

Step Six: Application

Application is the relating of truth to experience. This activity is seldom practiced. If we apply the truth at all, we tend to be very general instead of specific, apply it to others instead of to oneself, rationalize our way out of its implications for us, or substitute the emotional feeling (of guilt, conviction) for application.

But application is essential! (Review the process by which God communicates His will to men, pages 22-26; no link can be absent!) The aim of this phase of Bible study is to apply the Scripture explicitly to one's own life.

One helpful method of applying God's Word involves identifying and bringing to bear relevant precepts, principles and promises that pertain to a specific decision or situation.

A **precept** is a specific injunction as to what God directs, or forbids, us to do.

A **principle** is a general truth meant to inform our outlook and behavior.

A **promise** is a declaration by God of something that He will do.

A **precept** may be thought of as a rule or command; it is God giving orders.

A **principle** is an abiding, unchanging truth, a maxim; it is God describing the underpinnings of reality.

A **promise** is a pledge, a vow; it is God giving His Word.

An example of a **precept** is "Speed Limit 25 MPH."

An example of a **principle** is "A good driver is a defensive driver."

An example of a **promise** is "speed limit strictly enforced (you will get a ticket if you exceed the speed limit)."

Some biblical **precepts** include:

-you shall not steal

-honor your father and your mother

-you shall be holy

-present your members as instruments of righteousness to God

Some biblical **principles** include:

-he who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much

-from everyone who has been given much shall much be required

-to everyone who has (i.e., uses what he has) shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but from the one who does not have (i.e., does not use what he has), even what he does have shall be taken away (this one may also be stated as "use it or lose it!")

-"everything that comes into a believer's life first passes by in review before God" (it is all "Father-filtered")

-whatever a man sows, this he will also reap

- "God's work done in God's way will always have God's support."

Some biblical promises include:

- we shall not all sleep (i.e., die), but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet

- God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus

- He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you"

- whatever you ask in My Name, that will I do

- the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

In applying precepts, be sure the command applies to you (some are given to specific individuals or groups only for their particular situation; for instance, see Exodus 19:10-13; Acts 1:3,4; 2 Timothy 4:9).

In developing principles, remember that they are abiding, unchanging truths. It is best to state them as affirmations, rather than as questions. State them simply (avoid incomplete, compound, or complex sentences). Formulate them positively (avoid using negatives). IN framing them, include the names of persons, places or things only if they are eternal or everlasting.

In basing your behavior on promises, be sure that the promise is universal in scope (as in Revelation 22:18) and not just for a specific individual in some particular historical situation (as in Joshua 1:3,4 or Acts 18:9,10). Be sure to note whether the promise is conditional ("if you...then I will", as in James 4:7,8 or 1 Peter 5:6-10) or unconditional ("no strings attached"). If the promise is conditional, what must you do before God has committed Himself to act? If the promise is unconditional, God has unequivocally given His word to act in accordance with His declaration.

It is very important to understand that a given precept, principle or promise may have many possible applications. A statement of Scripture has only one meaning and, therefore, only one correct interpretation (remember Tyndale's excellent statement, "the Scripture hath but one sense"). However the statement may be a precept, suggest or reveal a principle, or contain a promise. These may have many different applications.

Illustration - 1 Thessalonians 5:18 contains a precept, give thanks in all things; this has as many applications as there are situations. Hebrews is written to show the superiority of Jesus Christ and Christianity to Judaism and the Old Testament. The underlying principle of the author's argument is: "Whenever God takes away something good, He gives something better." This could have application to a broken-hearted teenager or adult, to a man who has just lost his job, to an older person who has lost their health, etc.--one principle (and not the only one from Hebrews taken as a whole!) with many applications.

We can summarize the application of Scripture in four steps:

1) GENERALIZE. Once interpretation has been completed, write down the precept(s), principle(s) or promise(s) you have found.

2) CONTEMPORIZE the truth by beginning to relate the precept, principle or promise to areas of life and/or decisions to be made.

3) PERSONALIZE the truth, as you "walk through" the areas of your life or "think through" a section that must be made, by looking for ways in which you could apply it. Visualize what you would do in applying the truth to your situation.

4) ACTUALIZE this by doing it! One method of bringing this to pass is to:

Take the PRINCIPLE (or precept or promise) and relate it to a specific PROBLEM make a PLAN (a strategy of measurable steps) to address the problem by a certain date, and establish a means of PROOF that you did it (it always helps to establish accountability)

But remember, all practical lessons and applications of the Word must flow out of proper hermeneutics and interpretation. The end ("a blessing") does not justify the means (faulty hermeneutics, sloppy interpretation). If a blessing comes from improper interpretation, it is in spite of, not because of, poor hermeneutics.

As you read, note the sins to forsake and the temptations to avoid. IN applying examples from the Scriptures, distinguish between what the Bible records and what it approves. Direct application can be made from what the Bible directly censures or approves. Appreciate the new insights that come to you concerning God and His people. But be sure to apply the truth to your life!

Step Seven: Recording

There are three rules for learning: (1) "write it down", (2) "write it down", and (3) "write it down." Individuals may vary as to how they do this, but it must be done. This will take time, but it is worth the effort. Writing down your findings forces you to think clearly and to organize your material. It fixes what you have learned in your mind. It preserves the fruit of your study for future use. But is no only does these things, it indicates to the Lord that you're paying attention!

Summing Up

The preceding pages have outlined a method for studying God's Word. Every method needs to be adapted to an individual's own way of doing things. But some method is essential. As you use this one, don't hesitate to change it to fit your needs.

Remember, knowing how to interpret and to study the Bible is of little value if one doesn't use that knowledge!