

Using the New Testament

Introduction:

- A. Understanding the New Testament is critical for its use
 - 1. 2Tim. 2:15; 1Peter 3:15
 - 2. How can we be certain we are properly applying God's Word?

I. ESTABLISH RELEVANCE

- A. Begin where we need to begin; do not skip steps
 - 1. Illustration: teaching salvation by beginning with the five finger exercise. Start with where the prospect needs to begin, with his present condition and why he needs to be saved, continue with what the Father and Son have done for him, etc.
- B. Before we use or apply any passage from the NT, we must first establish relevance of the passage to our current state
 - 1. Not a subjective concept; always consider passage relevant unless there is a compelling reason not to
- C. High relevance: fully applicable to us today, just as when written
 - 1. Gal. 5:18-23; Phil. 2:5-11
 - 2. Paul speaks to us as he does to his immediate audience
- D. Moderate relevance: Directed in a particular context, but we can derive lessons from it
 - 1. Rom. 2:17-29 - Context is firmly established: Paul wrote to Jews who justified themselves by their lineage
 - 2. While not directly relevant, we learn how to avoid taking pride in our personal heritage and back story
 - 3. Jesus' promises to His disciples in John 14-17 are only for the apostles, but can help us understand our relationship with God and how His word came to us
 - 4. We cannot expect the same dispensation of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17), but we can learn a great deal from it (John 14:1-4)
- E. Low relevance: A passage firmly rooted in a context without much application for us
 - 1. Many times parts of the New Testament are not directly relevant to us
 - 2. The conclusions of Paul's letters that involve direct messages to specific persons - Rom. 16; Phil. 4:2-3
 - 3. It is not as if we can learn nothing from them, but we understand their full application was for specific times and settings

II. ESTABLISH AUTHORITY

- A. Authority in the New Testament is established by three means
- B. Divinely authorized commands
 - 1. Rom. 12; Eph. 6:1-4
 - 2. Commands instruct us in what we must do or must not do
 - 3. 1John 2:3-5

- C. Divinely approved examples
 - 1. 1Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17
 - 2. Examples that are approved by the inspired apostles establish Divinely approved patterns for us in which we can have confidence that we please God when we follow them
 - 3. Acts 20:7; 1Cor. 16:1-2
- D. Divine implication (commonly and inaccurately called “necessary inference”)
 - 1. Authority must come from God, and therefore He must imply something BEFORE we can draw an inference or conclusion from it. If God has not implied a matter, any inference we draw is in error. It is more accurate when speaking of Divine authority to describe this third aspect of it by means of where it comes from, that is, something God has implied.
 - 2. Acts 8:34-39 - Philip must have preached about baptism is implied since he preached Jesus, and the eunuch asked to be baptized
 - 3. Matt. 25:31-46 - Helping those in need is critical to salvation is implied when Jesus describes the Judgment in terms of how one helped those in need
 - 4. Matt. 22:29-32

III. ESTABLISH APPLICATION

- A. It is not enough, however, to simply see commands, examples, and Divine implications; we must consider their application. How do we carry out the instructions?
- B. The instructions are either general or specific
- C. General applications: a broad outline of responsibility with liberty in practice
 - 1. In commands, preaching the Gospel - Matt. 28:18-20
 - a. We are told to preach, but not given specifics on how to go, or where and with whom to begin
 - b. The only specifics are that at some point all nations must hear the commands of Christ
 - 2. In examples, assembling on the first day of the week - Acts 20:7
 - a. The first day of the week, but when, where, and how long?
 - 3. Divine implications often provide authority on a general scope, but will not address other details
 - a. The Lord implied that helping those in need is addressed in the Judgment - Matt. 25:31-46
 - b. Nothing is said about how many, how much, how often; this is left up to individual application
- D. Specific applications: When God speaks in specifics, we must follow the specifics without modification - Heb. 7:14; 2Sam. 7:7
 - 1. In specific authority, if something is not mentioned, it is not allowed
 - 2. In a command, we must follow precisely what is written
 - a. Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16 - specific command to sing, no command to play instruments; therefore, we sing without instruments
 - b. When God specifically commands a matter and its means, it excludes all other matters and means.

3. When an example is specific, we follow the specifics without variation
 - a. 1Cor. 11:23-26 - unleavened bread and fruit of the vine for the Lord's Supper follows the example of the original institution of the Lord's Supper
 - b. To require only one cup in the Supper goes beyond the example as given in the NT and creates an application not authorized
- E. The specifics of authority determine what we should do when nothing is written on a matter (commonly and inaccurately called the silence of scripture)
 1. If God's authority is absolute, and God has communicated His will, then anything He has not communicated is not authorized.
 2. In general authority, silence grants liberty in application
 3. In specific authority, silence prohibits individuality in application
- F. With liberties, if some have untrained faith in that particular means of fulfilling God's will, we must respect and accommodate them by finding a mutually agreeable way to apply the NT - Rom. 14:1 - 15:2

Conclusion:

- A. God has never failed to communicate His will to humankind, regardless of the means or dispensation
- B. God who is capable of creating the world with a word, is capable of communicating with His creation in such a way as to be completely understood by His creation
- C. We can understand and practice the NT the way God intended when He inspired its writing
- D. Eph. 3:3-4; 1John 5:20