

# Hermeneutics

## Week 8 – Application

**Introduction:** No one gets onto a plane hoping not to land somewhere. Everyone is often going on holiday, to a family member's place, or maybe just heading back home. But regardless, their hope is that the plane will get them on board, take off, and land. Imagine, if you will, a pilot got you on the plane, took off, drove around in circles, and then just brought you right back to where you started. That would feel like a waste of money. Many have described giving a message or talking through and interpreting a scripture without the application is akin to flying a plane with no intention of landing it.

### I. The What of Application

1. Application is the intention to obey God based upon the truths of God's word.
2. Truths are noted in general because, as mentioned before, truths are reached in a multifaceted way.
3. These truths can come to be known in ways such as.
  - A. Direct Commands – Imperatives
  - B. Explicit statements – propositions
  - C. Approved Examples – Patterns or Models
  - D. Inference – Logical Conclusions
  - E. Implication – meaning suggested but not directly stated
  - F. Descriptions – Narratives
  - G. Theological Theme – Keeps in mind big picture truths.
4. The application can become more difficult to faithfully apply as one moves more abstractly.
  - A. For example, "Do not murder" is easier to faithfully apply than the theme of sovereignty.
  - B. However, even the direct commands can create some levels of difficulty with the application.
  - C. For instance, don't eat meat offered to idols. What might someone be missing if they just say okay I didn't?

### II. The Who of Application

1. As we talked about last week, the problem among non-believing students and scholars is that they hear and understand but don't do (Some claim they do, but they may be doing things their own way, lessening the truth of God).
2. Obviously, then, those who will actually incorporate Biblical ideals will be Christians.
3. Occasionally, those who know God and find general wisdom in godly living will follow those, for instance, even Richard Dawkins calls himself a cultural Christian; however, the goal of the Christian life is not general morality but to know and love Christ.

### III. The Why of Application

1. Why should Christians care about applying the Word?
  - A. Because God's intention was for us not just to know about him but to follow him and thus become like him.
    - † **James 1:22-25** – *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.<sup>23</sup> For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like*

*unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:<sup>24</sup> For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.<sup>25</sup> But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*

† **2 Tim 3:17** – *That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

† **Eph 2:10** – *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

**B.** To hear and rightly apply is to live wisely. These are things that are needed not just for us but people of all time.

**i.** “The Bible claims that its message is relevant for later generations, not just its original readers. After Moses wrote down the law and assigned the Levites as its custodians, he gave instructions for them to read it every seven years before the assembled people (Deut. 31:9–13).”<sup>1</sup>

† **Psalm 119:7-9** – *I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.<sup>8</sup> I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.<sup>9</sup> Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.*

**2.** Why should we study how to rightly give biblical application?

**A.** “The internationally renowned preacher and homiletics professor Haddon Robinson has made the provocative but probably true statement, “More heresy is preached in application than in Biblical exegesis.”<sup>2</sup>

**B.** “Application requires more individual attention and thought on the teacher’s behalf than any of the preceding steps. It is the place where responsible and orthodox exegesis can lead either to brilliance or to treachery.”<sup>3</sup>

#### **IV.** The How of Application

##### **1.** The Difficulty in Application

**A.** Christians tend to make one of two errors in applying the Bible. Either they give too little attention to application or they give too much attention to it.<sup>4</sup>

**B.** In the first error some feel interpretation is enough, that Bible study is complete when a passage has been interpreted.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 603.

<sup>2</sup> Craig L. Blomberg and Jennifer Foutz Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 240.

<sup>3</sup> Blomberg and Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*, 241.

<sup>4</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth*, ed. Craig Bubeck Sr. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1991), 279.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

- C. In the second error others tend to move toward application before fully and accurately interpreting the passage. However, application without interpretation leaves us open to applying the Bible improperly.<sup>6</sup>
- i. “We misapply the Bible when we ignore the original situation and latch onto a situation that is not a genuine parallel. There may be a superficial connection, but one or more of the important aspects of this intersection between the text and original situation is missing. This often happens by ignoring the original situation.”<sup>7</sup>
    - 1) In God’s wrestling with Jacob (Gen. 32:24–30), He was seeking to gain Jacob’s submission to His will. It would be a faulty interpretation to say this passage teaches that Jacob wrestled in his prayer life with God until he got God to give him what he desired. That faulty interpretation in turn would lead to an inaccurate application if we said that we, like Jacob, must wrestle with God in our prayer life to free Him to answer our prayers.<sup>8</sup>
    - ii. Think of the application like you are out hunting, you are aiming your gun, intending to fire. The interpretation process is the aiming and preparation for the firing, which is the application. If we do not aim properly, we are likely to miss, and the further the target is, the more we may miss.
2. The system to come to the Application
- A. Using the Interpretive Journey using the book example of Phil 4:13.
    - i. Grasp the Text in their town
      - 1) In light of the historical-cultural context, summarize what you discovered about the original situation.
      - 2) Consider the book as a whole as well as the specific passage you are trying to apply.
      - 3) You can write a summary paragraph or simply list your observations about the situation.
      - 4) Either way, make sure that you have a clear picture of the original historical-cultural situation.
      - 5) As part of this step, write a statement of what the text meant for the biblical audience, keeping everything in past tense. From this past-tense statement, you will find it easy to transition to a theological principle<sup>9</sup>
      - 6) In this particular passage, you might write something like, “Paul told the Philippians that he had learned to be content in a variety of difficult circumstances through Christ, who gave him strength.”

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<sup>6</sup> Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 279.

<sup>7</sup> J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, Fourth Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 245–246.

<sup>8</sup> Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 282.

<sup>9</sup> Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 242.

- ii. Measure the Width of the River
  - 1) The Christian today is separated from the biblical audience by a “river” of differences (e.g., language, culture, circumstances).
  - 2) This river hinders us from moving straight from meaning in their context to meaning in ours.
  - 3) We are certainly part of the same great story, but our place in the story is often different from that of our spiritual ancestors.<sup>10</sup>
- iii. Cross the Principlizing Bridge
  - 1) Simply write down the principle (or principles) the passage communicates.
  - 2) When you identify the theological truths or principles conveyed by a passage, you are discerning what is timeless in the passage and beginning to bridge the gap between the biblical text and the contemporary world.
  - 3) This will likely be similar to the meaning you identified in step 1 above, but you will now use present- or future-tense verbs.<sup>11</sup>
  - 4) As for Philippians 4:13, you could say, “Believers can learn to be content in a variety of circumstances through Christ, who gives them strength.” Or you might prefer, “Christ will give believers strength to be content in a variety of trying circumstances that come as a result of following him faithfully.”
- iv. When evaluating your principles from a text, here is a good general rule of thumb
  - 1) Make sure given principle has come straight from the text at hand.
  - 2) Check to see that the principal incorporates all of the main elements of the text and does not conveniently neglect any important component.
  - 3) Make sure that the principal is not tied to the particular situation, but can truly express its original intention and cultures all over the world and throughout history.
- v. Consult the Biblical map
  - 1) Here you need to see how the theological principle you have discovered fits with the rest of Scripture.
  - 2) Although the Bible is made up of sixty-six books, it tells a single overarching story, and we need to make sure that our principle isn’t refuted by the clear teaching of the rest of the Bible.
  - 3) It’s particularly important when interpreting the Old Testament to see how a principle derived from an Old Testament passage might be fulfilled or modified in the New Testament.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 243.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 243–244.

- 4) With Philippians 4:13 we don't see anything in the principle we have discovered that is refuted by the rest of the Bible.
  - vi. Grasp the Text in our town
    - 1) What you find in this intersection between the biblical text and the original situation lies at the center of the application process.
    - 2) Paul, a Christian who's experiencing a variety of circumstances as a result of following Christ faithfully.
    - 3) Theological principle in the text: Christ will give Paul strength to endure such difficult situations.
    - 4) Parallel situation today: Christians facing a variety of trying circumstances. As a result of following Christ faithfully.
    - 5) Application of Theological Principle: Christ will give these Christians strength to endure such difficult circumstances.
    - 6) Application is not just needing to know what to do but how to do it.
    - 7) Using the application of the theological principle that we used above from Philippians 4:13: Saying Christ will give these Christians the strength to endure such difficult circumstances. This can grow more specific by noting.
      - a) We should think differently by...
      - b) we should do...
      - c) We should do something in this way...
      - d) We should pray for...
  - B. Zuck encourages the interpreter to be attentive to what is normative today.
    - i. "We are not expecting a trip to the third heaven like Paul's (2 Cor. 12:1–10).
    - ii. Nor do we believe that God restocks the food supply of those who feed traveling preachers as He did for the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:8–16.
    - iii. Leprosy patients do not dip seven times in a river to be cured (2 Kings 5:1–14).
    - iv. Nor do we throw sticks on the ground and expect them to turn into serpents (Ex. 4:2–3)<sup>13</sup>
  - C. Klein Blomberg and Hubbard say it this way... when looking for an application
    - i. Determine the original application(s) intended by the passage.
    - ii. Evaluate the level of specificity of those applications to their original historical situations. If the original specific applications are transferable across time and space to other audiences and situations, apply them in culturally appropriate ways.
    - iii. If the original applications are not transferable, identify one or more broader cross-cultural principles that the specific elements of the text reflect.
    - iv. Find appropriate applications for today that implement those principles.<sup>14</sup>
- Conclusion:** The goal of interpretation must be to end in application, and the goal of application is to do God's word in such a way that we have rightly honored the Lord in our modern day.

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<sup>13</sup> Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 285.

<sup>14</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 610.

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