



every
member
able to
admonish

"I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another."
- Romans 15:14

a scriptural basis

Ephesians 4:11-16 – Spiritual and consequently Scriptural growth are required for proper functioning

Hebrews 5:12-14 – Inability to use the Word skillfully makes one a spiritual “babe”

contextual analysis

Context is King! This level of study is the most important of all. Contextual analysis is the study of a passage within the framework of the other passages surrounding it. There are two levels of contextual analysis we will consider.

the book level

The first is the context and purpose of the book that is being studied. There are three questions we should consider in this analysis. A good study Bible or Bible Handbook will help answer these questions.

1. Who was the writer? What was his spiritual background and experience?

This can usually be answered by looking at the beginning or end of a book. There is only one New Testament book with unclear authorship (Hebrews). Some of the Old Testament books, like Chronicles or Kings, are compilations written by historians over many years.

2. To whom was he writing?

Again, this should be obvious as many New Testament books bear the names of their intended audience (the Epistles). Other books of the Old Testament are written as general history, proverbs, and teaching for all to read or are directed to certain believers at certain times.

3. What was the writer’s purpose (intention) in writing this particular book?

Here are a few helpful hints to determine the writer’s purpose:

a. Look for a clear statement of intent or a repetition of certain phrases.

What is the purpose of 1 John? (See 1 John 1:4; 2:1; 5:13)

b. Look at the specific points being made by the writer.

What was the purpose of the book of Hebrews? (See Hebrews 10:34-35, 10:19-23; 12:1-3)

c. Look at issues that are focused on or are omitted from the text.

By noticing repeated themes or the omission of certain material, we can learn about the purpose of a text. For example, 1 and 2 Chronicles do not give us a complete history of Israel’s monarchy. In fact, these books quote from other histories of Israel that can no longer be found (see 2 Chronicles 9:29). What we do see is a pattern of narratives demonstrating that Israel’s success is dependent upon her obedience to God.

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the passage level

The second level of contextual analysis we will look at is the immediate context of the passage in question. The following are some questions to ask as you investigate a passage. As an example, we will look at Romans 13:8 as we go through these questions. Does this passage teach that we shouldn't go into debt?

1. What are the major blocks of material and how do they fit together into a whole?

If you don't have the time to read and outline the book you are studying yourself, it is easy to find a good outline of each book of the Bible to get you started. Bible Handbooks or Study Bibles usually contain these outlines. Identifying the major blocks of material around our passage gives us a bird's eye view of the book. We will need this information as we answer the next question.

2. How does the passage under consideration contribute to the flow of the writer's argument?

This is where we really begin to answer the question of context. If we rightly divide (correctly interpret) the passage, we should see it fitting seamlessly into the flow of the writer's thought. Read the passages surrounding Romans 13:8 and determine how it fits into Paul's argument about civic and social duties.

3. Is the passage stating descriptive or prescriptive truth?

Is the writer describing something that happened or are they prescribing commandments from God? It is really important to distinguish between the two. For example, Abraham lied about the identity of his wife, Sarah. Abraham is also called the Father of the faithful. That doesn't mean that Abraham is perfect or that everything the Scriptures teach us about him is an example for us. Abraham sinned when he lied about his wife. This is descriptive, rather than prescriptive truth.

Is Romans 13:8 descriptive or prescriptive?

4. What constitutes the teaching focus of the passage and what is incidental detail?

This question is most relevant when we deal with prophesy and parables. However, it is still important to understand God's intention in the text and make sure we don't go beyond that. Many interpretive errors are made when people misuse Scriptural illustrations. As an example, look at 1 Corinthians 3:16.

What is the teaching intent of this passage?

What are some possible abuses of this passage?

Is there any incidental detail in Romans 13:8?

5. Who is being addressed in the passage?

It is important to know the intended audience of the passage. This allows us to determine how a bridge might be made to us today. Is the teaching intended for New Testament believers? If so, then it applies directly to us. Is it written to the Old Testament nation of Israel? If so, it may not directly apply to us as a command, but it does apply as an example. Read the following... does it apply to you?

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Matt. 27:5 – “...(Judas) departed, and went and hanged himself.” ; **Luke 10:37** – “...Go and do thou likewise” ; **John 13:27** – “...That thou doest, do quickly.”

Who is the intended audience in Romans 13:8? How does this passage apply to you?

questions

question 1:

You are discussing with a person the need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as the only means of salvation. He claims that living a moral life is what God expects of us, and shows you Micah 6:8 to validate his point.

Micah 6:8 – “He hath shewed thee, O man, what [*is*] good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

Will you argue that this verse is consistent with your point of view, and if so, how will you do it? If you take the point of view that salvation was by works in the Old Testament (as this verse seems to suggest), how will you reconcile this with Paul’s statement in Galatians 2:16 that “by works of the law shall no flesh be justified”

question 2:

A Christian man lost his job during the economic recession of 1974-1975. He and his wife interpreted Romans 8:28 (“all things work together for good...”) to mean that he lost his job in order that God might give him a better-paying one. Consequently he turned down several lower- or equal-paying job opportunities and remained on unemployment for over two years before returning to work. Do you agree with his way of interpreting this verse? Why, or why not?

question 3:

A person comes to you at the request of her husband. She says she has had a vision that instructed her to leave her husband and family and go to Bulgaria as a missionary. Her husband has tried to reason with her that this vision must have some other explanation than being sent from God since: (1) her children and husband need her, (2) God has not given the rest of the family a similar call; (3) she has no financial support, and (4) the mission boards to whom she has applied have not accepted her. Her continuing response to all this is to quote Proverbs 3:5-6 (“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. **6** In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”) How would you counsel her, particularly regarding this verse, since it seems to be a mainstay of her obsession?