

Making Application

By Michael Allen

1. Application in the Bible

Reading the Bible is a self-involving activity. It requires application or self-involvement. But it involves us by confronting us with both comfort and challenge (see Jer. 1:10). When we talk about applying the Bible well, we are in the realm of what we call contextualization. We are asking questions about ways that the Bible is meant to shape us. Contextualization is unavoidable, but that doesn't mean that it is straightforward. It can go well or wonderfully. And it is worth noting that we want to contextualize appropriately so that we and others can be faithfully confronted and challenged with God's promises and direction. Good contextualization doesn't tame the Bible but shows how it awakens us, wherever we are.

Application does not simply happen now that we have the Bible. We can see application *within* the Bible itself, as earlier passages are reapplied in new settings. We sometimes call this reality intertextuality (when one text inside Holy Scripture is referred to by another).

The Book of Deuteronomy is a really instructive example because the very same Ten Commandments appear in two places (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5). The rest of Deuteronomy (chapters 6-26) unpacks the Ten Commandments for a new setting very different from the context of Israel in the earlier Book of Exodus.

- 6:4-5 explains the demands of the First Commandment
- Chs. 7-11 describe three new temptations to break the First Commandment:
 - 7:17
 - 8:17
 - 9:4
- Chs. 12-26 push back on new struggles regarding the other commandments:
 - worship where God says (12:4-7).
 - occasional restarting of property and possession (ch. 15).
 - the dependence of the Levitical priesthood as a symbol (18:1-2).
 - restraint on bloodshed in war and in court (19:15-21; ch. 20).

What we can see here is how Deuteronomy applies the Ten Commandments in a new way that would not have been appropriate in the time of Exodus itself but which faithfully unpacks the true meaning of Exodus 20 itself. Later texts do this differently (see Rom. 13:8-14).

2. Exercise

Think about two church communities of which you have been a part in some way over the years. What were commonalities? What were differences? How might their need for biblical teaching and application be contextually overlapping? How might it not?

3. Application of the Bible

What are some principles or proverbs for being the sort of woman who can apply the text well and contextualize faithfully? The following aren't exhaustive, but they provide some guidelines.

- a. Hold immediate practicality at arm's length, which is ironically the most practical practice in the long run.
- b. Know your context (place, culture, trends, temptations, idols). History and sociology can be helpful here.
- c. Know your audience (persons, relationships, stories, struggles, gifts). Know how people work, and know the people in your midst specifically. Novels and people-watching can be helpful here.
- d. Remember that there are contexts of bigger and smaller significance. Travel can help illumine what is common and what is distinctive.
- e. Think about the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Remember to read redemptive-historically (as you have learned in past lessons). Knowing the Big Picture matters, and identifying where you fit in that Big Picture spares us many crazy applications.
- f. Watch for the whole Christ. You want to be Christ-centered without being focused on one part of him or one benefit of his grace.
- g. Focus. Embrace your finitude. Don't try to do it all just now.
- h. The same text need not always generate the same main focus of meditation and application.
- i. Watch your scope, sequence, and proportions over time. Like diet, sometimes you need a supplement or infusion, but over time you want to aim toward a balanced diet.
- j. Apply and illustrate out of your own wheelhouse, aware of your tendency to start close to home.
- k. Application grids can be very helpful as prompts to keep you balanced. Examples: Gregory the Great, Thomas Brooks, C. S. Lewis, Mark Dever.

4. Suggested Follow Up Exercise

You might consider women with whom you are taking this class or, more broadly, the women at your congregation. What are the relevant categories to identify and understand them: spiritual, demographic, personality, relational, etc.? What would seem to be especially dominant or pertinent categories to address? What may be overlooked categories?