketball with the rules of football it is not going to work out. Things are not going to go well. When one person comes in and thinks it is the rules of football at work and everyone else is dribbling around in basketball. That is not or the same thing in basketball trying to apply to football. It is almost looking at different genres like looking at different games and each one of them has different rules so to speak.

We have got practical examples of this. In one day this past week, you might have read a newspaper, looked up a number in a phone book, ordered from a menu, read a poem, read a letter, waded through instructions on how to build something, or meditated on a devotional book. Now those are all different genres and obviously you are not going to read a phone book the same way you read a love letter. And you are not going to order off, read a menu the same way you read a newspaper.

This is the possible potential danger with topical preaching and topical study of the Bible that just kind of jumps around from this text to this text. It is like bringing something from a menu and something from a love letter and something from a phonebook altogether and trying to figure out how they all relate to each other. That is very difficult to do. That doesn't mean that it can't be done but it is difficult to do.

But in the Old Testament you have got narrative, its stories, law, poetry, the prophets and wisdom. And they overlap some. Sometimes they overlap but those are the main genres. Then in the New Testament you have got the Letters, you have got Gospels which includes parables but are kind of a different breed in and of themselves, then the Book of Acts and you have got Revelation which is all to itself is a genre. So you have got these different genres you have got to take into account.

Second, Literary Context is the **Grammar.**

Grammar. Individual words, phrases, clauses, all just like we have talked about. Just like we have talked about in the first part of our time together tonight, all those affect the meaning and in the surroundings. We have got to realize that the Bible is not just a bunch of parts that exist separate from one another. They are a bunch of parts that come together in a whole.

What you have got is an inner circle, you have got the text you are studying. It may be a Verse, it may be a paragraph, it may be a Chapter, so you have got that text. And then you have got the immediate context in which it is found. Then beyond that you have got a whole segment that many times they are contained in. Then you have got the rest of that Bible Book that it is contained in. You have got the rest of the Bible. And so and this is why I study the Bible, it is going to take time, i.e., years to really dive into the depths of the Word because we are going to begin to learn more about these different circles that are going to help to understand the Word. And all of those circles are key.

Matthew 18:20 (ESV) 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

How many times have we heard it quotes, somebody comes up on stage and say, 'church where two or three are gathered together, there I am with them? So praise God, he is with us.' And that is good. Yes, God is with us. The only problem is the poor guy over here was thinking 'well, I was having a quiet time this morning by myself. Does that mean that God was not with me then?' What do you mean two or three have gathered. What we have done, we have taken that passage, that Verse and we have ripped it out of its context.

You go back to that passage and what you will find is Jesus is talking about conflict in the church and conflict between brothers and going to your brother and addressing him, basically a church discipline picture. And it is a promise that Jesus gives that when the church goes through very difficult times and when the church goes through conflict, I want to remind you that right when you gather together, I want to remind you that I am with you in the middle of the conflict. Now it is an incredible Verse, but if we rip it out of its context, we miss the point.

Do you remember Paul speaking to the church at Laodicea?

Revelation 3:20 (ESV) 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

And many times we use that to say I want to invite you to come to Christ. Jesus is standing at the door of your heart and he is knocking. The only problem is that it rips that verse out of its context. The Bible is actually speaking to the church there and it is a picture of Jesus saying to the church, I am outside this picture. Standing at the door and knocking, open the door and let's experience the unity that was designed for the church. We have got to know those different facets of context.

Then second, **Historical Cultural Context.**

If our interpretation of the Bible is going to be valid, it has got to take into account the history, the culture of that day. We have got to know that. That is why we spend so much time on the background of everything we teach....why we study first century Jewish culture.

We have got to get to **Know the Author.**

Paul was very frustrated with the Galatians and you can tell that in his writing....We studied Jonah's prejudice toward the Ninevites...we can see that in his writings. When Luke writes the book of Luke and Acts..... why does he not tell us exactly what happened to Paul at the end? Why did he kind of leave it hanging there? What we have got to understand what Luke is doing as an author in order to answer those questions.

We have to get to **know the Audience**

Every Biblical Book is written to specific people for a specific purpose. When you read the Gospel of Mark, Mark is writing to a bunch of believers who are facing persecution, so that affects the way that we interpret the Book of Mark. You get to John why did he write this Book? He wants us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and find life in his name. So we have got the Author and the audience.

Then, we have to get to **Know the Geographic Conditions.**

We recently studied the story of the Samaritan Woman at the Well...remember how He had to go through Samaria?

You go and you look at a map you see this path leaving Judea and going back to Galilee. And the most common path for people to take in that day because of the deep hatred for Samaritans was to go around Samaria. But John 4:4 says Jesus had to go through Samaria. It is a picture of Jesus going really in a sense outside of the norm because he was pursuing the people that no one else cared about, that everyone else ignored. We know this because we have considered the geography

Get to Know the **Social Conditions.**

John 4:7. When we read that 7When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" Socially this is way out of bounds, a man talking to a woman in public. Not only a man talking to a woman, but a Jew talking to a Samaritan. This is way out of bounds socially. We don't feel that unless we know the Historical Cultural Context there.

Get to Know the **Religious Conditions**

When 9The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.[a]) And you know the religious divide that goes all the way back to the Old Testament and this divide where the Samaritans accept the first five Books of the Old Testament but kind of check out after that and the Jewish people didn't and the divide that is there as a result of that. We need to know the Religious Conditions in John 4.

Get to **Know the Economic Conditions**

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" We need to know that economically this woman would have to come out repeatedly to this well to get water. Most of the time you would come out with others, but she is coming out along which says something about her. There are Economic Conditions at work here.

Get to **know the Political Climate**

Political Conditions. At the end of their conversation 25 The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." They were looking for a political Messiah. That was the picture and it helps to understand the expectations of Messiah for how Jesus is being revealed in the Gospels.

All those different facets of context. You see how just one passage, you see geography, history, politics, economics.

Then Third we have Theological Context

Every passage we study in scripture fits into the overall picture of scripture.

We constantly consider the patterns that were being developed in the Old Testament. We see them carried through in the New Testament.

I love this quote from J. I. Packer. He said 'the Bible appears like a symphony orchestra with the Holy Ghost as its Toscanini. With each instrument has been brought willingly, spontaneously, creatively to play its notes just as the great conductor desired though none of them could ever hear the music as a whole. The point of each part only becomes fuller clear when seen in a relation to all the rest.'

We don't read different texts in isolation from one another. We read them in their theological context, how they fit in to the overall message of the Bible.

There **are 4 C's** and we are working our way through the second one. We have learned how to see all that is in the Scripture...the content...Now we have an understanding of the context...what it meant to the original audience and the context that we bring to the process.

This step is the most critical one...because this is where we begin interpretation. If we don't get this one right...then what we bring forward to our lives today and the truth that we use to change our lives will be flawed.

I believe that this step is the most critical one. And I believe that how we approach this step...the heart that we bring to the text...is the key to finding the gold.

I started earlier by saying that we must not stand over the text but rather we must sit under the text in humility. Every time we open this book...it is a worship experience. Time with Holy Spirit exploring the mysteries of God. Uncovering truths hidden to those whose hearts are not all in, but revealed to those who persevere to find truth.

These are ancient historical documents...written by God....handed down through generations. Guarded in secrecy at times...precisely copied by hand and protected from those desperate to destroy it....handed down through the blood of martyrs **PHOTO** ...From person to person....parent to child...grandparent to grandchild.....believer to sinner....these words bring hope for the desperate....love for the unloved...peace to those riddled with fear....forgiveness for those shackled with guilt and shame....eternal life for those sentenced to death...These words....from the Heart of God...to those He most desperately loves. The first words from God to his people....etched in stone on Mt Sinai...broken by man...then given again by God....

Imagine if you had the original stones from Mt Sinai where God inscribed the Ten Commandments to Moses....Imagine looking inside the Ark of the Covenant and seeing those stones....the very words of God...given to you.

Now imagine that added to that was the ancient documents that contain the story of God and the Jewish People.....and the very words of God spoken first through His Prophets to the Jewish People and now recorded so that they can speak to us too.

Given to you are the secrets of God....the advice of the wisest man who ever lived....Imagine dusting off the pages of history....that reveal the story of the Godman....Jesus...His story told by those who were there....

Incredibly the gift continues....God telling us about the early church....the challenges, failures and successes....and then as if an afterthought....God telling us the end of His Story on earth and the beginning of our life in eternity.

Every time you open this book....you must open it with incredible humility...Tell the story of Wayne Cordero in his book The Divine Mentor

I brought today some of my collection of antique Bibles...I collect antique Bibles because they remind me that the words of God have never changed...When I hold a bible that was held by a Civil War Soldier...or that sat in a dining parlor and was read by families in the early 1800's...and I look at the very same pages...the pages where others...who are now in Heaven...have looked during desperate times for hope and great times for praise.....It prepares my heart...to continue the legacy.

Charles Spurgeon said, "A Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to someone who is not"...Sometimes people place or write what is most dear in their hearts next to the very words of God. **PHOTO 1** Some of my bibles have Genealogies, **PHOTO 2** Leaves, pressed flowers, **PHOTO 3** locks of hair, death certificates, **PHOTO 4** notes about family, all dear to someone's heart and what better place to keep it than with the Word of God.

Do you remember that I told you I first read the passage 7 times? I do so with one of these Bibles....I know it may sound weird, but I open the most ancient text that I can find and I almost never dust off the dust that collects on them. I turn off all the lights in the room with the exception of a single light on my desk at I turn it down to dim. **PHOTO 5** If you have watched my YouTube channel FBT you have seen this bible on my desk....it dates to 1872. **PHOTO 6**

Sometimes I will read it by candlelight...I do this so I will never forget the weight and responsibility that comes with trying to understand and teach God's Word. Your heart and your awareness of your unworthiness to know the secrets of God....your reverence for God....for His truth...and for your relationship with Him....is the correct lens that helps you to find Gold and find God. Humility is the beginning of Wisdom. Let's pray.