

CONTEXT

Scripture Reading: Read 2 John

Bible School students are usually required to take a course in hermeneutics (the interpretation and application of God's Word) sometime in their college studies. Because Scripture was not written in a vacuum but in a specific time and place, it is important to determine first what the Word meant when it was written and then, based on that meaning, apply it to our day and age. Failure to do both tasks equally usually leads to problems at some point. For example, when we interpret accurately but fail to apply it, we end up getting stuck in the 1st century world and never make the jump to the 21st century. On the other hand, when we try to apply what we have not rightly interpreted, we lose our moorings and end up reading our thoughts into the text instead of drawing out God's meaning from it. However, when we interpret accurately and apply appropriately, the text comes alive and speaks to us with God's authority.

Let's take a look at an example of this from today's chapter reading. In verses 10-11, John writes: *"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work."* What are your initial thoughts when you read these verses? Some believers have interpreted this passage to mean that if a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses organization or a representative from the Mormon faith comes to your door, you cannot invite them in or even say hello. Is this what John is saying? What if we read this passage so literally that it leads us to longer invite an unsaved neighbor or relative into the house since they don't share the teaching about Christ?

This is where context is so important. As is often repeated, a text without a context is just a pretext. So, what's the context? In John's day, traveling evangelists and preachers were common. It was expected that fellow believers would provide hospitality for these servants of God as they traveled about. Unfortunately, false teachers attempted to solicit support, as well, by traveling from church to church. John's counsel in such cases is an emphatic "no" to support. Churches were not to open their doors to these false teachers and give them access. Believers were not to provide any help whatsoever to these purveyors of false teaching. To do so and to allow false teaching to be propagated would be to share in their wicked work.

In context, then, verses 9-11 are not about sharing your faith with unbelievers at your kitchen table should they come to your door. (Note: if you are not yet grounded in the faith, it would be advisable to have an experienced believer join you for support if you plan on inviting someone into your home who holds false teaching.) These verses are about not welcoming and supporting false teachers and teachings in the church. It is not allowed! By understanding the context, we are able to apply the text properly.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: As you read the Bible this week, make every effort to understand the text in context. Look for clues in the chapter itself and make use of additional resources where necessary. Pray for God's wisdom and grace as you do, so that you can rightly handle the Word of truth.

Take-a-way: *Your text needs a context if you don't want any application wrecks.*