

Lesson 21 – APPLICATION

I. INTRO: Application as a Goal of Interpretation

A. Definition of Application: Application refers to living out the ongoing **relevance** of biblical truth.

1. Technically application is not part of the interpretation process.
2. The first goal of interpretation is to determine what the author intended and what the text meant when it was first written and read.
3. But this is not the only goal of interpretation. As believers we are under the Bible's authority and obligated to believe and obey it as God intends. **1 Tim. 1:5**

B. The Relevance of Scripture: While each portion of the Bible was written to different people at different times, each portion is relevant to us to **varying** degrees. **2 Tim. 3:14-17**

1. In Bible interpretation it is important to know to whom the text was first written. This is fundamentally important.
2. While the Bible was not written "to us" today, it was nonetheless written "**for us**." Its truths are relevant to us even when some specific instructions are not.
3. Whenever we encounter Scripture, we should eventually ask, "Is there a command for ME to obey?" — "Is there promise to believe?" — "Is there an example to follow?" — "Is there a sin to forsake?" — "Is there a practice to begin?" — "Is there a truth to believe?"

C. Kinds of Application: Application runs along several different lines and can take many shapes.

1. **Personal Application:** Every believer is under the authority of the Scripture and should carefully and prayerfully seek to live out the principles of God's Word. **Ps 119**
2. **Pastoral Application:** Every teacher of Scripture (whether a pastor, teacher, or parent) must shepherd others in how to apply God's Word in their lives.
3. **Practical Application:** Sometimes applications involve actions to change, sins to avoid, habits to begin, relationships to mend, etc.
4. **Philosophical Application:** Sometimes the applications involve changes of attitude, heart, & **mind**; or reinforcements of our beliefs, or improvements of our understanding of God and His ways in the world.
5. **NOTE:** For any passage of Scripture there is only 1 correct interpretation. But that one interpretation may yield multiple applications.

II. COMMON ERRORS: Missed & Mistaken Applications

A. Thinking that proper interpretation is **enough.**

1. Sometimes the student of the Word finds great joy in coming to a right understanding of a passage.
2. But rejoicing in right understanding can blind us sometimes to our failure to live out what the text requires. **James 1:22-25**
3. Luther, "[The Bible] is not merely to be repeated and known but to be lived and felt."

B. **Confusing application with interpretation.**

1. We must be careful to interpret the text before finalizing application.
2. Just because a text uses the word "I" doesn't mean that I myself should personalize it.

C. **Divorcing application from interpretation.**

1. Sometimes a Bible reader rightly understands the original meaning of a passage but then makes a completely unrelated application.
2. **Isaiah 40:6-8** describes people as grass and wildflowers which wither and fade. One might rightly understand the passage but make errant application about how **beautiful** our brief lives are.

D. Making applications from a misinterpreted text.

1. Sometimes a reader misinterprets a passage & then makes edifying application from it.
2. In **Matt 5:45**, Jesus taught that God sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteousness.
 - a. This has been misunderstood to mean that depression comes to everybody. True.
 - b. But this application is based on a misunderstanding of the goodness of rain, a common grace that extends to all people, not just to God's people.

E. **Claiming verses as personally relevant.**

1. Believers sometimes think that the Spirit has told them to follow the wording of a particular verse as some kind of special instruction.

2. Example: In **Isaiah 43:18-19**, Yahweh says to forget the past and focus on the new things Yahweh will do.

- a. Some Christians claim this passage when they are in a time of transition in life.
- b. But Yahweh is telling Israel that their future **deliverance** from Babylon will be even greater than it was from Egypt.

F. Over-generalizing.

1. **1 Timothy 6:5** says that the false teachers in Ephesus were motivated by **greed**.

- a. There are certainly false teachers today motivated by greed. But we would be over-generalizing to say that all false teachers are motivated that way.
- b. False teachers might be motivated by many different things. Paul is confronting one kind of false teacher.

2. **2 Chronicles 7:14** famously says that God will heal His people's land when they pray.

- a. This is often applied to the USA. But the promise is specifically made to Israel in the context of the **Mosaic** covenant.
- b. The verse does not give a promise to Gentile believers who live in other countries. A better application would be to think about the assurances given to Christians in the New Covenant, such as the certainty of God's forgiveness and the guarantee of our **eternal** inheritance despite our own inconsistencies.

G. Thinking that meaning **changes** over time.

- 1. This error is common when interpretation is not distinguished from application, as well as when instinct is used in handling Scripture. The assumption is that the Spirit breathes new life into passages as time move on.
- 2. In **John 16:13** Jesus told the 11 disciples that the Spirit would continue teaching them what He had for them to learn, that He would further reveal to them future events.
 - a. It's clear in the context that the promise is intended for the 11, not for all believers.
 - b. Many Bible readers assume there must be another meaning to the text that is relevant to them. They read themselves into the "you."

I. Relying on spiritual **intuition**.

- 1. The Bible does not promise the Spirit will give us perfect intuition for interpreting & applying.
- 2. This error often leads to claiming verses, e.g., declaring this to be a yr of Jubilee (**Lev 25:10**).

J. **Parrotting** verses commonly applied wrongly.

- 1. Christians naturally repeat verses in ways they've heard them used by people they trust.
- 2. **Isaiah 55:11** is widely used to encourage people to share the Word, confident that God will do something with it. But the context shows that the certainty is that God will do specifically what He's promised in His Word, not that He promises to do something with His Word when we repeat it.

III. GOOD APPLICATIONS: Principles for Doing it Right (Adapted from Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*)

- A. Be sure the application flows out of interpretation.
- B. Find out what was expected of the original audience—what was the application to them?
- C. Recognize how God's rule varies in different ages.
 - 1. Commands and promises are always based on something in the context of Bible history.
 - 2. Before we apply commands or promises, we must know which covenant arrangement we are in.
 - (1) We relate to God through the New Covenant announced in the Gospel.
 - (2) We must filter all application through the Gospel.
- D. Base applications on things we share with the original audience (e.g., timeless principles).
- E. Determine what is normative for today.
 - 1. The NT, particularly the epistles, gives us guidance as to what is normal for Christian experience today.
- F. Look for principles inherent in the text.
- G. Seek the help of the Spirit.