

Week 4 - STR Video: Context

Introduction

Review: We learned last week that a Scripture passage has one meaning and many applications. For the next three weeks, we will learn clues to help us find the meaning of any passage in the Bible.

Engage: How can “...all things work together for good...” be taken out of context? We’ll discuss this more after we watch the video.

Tip: Today’s video is about context. Before we watch it we’ll quickly introduce another Bible reading tip that is closely related to context. This is the “error of the ellipses” - the three dots [...] that indicate something has been left out of a quote. People will use them when quoting a verse in writing. They are much harder to find when a verse is quoted verbally. The problem with ellipses is that what is left out may be vital to understanding a verse’s true meaning.

Questions about the Video

Alan cited Psalm 14:1 without context. What do we learn from this example?

This course is called, “Never Read a Bible Verse” because:

The danger of a context vacuum is:

Analogy of Faith

Take a look at the graphic below. Much of what was discussed in the video is the grammatical context of words, sentences, and paragraphs and the context of the book. There are other kinds of context that will help us understand what we're reading. A tool for understanding the context of the testament (old/new) and the whole bible is called the "analogy of faith" or "analogy of scripture."

TRACKING THE CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE	
(1) WORD	WHAT DOES THIS WORD MEAN?
(2) SENTENCES	WHAT DOES IT MEAN IN THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT?
(3) BOOK	HOW DOES THE REST OF THE BOOK SHIINE MORE LIGHT?
(4) BOOKS/AUTHOR	HOW DOES IT FIT WITH OTHER BOOKS?
(5) GENRE	WHAT INSIGHT DOES THE GENRE, TYPE OF LITERATURE, GIVE?
(6) TESTAMENT	HOW DOES THE REST OF THIS PART OF THE BIBLE SPEAK TO THIS?
(7) WHOLE BIBLE	HOW DOES IT FIT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WHOLE BIBLE'S WITNESS?
J.A. MEDDERS SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY	

During the Reformation, the Reformers established the analogy of faith to guide biblical interpretation and prevent speculative readings. This principle, also known as the analogy of Scripture, holds that Scripture interprets itself, with the Bible's overall teaching serving as the supreme authority for understanding individual verses. It affirms that all parts of the Bible are harmonious and coherent, without contradiction. Unclear passages should be interpreted by comparing them to clearer passages on the same topic, ensuring alignment with the Bible's unified message.

An example of the use of Analogy of Faith to reconcile a problem passage is the "Faith Without Works is Dead" Debate (James 2:17 vs. Romans 3:28). We won't work it out here, but this debate can be resolved by reading Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 4:5, and Romans 11:6 and understanding James 2:17 in a larger Biblical context.

Application with Context

Let's return to Romans 8:28. People often quote Romans 8:28 as: "[...] all things work together for good [...]"

What do people mean when they quote this? People often misunderstand the phrase "all things work together for good"

Now, let's get it in context. Somebody read Romans 8:16–30 and listen for the train of thought to give verse 28 its proper context.

Romans 8:16–30 ESV

[16] The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, [17] and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.**

[18] For I consider that the **sufferings** of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. [19] For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. [20] For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. [23] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. [24] For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? [25] But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

[26] Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. [27] And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. [28] And we know that for **those who love God** all things work together for good, for **those who are called according to his purpose.** [29] For those whom he **foreknew** he also **predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. [30] And those whom he **predestined** he also **called**, and those whom he **called** he also **justified**, and **those whom he justified he also glorified.** (ESV)

This Week: In your Bible reading look for places where the surrounding context helps you understand the meaning of a verse.

Extra Credit

For those who want to explore the Analogy of Faith example further, here is a guide to working it out:

Let's apply the Analogy of Faith to a problem passage: The "Faith Without Works is Dead" Debate (James 2:17 vs. Romans 3:28).

- Read James 2:17 and Romans 3:28. James 2:17 states, "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead," which seems to contradict Romans 3:28, where Paul writes, "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." This apparent tension has fueled debates about faith and works in salvation.
- Remember that the Analogy of Faith says that difficult passages should be interpreted by comparing them to clearer passages assuming consistency with the Bible's unified message. Read Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 4:5, and Romans 11:6.
 - [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV)
 - [5] And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, (Romans 4:5 ESV)
 - [6] But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. (Romans 11:6 ESV)
- These verses (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 4:5, and Romans 11:6) clearly teach that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, not by works.
- However, Ephesians 2:10 adds, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works," suggesting that works follow faith as evidence of it.
 - [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10 ESV)
- Using the analogy of faith, what can we say about James 2:17 in light of Paul's teachings - James is not saying that works earn salvation but that genuine faith naturally produces good works as its fruit. A "dead" faith is one that lacks evidence of true conversion. The clearer passages in Paul's writings affirm that justification is by grace alone through faith alone, while James emphasizes that true faith is demonstrated by actions, resolving the apparent contradiction.