

## The Nine Steps to Proper Biblical Application

You should think of these 9 as steps more than individual isolated principles.

### Build Application on Interpretation

Since in interpretation we seek to determine what the text means, and in application we seek to determine what it means to me, it follows that if we do not first properly interpret the text, we cannot hope to form a proper application to the text.

If, for example, we interpret the “love of God” to *only* mean that gooshy feeling we get when we’re near our sweetheart, or that I-can’t-squeeze-you-hard-enough feeling you sometimes get with your child, then you’ll improperly assume that God’s love for your life means He’s only going to squeeze you and hug you and give things to you that make you feel good. When in reality, the love of God many times manifests itself in terms of discipline and difficulty.

Likewise, if you improperly interpret the wrestling of Jacob with God to mean that Jacob wrestled in his prayer life with God until God gave him what he wanted, then you’ll wrongly apply this to your life to mean that you too must pray until God acquiesces to your whims and desires. In reality, God was wrestling with Jacob to get gain Jacob’s submission to His will, and although this wrestling match really has nothing directly to do with prayer life, it is a proper application of the principle to say that God wants us to be in His will, and that is what proper prayer is really all about.

Lastly, if you conclude that the statement, “If my people, which are called by my name, will humble themselves and follow me, then I will heal their land” is a statement directed at all of God’s “people”, including Christians, and that “their land” refers to their place of dwelling, and not the physical land itself, then you will wrongly apply this to the United States and our need to humble and submit with a promise that God will “heal” our land, i.e., give us peace and prosperity. In reality, God promises no such thing for us, as “my people” refers to the nation of Israel, and “their land” is the physical bounty and prosperity of farming and fruit bearing.

### Determine What was Expected of the Original Audience

The human authors wrote mainly to specific audiences. Therefore, it is necessary to determine what applications were expected of those early readers. You have no doubt noticed that throughout Scripture, there are some items such as commands or admonitions, more direct than others. Then there are some items, which even to the first audience would have been less direct.

Think of the following types of discourse as going from more to less direct:

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- Commands and prohibitions
  - Exhortations (“let us”)
  - Wishes (“grace to you and peace be multiplied”)
  - Permissions (1 Cor. 7:15; Matt. 8:32)
  - Examples (“therefore I urge you, imitate me,” 1 Cor. 4:16)
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- Narratives (“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning...” Rom. 15:4)
  - Parables
  - Themes

Those types above the line give instruction for direct application, whereas those below are more indirect. With those below the line, you must look more diligently for the principle being presented, to see the implied in the story, rather than the direct statement. God’s will is revealed in explicit declarations and generic principles, and in either case, it is still just as much God’s will.

## Base Applications on Elements Present-day Readers Share with the Original Audience.

It is the commonality between the original readers and today’s readers that is the basis for valid application. Really, we have much in common with the first century church, (as well as with Israel, and even with Adam and Eve). Separation of time and space do not form barriers against the universality of the church (by universality I speak of the fact that all believers, since the time of Christ, are a part of the universal church), and we do, to no less extent than they did, depend upon the apostolic authority (i.e., authenticity of Biblical writers and thus writings) for guidance in faith and practice. When the Bible says, “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ” (Phil. 2:5) we are just as much intended to heed this as was the original audience, for we all share the body of Christ as both the means of our salvation, and the example of how to live.

When God commanded the Israelites to pick up Manna in the wilderness, however, we do not share much in common with them **in this regard**. There is the general principle of reliance upon God for provision, however.

Likewise, when God instructed Noah to build an Ark, its hardly the call for every believer to do. But, there are times when we are called to do what may seem absurd to the general populace, in which total obedience is the only thing that will save us. There is no need, however, to start shopping for gopher wood.

## Recognize How God's Working Varies in Different Ages

Where dispensation distinctives abound, principles remain, but commands and exhortations wane. God instructed, in quite a specific manner, what animals could and could not be eaten in the OT, whereas in the NT we find that prohibitions against the eating of any food is a part of the "doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1).

See also the related principle of "*Law vs. Legalism.*"

## Determine What is Normative for Today

It's important not to generalize for today an event which occurred in the past. Because God acted in one way once does not mean He is obligated, or even likely to act in the same way. (By "way" I mean a specific action, not a guiding principle).

For example, we are not to expect a trip to the third heaven for a vision as Paul experienced, nor are lepers today expected to dip 7 times in the Jordan for healing. When we throw a stick on the ground, we should not expect it to become a serpent. These are obvious statements, yet it is easy to do the same over generalizations regarding many narratives of the Bible.

Really, the principle here goes back to a proper interpretation. You remember that no portion of the Bible is interpreted on its own, meaning that all Scripture must agree, and we must therefore find relevant other passages to support all other passages. Although God used Elijah, Elisha and Peter to raise people from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-23; 2 Kings 4:17-37; Acts 9:36-43), there is never a hint from the rest of Scripture that this is normative for all believers. Jesus' instruction to the 12 to raise the dead (Matt. 10:8) was given to a specific audience for a specific duration of time, for a special reason. If someone today were to follow this practice, based on Jesus' command to the 12, they would also have to follow the other commands given at that time, namely, to take no money, bag, extra clothing or shoes with them as they travelled. One reason we can know that this does command not apply to us today is that later Christ changed his instructions regarding travel without money (Luke 22:36).

## See the Principle Inherent in the Text

As already mentioned, many times a principle is inferred but not directly stated. When Jesus says, "If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles" (Matt. 5:41), are we to then believe that if someone asks us to go 5 miles we are to ignore the principle? No, because the principle is, "go the extra mile", "serve even under hardship", "look out for the best interest of others before yourself".

Jesus tells us not to call his brother, “Raca” (Matt. 5:22) . Since we’re not likely to ever call someone this, then we’re in the clear, right? No, because *Raca* is an Aramaic term of contempt, equivalent to “idiot, jerk, etc...”. In fact, because Jesus mentioned an Aramaic term in a Greek world, He was, in a sense, confirming the “principlization” of Scripture.

For any principle to be valid, it must, of-course, be affirmed elsewhere in Scripture. This means that we take extra caution in drawing principles from narratives and historical accounts. Just because the early church had one specific form or government, or meeting place, or worship style, etc..., does not imply that we must do the same. Likewise when Abraham decided to help God out by convening with Hagar, we are not to take this as a prescription for us to help God—one need look no further than the difficulties this caused Abraham to realize the error in this way of thinking.

### **Think of the Principle as an Implication (or Extrapolation) of the Text, and as a Bridge to Application**

OK, so you’ve arrived at a principle. Now what? Use this as a bridge to your own life.

When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb (Luke 1:41). One thing we learn from this account is that there is some kind of responsive life in an unborn child. It was, supernaturally, but personally, responsive to a situation. Its hard to argue that anything so responsive is not truly a human life. Other *stated* principles of the Word tell us the importance God places on life. Therefore, one could draw from this the personal application that “human life, even *in utero*, is important, and I should not be by choice, support abortion.”

In 1 thes. 4:7 we are told, “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.” A principles that may be drawn from this is that viewing pornographic material is wrong. Although, obviously, such media is not mentioned in the Bible, an appropriate application would be, “I will not view pornographic literature or films.”

When Paul declares that he does will preach the gospel where others have already preached, this does not mean that missionaries should never go to countries that have been visited. However, a principle to be drawn would be the dangers and problems with building on another’s labor, and the necessity for distinction. Therefore, an application may be, “I will endeavour to build my personal ministry on the work that God has intended for me, instead of seeking to duplicate other efforts.”

## Write Out Specific Action-Responses

Remember, as you study, and as you prepare lessons for others, that the ultimate goal of God through the Bible is to change lives. First, look for ways that you may need to be changed. Consciously ask yourself, “do I have a need to be more like this, or that, or do I lack this, or do I need more of this, or do I need to show more of this, etc...”

Someone suggests using the acronym SPECS. As you study, look for SINS to be forsaken, PROMISES to be claimed, EXAMPLES to be followed, COMMANDS to be obeyed, and STUMBLING BLOCKS or hindrances to be avoided.

As you do this, recognize that change may be in either actions or attitudes. Actions can be changed immediately, attitudes take much longer. As such, pace yourself. Don't attempt to change from Saul to Paul overnight. Even Saul didn't really do that...it took 14 years for him to be prepared for the ministry. We don't have those 14 years recorded for us, but I can guarantee you, he didn't go from Satan to Saint overnight. Just look at the bumbings of the Apostles, especially Peter, during the life of Christ, and the examples they became afterwards.

Make your applications personal. Use *I, me, my, mine*, instead of *we, us, our*. Also, be specific. Instead of saying, “I should love my wife more,” say, “I am going to tell my wife, at-least once a week, how much, and in what ways, I appreciate her.” Instead of, “I need to be nice to my employees” try “I need to not yell at my employees when they do such and such, and I need to speak kindly to them.”

Add a time element, such as “Friday” or “this week” or “tomorrow”, makes it much more likely for you to accomplish your application, and have a way to gauge if you failed. Again, be realistic with yourself, and don't expect overnight success. Instead of, “I will control my anger this month,” try being more specific, “every morning, this week, no matter how bad the traffic and how many lights I miss, I will not lose my temper.”

Make alternative plans. Its fine to say, “I will not do...” but its even better to say, “instead of \_\_\_\_\_ I will do \_\_\_\_\_.” For example, instead of “I will not lose my temper at the traffic,” try “I will pray for every driver I can see in the line of cars ahead of me when I'm stuck in traffic this next week.” Who knows, maybe God will use your prayer as a means for someone to draw closer to Him, or, maybe the devil will keep you from traffic, so you don't pray for someone. In either event, you're much better off!

## Rely on the Holy Spirit

Ask Him to help you understand the Word, properly interpret it, and find legitimate applications. But don't forget to ask Him to help you apply these truths to your life. We cannot do it on our own, but we must do it. Johann Bengel, in 1742, wrote, "Apply yourself wholly to the text and apply the text wholly to yourself."

## Law vs. Legalism

Volumes have been written on the subject of application of Scripture. The great difficulty comes when we attempt to assess what principles were only for a specific historical setting, and which principles apply to all ages.

Take for example, the ongoing debate regarding the role of women in the church. The questions relate to how women should dress (1 Tim. 2:9-10), and whether they should be allowed to speak and/or teach in the church (v. 11-15; 1 Cor. 14:34), and even if they should be allowed to be the pastor of a church. It's not my purpose to divert into such a discussion, but let me give a very general over-riding principle that should never be forsaken in the application of the Word: Whenever in doubt, choose to be conservative, except where this would cause you to be legalistic.

By conservative I mean to err on the side of greatest restriction, or the side opposite greatest freedom. By freedom, I mean personal, self-will, not real freedom as we know it in our relationship with Christ.

By avoiding legalism, I mean to be very cautious that you are expecting something, anything, of others, or yourself, that will lead you to be more spiritual. NOTHING you do or say can make you more spiritual. Things can only help us remove hindrances to spirituality, they do not make you spiritual in and of themselves. Therefore, do not impose regulations with the intent that you can, by the regarding of these rules and regulations make yourself, or others more spiritual. In other words, do not restrict your real freedom in Christ (again, I'm **not** talking about that self-will we call freedom) by chaining yourself to a law.

Always, always, always, look to more than one passage to "prove your point." In our example of women's roles, we do not keep women from being our Pastor because one passage may say so, nor because it would keep us from being spiritual. We do not allow women to be pastors because of many principles regarding the role and relationship between men and women, and because multiple passages speak against it. It's not however a matter of ability, nor a matter of spirituality.

# Homework

## Expanding your trees

Keep adding to your topics

### HOME WORK ASSIGNMENTS FOR

**3/7, 3/14, 3/21 and 3/28.**

Keep expanding your topic out (see *Homework*, pgs. 79 and 82). You can either further expand one of your categories, or fill out another category.

When working, bear in mind that when all is said and done (in 4 weeks), your material will consist of:

- All 3-5 of your categories completely filled out (following our tree rules, pg. 77).
- At-least one of each of the following types of studies conducted **in each** of the above categories, with each type below being done at-least once:
  - Vertical Chart (pg. 17-18)
  - Horizontal Chart (pg. 17-18)
  - Grammatical Chart (pg. 17-18)
  - Word Study (pg. 56)
  - Q/A (pgs. 63, 64, 72)

For each study above, pick a relevant verse, or word, that you've discovered in your topical study.

- You have 4 weeks (until April 4), to complete the above.
- I'm going to collect your work each week, so please work on at-least one of the above charts/studies every week.
- This is going to be the source material for you in-class presentations.

# Organizing

At this phase, you now have an arsenal of information.

How do you organize this material into something useful for presentation, something others can understand? Many people stumble right here. They've got good stuff, but they just can't figure out how to organize it into something people can follow. I understand the problem! You've got it down, but you've spent so much time studying it, and you've got so much stuff you want to share, that you don't know where to begin, where to stop, and how to get there even if you know where you're going. That's what organization is all about.

## 2 Timothy 2:2-3

*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 3You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

## 3 Steps to Teaching

### Gathering our Material

- Observation
  - Interpretation
  - Application
- } Correlation

### Organizing our Material

### Presenting our Material