

What is Expository Preaching? What is the Context?

Recap:

We've seen from Colossians that faithful preaching will be

1. Loving the church by
2. Proclaiming Christ – being a minister of the Gospel
3. Making the Word fully known
4. Trusting that God speaks

We mentioned that, in making the Word fully known, **context** is crucial.

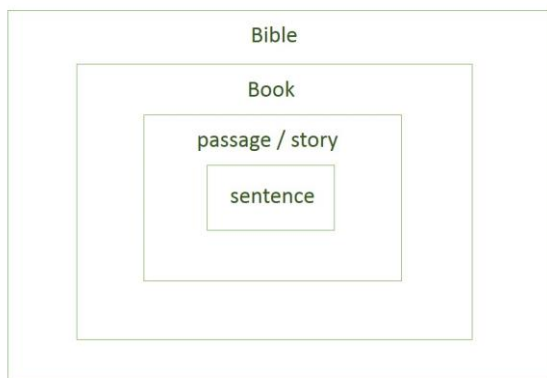
A text without a context is a pretext to say whatever you want.

To put it another way round, 95% of false teaching would be stopped by simply looking at the context of the verses used.

Context is a fancy word simply meaning looking at what comes before and what comes after.

We mentioned when we were talking about letters that we naturally read a whole letter or email and we understand each sentence as part of the whole.

When we get to the Bible there are different levels of context:



Bible level

First we need to see the letters as part of a Bible overview – put them in the big story of the whole Bible – the story of salvation, creation → new creation.

If we don't do that we'll forget the big problem the Bible is talking about (and the letters are talking about) and we'll start looking in the letters for tips and principles to apply to what we think is our big problem.

What is the Bible all about? (2 Tim. 3:15)

And that's what the letters are all about – JESUS, JESUS, JESUS, CROSS, CROSS, CROSS

In particular – the NT letters all come in that part of the Bible after Jesus' ascension and before his return. This is the overlap of the ages.

This is such an important thing for us to get our heads around because it underlies all the New Testament letters – it's the basic dynamic that drives them. Christ has come, the great salvation, the great victory has happened at the Cross, the New Age the Prophets spoke of has started in one sense - we have been freed from bondage to hell and the devil and condemnation – we are seated with Christ on high – we've been adopted by the Father – we have every spiritual blessing. But we're still here – we're still in our decaying bodies, we still get sick, we still sin, other people sin, there's persecution, disasters and accidents, and Jesus is not physically here with everything submitting to him, this is not The New Creation is it?!?!?

Then one day there will be the consummation of our salvation – when Jesus returns and this age finishes and there is no more pain or crying or suffering and we see Jesus as he is and we are made like him with new glorious bodies to enjoy Him forever.

For Now - The Kingdom of God, The New Age – is Now and Not Yet

Book level

First we could look at the Bible background to this book (don't need to worry about reading lots of history books on ancient Greece – all the background we need is in the Bible itself).

Read Acts 16

- Paul will later write to the Philippians about the “work begun in you” – from Acts 16, what do you think was the work begun in them and who began it?
- What do you see about salvation in Jesus from Acts 16?
- What *partnership in the gospel* do you see going on in Philippi right from the beginning?
- What do you see about suffering and opposition to the gospel here?

Now let's do something really radical... and read through the whole of Philippians in one go. [Make sure you've chosen someone in advance to do this, a good reader who has ideally prepared.]

Keep everything we've just read in Acts 16 in mind

Try to imagine you're hearing this for the first time, as a Philippian

Experience it, see how it makes you feel

What was the impact of listening to the whole letter? How did it make you feel?

Passage level

This is what we were talking about in the previous session – the opening, the greeting, the introduction, the body etc. And within the body there will be distinct units.

- There are various ways you can break up a text (not all of these ways of breaking up a passage will be appropriate for all texts)
 - Content/topic
 - Location (in a narrative)
 - Time (in a narrative)
 - Actors/speakers (in a conversation)
 - Repeated phrase
 - Logic – e.g. “therefore” or “however”
 - Discourse marker – e.g. “Finally” or “Now”

Exercise: Try dividing Philippians 2-3 into a few chunks (4, 5, 6 or 7)

Sentence level

In Paul's letters his sentences can be very long and involved with lots of sub-clauses.

Indeed I count everything a loss

because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord

because of whom I have lost all things

and consider them rubbish

in order that I may gain Christ

that is, be found in him

not having a righteousness of my own

of the Law

but that which is through faith in Christ Jesus

the righteousness of God

based on faith

that I may know him

the power of his resurrection

and participation in his sufferings

being conformed to his death

if somehow I might attain to the resurrection from the dead.

It doesn't really matter how you do it. Whether you use arrows or different colours or whatever but the key thing is to see the bits of a sentence and how they connect together – what is the logic of the argument? This can be quite hard work but the fire is in the logic. Just one “but” can make the difference between heaven and hell. Noticing one “therefore” can make the difference between moralism and gospel preaching.

Let's look at this in practice:

Choose either Philippians 1:1-12 or Philippians 3:1-16 or Philippians 4:10-20

- Pray
- Read the passage
- Read it again
- What are the verses here that we might be tempted to take out of context? How are they normally used?
- What is the context of these verses in the passage, the letter and the Bible?
- How does the context control the meaning?

Plenary: What did you find?

What is Bible Exposition? What is the Big Idea?

Recap:

We mentioned in the first session that we want to be servants of the Word who preach the message given by the text – not “What is my message this week? Lord give me a message?” - look at the text! The big idea of the text is the big idea of my talk.