

Failing To Define Terms Contextually

Before there were dictionaries, commentaries, concordances, the Internet, electronic Bible tools, & seminaries, we had the Bible. It was through God's holy & divine word men studied because the Bible is the only book that can teach us the doctrine of Christ, give us the evidence we need to prove our faith, make corrections in our lives, & show us the way of righteousness, so we may be the complete creation God would have us to be (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**). Now don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with the tools, books, & schools listed above. However, when these things become our standard of authority, then we have failed miserably in fulfilling the command of **2 Timothy 2:15**, which instructs us to **"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."** Notice who it is we are to be showing ourselves approved to: GOD! Oftentimes, Christians will accuse denominationalists & others in religion of being brainwashed by some preacher or a religious creed book. However, when a Christian base their religion on the theology of a preacher, a book other than a Bible, or an ideal because it seems to be the right thing to do or it justifies what they want to do, then it is this Christian who has been mis-educated & brainwashed (**1 Corinthians 4:6** & **Proverbs 14:12**). Notice also in **2 Timothy 2:15**, what it is we are to rightly divide: THE WORD OF TRUTH. Too many Christians are dividing churches because of their inability to study the scriptures. Too many Christians & preachers in the pulpit no longer attempt to explain a text through exegesis, but rather by what they feel. Jesus never said we had to feel anything, but He did say we had to know something & the Lord tells us we need to know the truth (**John 8:32**). In too many churches, our assemblies have succumb to this line of thinking & many preachers can no longer reference text like I have done in this article, but must literally re-teach Bible stories, spend countless Sundays teaching individuals how to read their Bibles because we know if we don't, then any subject we teach on will be confusing to, misunderstood by, & totally rejected by Christians. One of the issues, which have strongly contributed to this area of mis-education of the Christian, has been the failing of defining terms contextually.

We must understand any given word in the Bible can have multiple definitions, according to dictionaries & the languages of Hebrew & Greek. Therefore, to understand what a particular word means, the reader must know what the definitions (plural) of the word are & what definition contextually fits. Where the Christian has been mis-educated is when they are taught to define a word before they read it in the context. This area of mis-education leads to the following:

1. Whenever I see this word in the Bible, it only means "this," regardless of the context in which it is being used.
2. If it means "this" always, then I don't care whether it contradicts other Scriptures.
3. It forces me to come up with a new hermeneutic, which shows how one can ignore the context of the Scriptures & yet have it still harmonize with the rest of the Bible.

Brethren, in looking at the 3 points above, it is crystal clear this person is not looking for the truth of the Scriptures, but rather they are trying to justify a practice they want to hold on to & this is the only way they can do it.

Not only are Christians mis-educated when they fail to define terms contextually, but it is displayed further when they fail to let the Bible interpret the Bible. When we are inquiring about a definition of a particular word, it is okay to go to a dictionary or a commentary, but these things are not a source of authority because your dictionary & commentary could be wrong. If you look in the dictionary for the word "baptize" or "baptism," you will find this definition, "The act of baptizing; the application of water to a person, as a sacrament or religious ceremony, by which he is initiated into the visible church of Christ. This is performed by immersion, sprinkling, or pouring" (*Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, © 1996, 1998 MICRA, Inc*). Do we see a problem with Webster's definition of the word "baptism?" Let us count some of the errors:

1. Nowhere in the Bible is baptism ever described or explicitly stated as a sacrament or religious ceremony. Baptism is a condition placed by God of which we can be saved (**1 Peter 3:21**). Furthermore, if baptism is a religious ceremony, then Philip should have waited to baptize the eunuch in **Acts 8:26-39** so the rest of the Christians could partake in this "ceremony."
2. If baptism is the method by which man is initiated into the "visible" church of Christ, then this infers he was a member of the spiritual church of Christ prior to baptism. However, this contradicts **Galatians 3:27**, which teaches baptism is what puts us into Christ & Christ is the head of His church (**Ephesians 5:23**).
3. Webster teaches baptism can be performed one of three ways: immersion, sprinkling, &/or pouring. If baptism is a "sprinkling," then we should be able to find at least ONE scripture, which explicitly states or gives an example of someone being sprinkled into Christ. From Genesis to Revelation, this scripture does not exist. If baptism is a "pouring," then we should be able to find at least ONE scripture, which explicitly states or gives an example of someone being sprinkled into Christ. From Genesis to Revelation, this scripture does not exist. However, the Bible does teach baptism is done by way of immersion ONLY (**Matthew 3:16, Acts 8:38-39, & Romans 6:4**).

