

Meaning to Application

How important is application when it comes studying the Bible?

How would Jesus answer this?

John 14:21 Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.

Have + Keep = Love for Him.

We have not truly grasped the truth of God's Word until it has impacted both our thinking and our living. Christian biblical interpretation is incomplete until it has changed our hearts and lives.

There is a difference between knowing how to apply the Bible and applying it.

Application is submission to God, to His Word, with a humble and obedient heart.

When we truly grasp God's Word, we will find God's Word grasping us. In the end it's much more than just applying the Bible to our lives; it's about adjusting and conforming our lives to the Bible.

Application: The response of a Christian reader to God's Word, by the power of the Holy Spirit, whereby their hearts are changed, resulting in new ways of thinking, believing, desiring, and living.

- Application is dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Application is bound by the meaning of the text.
- Application involves being able to discern the areas of actions, attitudes, and heart motivations that need to change.
- Application relates directly to the reader's life circumstances.
- Application can vary from reader to reader.

Application seeks to answer the question: "How is this text relevant to my life?"

If you teach, or plan to teach the Bible, the distinction between meaning and application needs to become crystal clear to you.

Back to the Interpretive Journey. Steps 1-4 all deal with meaning.

Step 5 is application (grasping the text in our town).

How to Apply (Live Out) Meaning

Start by moving through the Interpretive Journey.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

1. What did the text mean to the biblical audience? (grasp the text in their town)

Summarize what the text originally meant in a past tense statement.

- Paul is able to endure every situation he faced—whether poverty or plenty—because Christ had already been giving him the strength to remain faithful and content.

Structure diagram Philippians 4:10-13:

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly
that now at length

you have revived your concern (honor highly) for me.

You were indeed concerned for me,
but you had no opportunity.

¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need,
for I have learned in whatever situation

I am to be content (manage life with what I have).

¹² I know how to be brought low,
and I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance,

I have learned the secret

(have one's fill) of facing plenty
and hunger,
(more than enough) abundance
and need.

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.
(I am capable in all situations through Him who makes me capable)

Paul was in prison, writing to the Philippian church. 1:7, 13-14, 17

Paul thanked them for their ministry and monetary gift in 4:10-18.

****Paul told them that he had learned to be content in a variety of difficult circumstances through Christ who gave Him strength.**

2. What are the differences between the biblical audience and us? (identify how wide the river of culture/time/situation)

The river is not wide. Both are written to New Testament believers in a local church.

We are not apostles. We are not in prison.

3. Write down the theological principle(s) found in the text (cross the principlizing bridge).

****Christians can learn to be content in a variety of circumstances through Christ, who gives them strength. Or**

****Christ will give believers strength to be content in a variety of trying circumstances that comes as a result of following Him faithfully.**

4. How does our theological principle fit with the rest of the Bible (consult the biblical map)?

We don't see anything in the rest of the Bible that would challenge or refute our theological principle.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Ephesians 3:16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

1 Timothy 1:12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service,

5. How should individual Christians today live out the theological principles (grasp the text in our town)? Apply it!

This step involves several sub steps.

- a. How did the original author want his audience to apply the meaning?** This is essential for applying in our present-day context.

In our example, note these key elements:

Element 1: Paul - A Christian

Element 2: A Christian who is experiencing a variety of trying circumstances because of following Christ faithfully.

Element 3: Christ will give the Christian strength to endure any circumstances.

- b. Make your applications specific.**

Bring the truth to the specifics of your life. Don't leave things vague and unclear.

****Specifically, ask what should I (and others) be, think, or do in light of this text's meaning?**

-Being addresses the character.

-Thinking addresses our understanding of God and our inner thoughts on everything else.

-Doing addresses the action we take in response.

- c. Think of a parallel situation in a contemporary context.**

Think about a situation in our day that contains all the key elements you noted above in step 5a. Make sure it includes all of them. If you omit one or more, then you are not properly applying.

Question: Does the athlete who uses this verse to conquer and achieve victory apply the verse properly? Answer this by looking at the 3 elements we identified in Step 5a.

Are they all there?

Element 2 is missing? Is that athlete experiencing trying circumstances like hunger or imprisonment because of them following Christ faithfully?

What if there is a boxing match and both fighters are Christians quoting that verse as they face off? Unless the "all things" to them includes losing and being content with it, then they really aren't applying it. If it is just translating to "I can win because of Christ," then that's not proper application.

Other examples:

A tired parent who works a full-time job unto the Lord is getting passed over for any promotions because of their known obedience to please Christ in their morals and ethics is now having trouble affording rent, food, gas, and other basic bills. But they are trusting in Christ for the strength to persevere in these struggles.

-This example has all 3 key elements

A mother of two small children whose unbelieving husband just left the family because of her commitment to Christ. She has many emotional, physical and financial burdens.

-This example has all 3 key elements

Another way to do this is to retell a biblical story in such a way that the original intended meaning comes through more clearly to the contemporary audience. This is called contemporizing.

Asking these questions will help you to find appropriate application:

1- Is there a command to obey in this passage?

- 2- Is there an example to follow or avoid in this passage?
- 3- Is there a reality to affirm in this passage?
- 4- If so, how should that reality impact my life? (desires, thoughts, beliefs, actions)
- 5- How can I praise Him through this scripture?
- 6- How can I confess my sins on the basis of this scripture?
- 7- If this is really true, what harmful emotions, what wrong behavior or false attitudes result in me when I forget this?
- 8- What should I be aspiring to on the basis of this text?
- 9- Why is God telling me this today?
- 10- How could my life be different if I were absolutely sure of every one of God's promises that He gave me in this scripture?
- 11- What are some of the challenges or roadblocks that make applying/obeying difficult? (sinful desires, temptations, struggles, wrong ideas, the culture we live in, etc.)
- 12- What would it specifically look like if I lived this out?

True Application and Life Change:

- Occurs as we behold the glory of the Lord in the Word (2 Corinthians 3:18)
- Occurs by the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:22; Romans 8:13)
- Involves replacing sinful actions with God-honoring ones (Ephesians 4:22-24)
- Involves a renewal and change in the heart by the Spirit (Ephesians 4:22-24)
- Requires an understanding that our actions (both good and bad) come from desires in our heart, sometimes even desires for good things (James 4:1-3; Luke 6:43-45).
- Therefore, true change involves more than behavior change, it involves heart change and desire change.

Keep these truths in mind as you seek to apply the Scriptures by the grace and power of God!