

Introduction: Understanding Hermeneutics

Before diving into specific verses, explain what **hermeneutics** is: the science and art of interpreting the Bible.

- **Hermeneutics** involves interpreting Scripture in a way that is faithful to its original meaning. This requires understanding:
 - **Historical context** (What was happening when the verse was written?)
 - **Cultural context** (What did this mean to the original audience?)
 - **Linguistic context** (What do the original words mean in their original language?)

Key Principle: We must interpret the Bible by looking at its **original meaning** to its original audience, not just by applying verses to our lives in a way that suits our personal preferences.

1. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” – Philippians 4:13 (Misuse: Applied to personal success, sports, or ambitions)

- **Full Verse:** “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”
- **Correct Audience:** Paul was writing to the Philippians, speaking from a place of suffering and imprisonment. He was teaching them that **contentment** in Christ is the true strength—not success in worldly endeavors.
- **Context:** Philippians 4:11-13 is about Paul’s contentment, not achieving personal goals or success. The verse shows Paul’s dependence on Christ for **perseverance** through hardships, not for achieving wealth or fame.
- **Hermeneutics:** We need to understand that Paul is not saying “you can succeed in anything you want if you pray hard enough,” but rather that Christ gives **strength for endurance** through difficult circumstances.

Application: While it's not wrong to use this verse for encouragement, we must recognize that the "all things" is specifically about enduring hardship for Christ, not about worldly accomplishments.

Discussion Question: How can we reframe Philippians 4:13 to align with Paul’s original intent?

2. “For I know the plans I have for you... plans to prosper you.” – Jeremiah 29:11 (Misuse: Applied as a personal promise of prosperity)

- **Full Verse:** “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

- **Correct Audience:** This was a message to the Israelites in exile in Babylon. God was reassuring them that after 70 years of exile, He would bring them back to the land of Israel.
- **Context:** While the verse expresses God's care for His people, it was **not** a personal promise to individual believers for wealth or success. It was a promise to a **nation** in a specific historical context.
- **Hermeneutics:** We should not assume this verse applies directly to modern individual Christians, but rather see it as part of God's **covenant faithfulness** to Israel. The **general principle** is that God's plans are good and He is sovereign, even in difficult times.

Application: We can apply this verse by trusting God's sovereignty and faithfulness, knowing He has a good plan for His people, but we should not use it to claim personal material prosperity.

Discussion Question: How can understanding the historical context of Jeremiah 29:11 help us avoid misapplying it to our personal lives?

3. "Where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am with them." – Matthew 18:20 (Misuse: Used to justify small group gatherings or prayer meetings)

- **Full Verse:** "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."
- **Correct Audience:** This verse is spoken by Jesus in the context of **church discipline**. The "two or three" refers to a small group of witnesses or decision-makers involved in reconciling a brother or sister in sin.
- **Context:** The context is about **church authority and reconciliation**, not simply a general promise about Jesus' presence when we meet in small groups or prayer circles.
- **Hermeneutics:** The verse is about the authority and power of Jesus in **discipleship** and **church discipline**. It is not about the number of people present for a Bible study or prayer gathering.

Application: The verse is best applied in the context of resolving conflict and church discipline, where Jesus promises His presence when His people seek reconciliation and pursue justice together.

Discussion Question: How does knowing the correct context of Matthew 18:20 change the way we use this verse in church life?

4. “Ask and it will be given to you.” – Matthew 7:7 (Misuse: Applied to any prayer request, implying God will give anything you ask for)

- **Full Verse:** “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.”
- **Correct Audience:** Jesus is teaching about God’s **generosity** in answering prayers, but He is also emphasizing the importance of **asking according to God’s will** (see 1 John 5:14).
- **Context:** The verse follows the **Golden Rule** (Matthew 7:12) and is part of a larger teaching about prayer in the Kingdom of God. It’s not a guarantee of **any request** but is a call to align our prayers with God’s will.
- **Hermeneutics:** We must interpret this verse with the understanding that prayer is about seeking **God’s will**, not simply asking for anything we desire.

Application: God does promise to answer prayer, but He answers according to His wisdom and will, not necessarily granting all our requests.

Discussion Question: How can we ensure our prayers align with God’s will rather than just asking for our personal desires?

5. “The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” – Exodus 14:14 (Misuse: Applied to situations where we are passive and do nothing)

- **Full Verse:** “The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.”
- **Correct Audience:** This verse was spoken to the Israelites as they faced the Red Sea, with Pharaoh’s army in pursuit. God was calling them to **trust in His deliverance**, but this does not mean inaction in every situation.
- **Context:** The Israelites were in a **unique situation**, where God was going to deliver them miraculously. The call to “be still” was in the context of God’s imminent action, not a blanket call for passivity in all situations.
- **Hermeneutics:** We should understand that sometimes God’s intervention means we need to **trust and wait**, but at other times, God may call us to act in faith and courage.

Application: In difficult situations, there are times when we need to trust God to fight for us, but also times when He calls us to act in faith.

Discussion Question: When do you think it is important to “be still” and trust God, and when might God be calling you to act?

6. “Judge not, that you be not judged.” – Matthew 7:1 (Misuse: Used to avoid any correction or judgment in the church)

- **Full Verse:** “Judge not, that you be not judged.”
- **Correct Audience:** Jesus is warning against **hypocritical judgment**, not the absence of discernment or righteous judgment.
- **Context:** The context of Matthew 7:1-5 teaches about humility in judgment. Jesus is teaching that we should not judge others harshly or self-righteously but should look at our own faults first.
- **Hermeneutics:** This verse is not a prohibition against all judgment. Jesus calls for **humility and self-examination** before offering correction to others.

Application: We should avoid being judgmental or hypocritical but still address sin and offer loving correction when necessary, in humility.

Discussion Question: How can we apply the principle of humility in judgment without avoiding necessary correction?

7. “By His stripes we are healed.” – Isaiah 53:5 (Misuse: Applied to physical healing in all circumstances)

- **Full Verse:** “But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”
- **Correct Audience:** Isaiah 53 is a **prophetic passage** referring to the **suffering servant** (Jesus Christ), and the healing here refers to **spiritual healing**—the forgiveness of sins.
- **Context:** This verse is about **spiritual restoration** through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, not a promise for physical healing in every situation.
- **Hermeneutics:** The healing mentioned is **primarily spiritual**, referring to the healing of sin and brokenness between humanity and God.

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