

REVELATION



INSPIRATION



ANIMATION



COLLECTION



TRANSLATION



ILLUMINATION



INTERPRETATION



APPLICATION

2

COMMUNICATION

THE WRITTEN WORD

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, November 22, 2009

Digging for Gold in God's Word

Tucked away in the ancient texts of Scripture--like gold hidden in the earth--are God's timeless principles for living. One of the tasks of Bible study is to carefully unearth those principles, and translate them into twenty-first century application.

One of the important skills that must be developed in Bible study is the skill of seeking--from out of time-bound, culturally-based portions of Scripture--God's eternal principles for life. This is not to say that Scripture is in any way "dated" or "archaic". It's simply a matter of recognizing that God gives us these eternal principles in stories, biographies, poetry, histories, parables, visions, letters or prophecies, that require that we accurately see them in these contexts, draw them out, and translate them into twenty-first century applications.

I. WHAT IS A 'PRINCIPLE'?

- A. A principle, as we're defining it in this study, is a carefully worded, biblically sound statement of a timeless, universal proposition that can be translated into contemporary application. For example, the Bible doesn't say anything about computers directly; but it does say much about stealing that has application to contemporary use of computer software. We don't live under the authority of a king; but what the Bible says about life under a king instructs us in how to be submitted to civil authority.
- B. Principles are legitimate to draw from Scripture. One of the greatest expressions of its legitimacy is found in 1 Corinthians 10:11-13. Read that passage and see how the Corinthians were told that certain things happened in the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness as "examples" for "admonition" to the Corinthian Christians.

II. SOME SAFEGUARDS IN THE SEARCH FOR 'PRINCIPLES'.

- A. Drawing principles from Scripture can be a dangerous thing if done carelessly. Here are some common errors to avoid¹:
 1. Make sure that principles are based on sound interpretation. One of the great mistakes people make is that of trying to make the Bible say what they want it to say. All the practices of good Bible interpretation should stand behind the principles we draw. Let the Bible guide the principle rather than the principle guide our interpretation of the Bible.
 2. Don't base a principle on subjective encounters with the Bible. We've all heard people say, "This is what this passage means *to me*." A sound principle isn't drawn from what we feel the Bible means, but on the basis of what it truly says.
 3. Don't 'spiritualize' a passage in order to draw a principle. Spiritualization occurs when we "discover" a mystical meaning to a passage that would not be obvious to the normal reader of the text--or that gives "meanings" to details in the text in an illegitimate way. Let the Bible speak in a normal, natural, literal, historical, grammatical sense.
- B. Here are some basic ground-rules to remember²:
 1. A sound principle will always correlate with the general teaching of Scripture. In our lesson on interpretation, we mentioned the principle of the analogy of Scripture. That principle applies when it comes to "principles". A principle would be wrongly drawn if is in clear contradiction to what the Bible says elsewhere. Or to put it another way, a good principle is consistent with the Bible's teaching as a whole.

2. A sound principle should speak to the issues of real-life today. If the statement of a principle is still bound to the time, culture, and experiences of people in the past, it's not a well-stated principle. Proverbs 27:23-27 teaches us to 'know the state of your flocks'; but what does that passage mean to those of us who do not have sheep?
3. A sound principle is transferrable to a course of action. A good principle should be more than simply hypothetical. It should be a statement of something active--something God wants us to believe, or do, or say, or avoid.

III. STEPS IN DRAWING 'PRINCIPLES'

- A. Study the passage carefully in order to come to a good, faithful interpretation. Use all the rules of good Bible study that we've already talked about.
- B. Bridge the gaps. There are several things that separate you from the way the passage may have applied to original readers of the text:
 1. *History.* What is different about your times from theirs? What experiences did their immediate history give to the context of this passage? Were there commands given that are specific to them?
 2. *Culture.* What are their unique presuppositions, viewpoints and experiences? If you put yourself in their culture, would your understanding of this passage be different than if you only saw it from the standpoint of your own?
 3. *Geography.* Does the landscape, weather patterns, and travel needs of the people to whom the passage was written make its application unique?
 4. *Language.* Are there unique phrases or figures of speech that need to be interpreted before you can understand how this text was understood by the original readers? Are you imposing a meaning to things from your time that they would not have understood in theirs?
- C. State the principle as it would have applied to them. Don't skip this step. Before you can understand what this passage means to you, you must first make sure you accurately understand what it meant to them.
- D. Restate the principle in twenty-first century terms. Consider whether your situation is identical to theirs or only comparable to theirs. How is it identical? How is it only comparable? Restate the broad principle in a way that is appropriate to the relationship of your situation to theirs.
- E. Check your work. Would someone from biblical times, to whom the passage was first written, be able to see the same eternal principle from what you stated? Does the principle, as you stated it, fit with what the Scriptures command you to do elsewhere? Can you now transfer this principle to action?

¹Adapted from *The MacArthur Study Bible* (1997, Word Publishing), p. xxi.

²Adapted from Howard G. Hendricks, and William D. Hendricks, *Living By The Book* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), pp. 318-21.