

LESSON 8

**Principles of Understanding Scripture (7)
Background Information for the Teacher**

Objectives:

1. The student can explain the principle of “application” in the use of Scriptures as the final step following the first nine.
2. The student can explain using a command and give an instance of this.
3. The student can explain using an example and give an instance of this.

Preparation:

1. Have ready to distribute Written Review No. 7.
2. Have ready to distribute Worksheet No. 8. Fill out one for yourself.
3. Have sufficient Bibles and pens.
4. Have access to a chalkboard or overhead projector.

Theme: Having learned through the previous nine principles what a passage would likely have meant to those who first received it, we now ask how God meant for us to apply that passage to ourselves. The first two questions we ask are whether there is a command in the passage God meant for us to obey and whether there is an example in the passage which God meant for us to follow.

Lesson Plan for the Teacher

Introduction: (15 minutes)

1. Call the role and plan contact with those who are absent.
2. Make necessary announcements.
3. Songs and prayer as desired.
4. Give answers to Written Review No. 7. 1—theology and other passages. 2—woman, husbands, die, marry. 3—death of Jesus. 4—nature of God, examples, background, etc. 5—False. 6—references in a Bible, Bible dictionary, concordance, topical Bible, etc.
5. Discuss Ephesians 5:19. (This is not intended to be a full discussion of the verse. Just raise each of the nine points and ask what something learned from this principle could mean in exploring the verse. Don't try to run down all these conclusions or you won't get to the main lesson.)
Conditions—Paul is in prison writing to the church in Ephesus. He had spent three years in Ephesus building up the church so he knew the church well. Archaeology has disclosed that Ephesus was a very large, major city in the eastern Roman Empire. Genre—an epistle, although not directed toward some particular problem. The general thrust of the epistle is to help the Ephesians understand the



plan of God and how their lives should be Christ-like. Context—in verses 15 through 19, Paul writes about how to live as a Christian--not to be drunk but be filled with the Spirit. We can help each other in Christian living as we share with each other through song. Speaker/Audience. Paul writes to Ephesian Christians who lived in the midst of a very pagan city which strongly supported Diana of the Ephesians. Her temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was a dominating force in the area. Paul, who had spent some three years in Ephesus with them, writes to help Christians in this particular place to stay free of such wicked influences. Words—psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs refers to different styles of songs but we do not have any information that would allow us to draw hard lines between these. The word “singing,” here, suggests just that—to sing. The term “make melody” is from the Greek word psallo which, many years earlier, had meant singing with a musical instrument. By Paul’s day, however, the word had come to mean just to sing without the use of an instrument. It is still the Greek word for sing. The Greek Orthodox Church still does not use instruments in its services. So the expression more literally is “singing and singing with your hearts to the Lord.” Syntax—the prepositional phrase “in your heart” is a very important indicator that we are to sing with deep internal expression and feelings. Figures—the use of the word “heart” is a figure because it does not mean the literal heart but stands for our “inner being,” much as we say— “with all my heart,” not meaning the blood pumping organ. Theology—we must connect this verse about singing to God with the broader picture of worship expressed in the New Testament. Other passages—Colossians 3:16 is almost a parallel passage. We also learn about singing from such other passages 1 Corinthians 14:15, Hebrews 2:12, and James 5:13.

Learning Experiences: (about 25 minutes)

1. The first nine principles have been primarily about discovering what the passage would have meant to those who first received it, looking at the passage “through their eyes.” What would the words and sentence structure have meant to them? How would they have interpreted the figures? What conditions would they have been aware of that can help us in our understanding? When we come to the tenth principle, we move to a different question. Knowing what the passage would have meant to them, then what message should we get for ourselves? This principle is called “application.” How shall we get from this passage, written more directly to those who lived a long time ago, the message God intended for succeeding generations to learn?



2. Of course, some of the principles we have studied have already moved us in this direction. We have asked, for example, with which covenant is the statement connected. We have looked at the way this passage and its content fit with the overall theology or “big picture” of the Scriptures and we have asked what other passages will help us in deciphering its message. Such principles begin to show us how the passage might apply to ourselves. We must come more specifically to the issue, however, of just what God wants us to learn from a passage.
3. Three questions we can ask will help us discover whether there are lessons in the passage we need to apply to ourselves. These three questions are not all there is to understanding Scripture and they have not been considered the only factors for interpreting the meaning of a text among those in churches of Christ. But, as we shall see, they are important questions which the Scriptures expect us to ask as we seek to make use of a passage. Our study of these questions will show (1) that these are questions the Scriptures expect us to ask and (2) how these questions reveal important information for us.
4. The first question to ask is this: Are there commands in this passage God intended for me to obey? Certainly there are commands in the Bible to obey. Read Hebrews 5:8. **Q:** Who learned obedience through suffering? **A:** Christ. **Q:** Those who want eternal salvation through Him must do what? **A:** Obey Christ. In view of this, I must ask, “Are there commands of Christ in the passage which I am to obey?” Jesus emphasized this point of obedience in many ways while He was on earth. Read Matthew 7:21. **Q:** From this passage, who will enter the kingdom of heaven? **A:** “He who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” So what is the “will of the Father?” That’s what we must learn from our study of Scripture. In John 14:15, Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” So there are certainly commands to be obeyed and we must be about finding them in Scripture.
5. Since the New Testament Scriptures, from the gospels through Revelation, are our covenant, we should read these passages and from them learn the commands Christ wants us to obey. Read Matthew 28:18-20. **Q:** What were the apostles to teach others to do? **A:** They were to teach others to observe what Christ had commanded them. As we read the New Testament, then, we should be asking, “Where are commands I am to obey?” Commands under a different covenant would apply to us only to the extent they are incorporated into the new covenant.
6. Let’s look at a couple of passages to illustrate how we study passages looking for commands to obey. Have someone read Matthew 5:14-16. **Q:** Do you find a command here for us? **A:** Yes. “Let your light shine before men, that they



may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” **Q:** What does it mean to “let your light shine?” **A:** To set an example before others of living the good life God calls us to live. **Q:** Is this a command for Christians? **A:** It is a command by Christ for His followers and would have been included in those things He told the apostles to teach others. Have someone read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. **Q:** How important does Paul say it is for them to follow his instructions? **A:** If they reject it, they are rejecting God (v. 8). **Q:** What is the specific instruction which he has given them? **A:** Avoid sexual immorality. **Q:** Is that teaching for us? **A:** Yes. **Q:** How would we reach that conclusion? **A:** This was the teaching of an apostle to Christians. Since we are also Christians and subject to the teaching of the apostles, we should follow that instruction.

7. Open your Bibles now to Acts 2:36. **Q:** How does this verse connect with the preceding context? **A:** It is the climax of Peter’s sermon. **Q:** Based on verse 37, what is the response of the people to this sermon about Jesus? **A:** They believe Peter’s sermon about Jesus and that they crucified Him; and they ask what shall we do? **Q:** What does Peter tell them to do? **A:** “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” **Q:** Is this a command for us today? **A:** Yes. We, like they, live in the time when we are to follow Jesus and His commandments and those of His apostles.
8. Now read Romans 13:1-7. **Q:** What command is found here? **A:** Submit to governing authorities. **Q:** Is that a command for us? **A:** Yes, for we also are Christians living under a governmental authority. **Q:** Why might this be easier for us than for those to whom Paul wrote? **A:** They had no say in their government and their government was sometimes anti-Christian. Now have someone read Acts 4:19. **Q:** Did Peter and John violate what Paul had commanded Christians to do? **A:** No. We must take the two passages together. We are to obey the government, but that must be limited to those things that do not put us in conflict with God’s commands. If the two conflict, we must obey God rather than man.
9. Let’s summarize some things we have learned about obeying commands.
 - a. Christ and the apostles gave Christians commands to be obeyed.
 - b. When looking at a command, we must ask if God intended it for us today.
 - c. We must also ask if a command has been limited by or modified by any other commands or teaching. (As in the case of obeying the government.)
 - d. We must be willing to obey commands from Scripture for us.



10. Now let's turn to another way we are to learn from Scripture. We certainly look for command's God wants us to obey. But God has taught us in other ways, too. God shows His will to us by giving us examples to follow. Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-12. **Q:** What Old Testament events has Paul just mentioned? **A:** Events from the 40 years in the wilderness. **Q:** How do we learn from this example? **A:** They violated God's moral teachings and suffered for it. We should not do that. **Q:** Are we under similar moral principles? **A:** Yes. **Q:** What are some specific lessons we should learn from their example? **A:** Don't set our hearts on evil things. Don't be idolaters. Don't commit sexual immorality. Don't grumble. Don't think you can't fall. Paul wants them to learn from examples.
11. Read Philippians 4:9. **Q:** What does Paul say here about learning by example? **A:** Learn from what I taught and what I did. Now let's take another case. The rule about the Sabbath day was that the Israelites were to do no work. Read Matthew 12:5. **Q:** What group does Jesus cite who worked on the Sabbath day? **A:** The priests who worked to offer the sacrifices. His point is that the command about not working had some exceptions that must be recognized. **Q:** What method does He use to establish His point? **A:** He gives an example.
12. Read 1 Corinthians 4:17. **Q:** Why did Paul send Timothy to the church in Corinth? **A:** So he could remind them of Paul's way of life in Christ which agreed with what he taught in every church. So the Corinthians needed to know the approved practices of other churches so they could follow them. Read 1 Corinthians 14:33b. **Q:** When discussing how women should conduct themselves in the services of the church, what is one way Paul makes his point? **A:** To refer them to the practice of other churches. Paul, then, under divine guidance, indicates that one church is to take the practice of other churches who were under apostolic guidance, to be the model for what they do. We, likewise, should look to these early churches as such a model.
13. Let's establish a few guidelines for the use of examples.
- God has used examples as a way to teach us His will. He gave us the early church as a model from which to learn.
 - The example must be an approved practice. We certainly are not to follow the example of the Corinthians in dividing the church, a practice which Paul condemned. We can, however, also learn from negative examples what we should not do.
 - The example must be of something that was intended to be followed generally. The church in Jerusalem, for example, had all things common to meet a particular emergency. Other congregations, however, did not follow this practice. Thus, while this was a practice of



the early church, it was not intended to be followed generally. Should an emergency similar to this one arise, we could do the same thing but are not bound to follow this example which was not intended to be the norm.

- d. The example must be of something that has spiritual significance. Paul wore a cloak but that is not something we have to follow. It has no spiritual significance. The way Christians traveled, the style of houses they stayed in, or the food they ate has no spiritual significance. So we are not bound to follow their example in these things. Some Christians met in homes (Romans 16:5), while other meetings were in temple courts (Acts 2:46), in an upstairs room (Acts 20:8), in public places (Acts 20:20), and in a lecture hall (Acts 19:9). Clearly Christians met in a wide range of different places and so the particular place they met did not have any spiritual significance. The day on which Christians met, however, is a different matter. Acts 20:7 tells us of the typical practice of Christians—"On the first day of the week we came together." And 1 Corinthians 16:1 mentions that first day meetings were the norm. Since, then, meeting on the first day of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection, appears to have had spiritual significance for the early Christians when they were under apostolic guidance, we make that same day our day to meet for worship.
14. Now let's look at some instances of things God choose to teach us by example rather than by command.
- a. **Q:** Is there a command regarding the day on which we are to meet for the Lord's Supper? **A:** No. Read Acts 20:7. **Q:** On what day did the early Christians take the Lord's Supper? **A:** First day of the week. **Q:** Do we have any cases of their taking it on any other day? **A:** No. So if we want to use the early church as our model, we will learn from their example to participate in this important event on the same day they did.
- b. **Q:** Is there a command about how congregations of the church should be organized? **A:** No. **Q:** Do we have examples of how they were organized? **A:** Yes. The early churches had elders and Acts 14:23 says Paul appointed elders in each church and in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 Paul gave Titus and Timothy instructions for appointing elders in still other congregations. So a congregation could begin without elders but as soon thereafter as they had qualified men, they were to appoint elders. **Q:** What do these examples tell us about how many elders to have? **A:** They were always mentioned in the plural so in our model there was always more than one. Since elders with stated qualifications are the norm for



churches under apostolic guidance, we should follow their example.

- c. **Q:** Is there a command about what activities congregations are to engage in? **A:** No. **Q:** What do we learn by example that congregations did? **A:** They cared for the needy, they preached the gospel, they met for worship, they supported missionaries, they edified their members. **Q:** Is there a command about how they raised the funds to do this work? **A:** No. **Q:** Is there an example? **A:** Yes. Through free will offerings. 1 Corinthians 16:1 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

Application: (3 minutes)

1. We know God gave us the Scriptures to lead us in our efforts to serve Him. We have learned today that we are to obey God's commands that were given to us. We, then, should have a submissive spirit about the commands God has given. Let's look for the commandments and be willing to do them.
2. We know God has also chosen to reveal some elements of His will through the example process. Just as we look in Scripture for those commands God wants us to observe, we also look there for examples He wants us to follow.
3. Let's commit ourselves to using these methods of learning God's will for our lives .

Assignment: (2 minutes)

1. Be prepared for our weekly written review over this lesson. Use the worksheet to prepare for the quiz.
2. Study 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 to answer these two questions: (1) What commandments are there in this passage which we should obey? and (2) What do we learn from the example of the Corinthian church and Paul's comments to them that could help us in taking of the Lord's Supper?



**UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE
WORKSHEET NO. 8**

1. The first question to ask is: Are there _____ in this passage God intended for me to _____?
2. Passages which indicate we are to obey are found in the following places:

3. Since our covenant is in the books from the _____ through _____, we look there for the commands we should obey.
4. In Matthew 28:18-20, Christ says His apostles are to teach others to _____ what He had _____ them.
5. In Matthew 5:14-16, we learn what command to obey?

6. In 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, we learn that we are to obey what command?

7. What happens if we do not obey this command?

8. From Acts 2:36-38, what command do we learn is for people of our day?

9. From Romans 13:1-7, what command do we learn is for people of our day?

10. From Acts 4:19 we learn that the command in Romans 13 means that we should:

11. A summary of what we have learned about commands:
 - a. Christ and the apostles gave _____ commands to be _____.
 - b. When looking at a command, we must ask if God _____ it for us _____.
 - c. We must also ask if a command has been _____ or _____ by any other commands or teaching.
 - d. We must be willing to _____ commands from Scripture for _____.



12. God reveals His will to us by giving us _____ to follow. Some passages where this principle is taught are in the following places:
13. Here are some guidelines for the use of examples:
- a. God has used _____ as a way to teach His will. The early church is a _____ from which we are to learn.
 - b. The example must be of an _____. Of course we can also learn from a _____ case when something has been _____.
 - c. The example must be of something that was _____ to be followed _____.
 - d. The example must be of something that has _____.
14. Here are some cases of things we learn by example.
- a. From Acts 20:7 we learn by example on what day to take the _____.
 - b. From Acts 14:23 and other places we learn how congregations were to have _____.
 - c. From many scriptures we learn that congregations are to be engaged in what kind of activities:

 - d. From 1 Corinthians 16:1 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 we learn that churches are to raise their money by _____ offerings.

STUDY 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-34 FOR THE NEXT CLASS PERIOD AND BE PREPARED TO ANSWER THESE TWO QUESTIONS: (1) WHAT COMMANDMENTS ARE THERE IN THIS PASSAGE WE SHOULD OBEY AND (2) WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THE EXAMPLE OF THE CORINTHIANS CHURCH AND PAUL'S COMMENTS TO THEM THAT COULD HELP US IN TAKING THE LORD'S SUPPER.



**WRITTEN REVIEW NO. 7
(For use with Lesson No. 8)**

1. The two principles for understanding the Bible studied in the last lesson were:
2. In Romans 7:1-4, Paul compares living under God's covenants to a _____ with two _____. The first one must _____ before she is free to _____ the second one.
3. What event marked the end of the first covenant, the one through Moses?
4. Name a benefit to us today from studying the Old Testament.
5. True or False. The four gospels are not part of the New Covenant because they describe events which happened before the death of Christ.
6. A source for finding other passages with which to compare a passage you are studying is:

