

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Lecture 27, Application,

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The next text that we want to talk about in terms of theological analysis is Ephesians chapter 2, 11-22. I won't read the text in its entirety, and we've already referred to it for other reasons, especially we dealt with it at some length in terms of the Old Testament use in the New, which is directly relevant to analyzing the text theologically and understanding where it stands within the overarching story of God's redemptive acts in history on behalf of his people and all of creation. But I want to look at it again in a little more detail related to how we might read this text theologically.

And first of all, Ephesians chapter 2, 11-22, when you read it, you note a number of terms that emerge, such as reconciliation is an important term, the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile into two entities that were formerly at odds with each other are now reconciled and brought together into a peaceful relationship and existence. The theme of the death of Christ, the theme of the people of God, again, consisting of Jew and Gentile. And towards the end, we find the theme of temple cropping up.

So this is a story of God through the death of Jesus Christ reconciling Jew and Gentile, again, two entities that were formerly at odds with each other, into a new people of God who actually function, therefore, as God's temple, as God's dwelling place. And this theme actually within the book of Ephesians itself plays an important role in relationship to the very beginning of the book. And back in Ephesians chapter 1, Paul tells his readers in this long section in chapter 1, verses 3-14, that in many ways, under one head, that is Jesus Christ.

So Paul, one of the things that God has done for his people through Christ is make known this God's intent, his will, and that is that eventually God intends to unite all

things, to reconcile all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, and that is the person of Jesus Christ. This assumes some type of dislocation in the present creation. This assumes a problem in the present heavens and earth that, according to Genesis 1 and 2, owes itself to sin.

So sin has entered the world and caused dislocation, has caused trouble, has caused fragmentation in the world and has caused hostility, and God intends to restore all things in creation, in heavens and earth, under the one head, which is Jesus Christ. Now where chapter 2 comes in is we see that this is already taking place. This has already been inaugurated.

And chapter 2, 11-22, is an example of how God is already bringing about reconciliation on earth by reconciling two formerly hostile and dislocated and fragmented parts of humanity, Jew and Gentile, into one new humanity, into a new people of God. Now we've already seen that by sustained allusion to texts from the book of Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah, that Paul intends to see this uniting of Jew and Gentile through the death of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Isaiah's program of restoration. And that Isaiah's anticipation of a day where those who are far and near, where Gentiles will be included in God's people, where they will also come and worship God and become God's people, now is restored, or now is inaugurated, through the person of Jesus Christ.

However, we also see this language of temple, especially in the latter verses of Ephesians 2, where notice how Paul shifts. Starting at verse 19, he shifts from speaking of nationhood, being citizens of the people of God, to household, but then he moves on to temple. Verse 20, he talks about this, now Jews and Gentiles equally belong as members of God's household.

Verse 20, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which may reflect Isaiah chapter 54 and the language of restoration of Jerusalem, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. In him, in Christ, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

So putting this all together, Ephesians 2 stands within the broader biblical theological narrative. Ephesians 2, which emphasizes the themes of reconciliation and people of God and the work of Christ, his death on the cross, emphasizing temple imagery, this all stands within the broader overarching theological narrative of God's intention to restore what was ruined at the fall, what caused dislocation and fragmentation between God and his people and between the people and other people, is now God expresses his intention to restore that. Throughout the Old Testament story, in terms of a temple, the temple was the way God would restore his presence and dwelling with his people.

And the prophetic anticipation in books like Isaiah, where God expresses his intention to restore humanity, Jew and Gentile, into a new people of God and to rebuild a temple. Texts such as Ezekiel chapter 40 through 48, God's intention to restore his temple so that he can dwell in the midst of his people in a new creation. That story now is beginning to be fulfilled in Ephesians chapter 2, where God has now, through the person of Jesus Christ, again this story reaches its climax in Christ, through the person of Christ, through his death on the cross, now the problem of sin from Genesis 3 that has caused this dislocation and fragmentation and has caused problems in God's creation, now has been dealt with in the person of Jesus Christ, so that now God establishes a new humanity consisting of Jew and Gentile, and now the humanity itself becomes a temple where God dwells through his Holy Spirit.

So Ephesians chapter 2 plays a crucial role in this ongoing narrative. But again, it reaches its climax in, finally, where most everything else does, in the book of Revelation, especially 21 and 22, where now you find the building of God, you find God's temple, which consists of the people in Revelation 21 and 22, consisting of Jew and Gentile, the pillars being the 12 tribes of Israel, the foundations being the apostles of the Lamb, the church consisting of Jew and Gentile, a place where nations now come and stream into the city in a new creation, and the key feature is now God, in covenant relationship, dwells in the midst of his people, his people temple. So that Revelation 21 and 22 is the ultimate climax of what one sees already taking place in Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 11 through 22, the ultimate dwelling of God with his people, consisting of both Jew and Gentile, in a new creation, his people temple.

So, I've given simply two examples of how, that are a little easier to do. This isn't as easy in every text, and I don't want to say every text has a direct relationship to the story, but still, as one studies biblical texts, one must be alert to the theological themes that emerge from the text, and one must be alert to how it might fit within the overarching biblical theological story, as part of the canon, the coherent and canonical unity that has come down to us in the form of the Old and New Testament. Those of you that are accessing this on the website will note, on Professor Hildebrand's website, I have also put together a series of lectures on the storyline of the Bible, and that is meant to unpack and unfold in even more detail this overarching narrative or story that emerges from the Old and New Testament canon.

So, one might go to that for more detail. But there are also a number of very helpful books on biblical theology, or Old and New Testament theology, or particularly the unified story of the entire Bible. One very brief text that I find helpful is a book authored by Desmond Alexander called, *From the Garden to the New Jerusalem*.

It does some similar things and traces themes from Genesis all the way through to Revelation 21 and 22. What I want to do now is move on to discuss briefly issues related to application, or as some scholars call it, contextualization. In my opinion, the process of interpretation is incomplete for Christians until they respond in obedience in a way called forth by the scriptural text itself.

That is, until the Old and New Testament texts are contextualized for our own day and situation, enabling Christians to respond in obedience as God calls forth in his revelation, until that takes place, the process of interpretation remains incomplete. Again, this stems from the fact that we confess that the Bible is the word of nothing less than the very word of God, and that God expects his people to conform to it and to obey it and be transformed by his word. So this is application, or contextualizing God's word for our modern day context and situation, is simply an implication of the scriptures as inspired, and also as an implication of the theological nature of scripture itself.

But it's important to understand at the outset that application is not just an add-on at the end of the interpretive process. It's not just something to be tacked on at the end so that you do your interpretation and try to understand the text in its historical context. And when you're done, kind of the last thing you do is tack on an application to show how it is relevant at the end of the interpretive process.

Instead, I would argue that application, or what some call contextualization, is already taking place at the very beginning of the interpretive process as we try to understand it for our own culture and day. Even though we are trying to understand it in its original historical context, we are still reading it as the scriptures of God to his people, so that we're already thinking of and asking how we understand this in our own culture and our own location. So the very goal, in my opinion, application is the very goal of interpretation.

That is conforming our lives to scripture and being transformed by reading it. So we ask, how does the word of God continue to speak to God's people today? The challenge is that we recognize, on the one hand, the ongoing relevance of God's word for his people, because it is God's word, we recognize the ongoing relevance of scripture, while at the same time we recognize that scripture was communicated in a very specific historical and cultural context. So we have to then ask, how do we take a text that is produced in a very specific historical and cultural context, and how do we bridge the gap to hear it continue to speak to God's people today, who find themselves in a very different historical and cultural context.

One of the justifications for, at least biblical justifications for application, is found in the text of the New Testament itself, a text that we considered in relationship to inspiration, but simply to suggest that even the Bible calls for its own ongoing relevance and application to the lives of God's people. And we could point to a number of other texts, but perhaps one of the more significant ones is found in 2 Timothy 3.16. 2 Timothy 3.16, all scripture is God-breathed, that's the clearest text that refers to inspiration, but usually we stop there and we talk about the character of scripture as inspired and what that means, but Paul's intention is articulated in the rest of 16 and 17, all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for instruction, for rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man or woman of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. So the corollary of inspiration is the transformation of God's people.

The corollary of inspiration is equipping God's people for every good work. So that in my opinion, the process of interpretation is incomplete, not only until we are able to articulate clear areas of application, but until we actually do it, and until we actually allow scripture to transform our lives. Until that happens, the process of interpretation has not yet run its course.

In my opinion also, I find application to be one of the more difficult aspects of interpretation to do well. I always tell students, I frequently have students ask me about how did you, when I was a pastor, how did you keep up your Greek and Hebrew, and how did you apply exegesis, and I often tell them, or they'll even tell me, what was the most difficult aspect of preparing sermons. And I usually tell them, is exegesis or interpretation, I often found the easiest part, and I don't mean it was easy, and I don't mean that there were not difficult texts that I had to wrestle with and work very, very hard at, but out of all the things that I would do in interpretation, and sermon preparation, I over and over again found that making good application was the most difficult aspect of interpretation.

But it's important to recognize that first of all, that interpretation, or application, or contextualizing scripture for modern day readers and listeners, it's important to recognize that it is first of all based on sound interpretation of the biblical text, in its original historical context, as the author most likely intended it, as the readers most likely would have understood it. Interestingly, one model of this is actually reflected in a commentary series, one commentary series in particular, which, with generally successful results, and that is the NIV Application Commentary Series, produced by Zondervan, it's intentional about applying a specific methodology to providing application of the biblical text that is rooted in understanding the text in its original historical context. But as with many of the approaches that we've talked about, the first thing I want to do is discuss briefly some of the errors to avoid in drawing application, and some of these are rather obvious, almost silly, others are sometimes more important, but the first mistake, or the first error, I think, to avoid in drawing application is the neglect of the overall context, that is the failure to place a New or Old Testament document in its literary and historical context, and often one of the dangers of misapplying biblical text, or one of the reasons, I'm sorry, one of the

reasons for misapplying biblical text, is often a failure to recognize the literary or historical context of a biblical passage.

I think, too, one of the curses, in my opinion, of verse and chapter divisions, especially verse divisions in the Bible, and again, let me, before I finish that, an aside is verse divisions, as I said before, chapter and verse divisions, at least to me, in my understanding, the primary value is that everyone can find the place, the same place in the text. Can you imagine speaking to a group of 100 people, trying to get them to find the same place somewhere in the middle of the book of Genesis, without chapter and verse divisions? So chapter and verse divisions are very important in helping us locate the right spot, and helping us to find the right place that we want. Otherwise, chapter and verse divisions, I think, can be a curse, because one of the offshoots of them is the danger of treating verses in isolated fashion.

To treat verses as self-contained units, as promises of God to His people, or something like that, where a verse, or even a paragraph, is treated as some self-contained unit, in isolation from the context in which it occurs, historically or literarily. We've already given one example of how ignoring context and neglecting context can lead us astray. And one of the more popular examples is the Philippians 4.13, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

If I take that verse in isolation, one of the ways I might apply it is to, as we've said before when we discuss literary context in the relationship to this verse, one of the ways I might apply it is that Christ helps me to do an impossible, a job that seems impossible to me, God will enable me to do it, or God will enable me to persist and persevere through a difficult marriage, or God will allow me to tolerate difficult relatives, or God will allow me to pass an exam that seems impossible for me to pass, often sometimes used as an excuse for not studying. But the point is, this verse is taken as a principle that gets applied to any situation that seems overwhelming and

too difficult for me to accomplish, then I'm reminded in Philippians 4.13, I can do all things through Christ. However, as we've already seen, the difficulty with that is, when one places it back within its broader context, the verses right before it, verses 11 and 12, Paul clearly is talking about his ability to live in any circumstance, that is, whether he has abundance or whether he is in dire need.

No matter what the circumstance, Paul is able to remain content. He's able to respond appropriately and to be content, whether he has money or whether he doesn't, whether he has abundance or whether he is in poverty. He is able to be content in any situation.

And the secret is, he can do everything through Christ. That is, he can live in any situation contently because Christ enables him to do so. So by understanding the broader context, this makes a difference in the way that a text is applied.

To give a really silly example, I always think of this one for some reason. This is kind of a silly example of misapplying a text, but I use it because it was serious. Someone made a serious life decision based on reading this text.

When I was in college in Denver, Colorado, I heard a pastor speak one time who had just moved to Denver to become a pastor of a church that I was attending. And I appreciated his ministry, and I don't want to say he was there on false pretenses or that God did not want him there or anything else. I don't want to call that into question.

But I do want to raise a question of how he got there. And on the first Sunday he was there, he read an interesting text from the book of Haggai, the Old Testament prophet Haggai, in chapter 1. And as he was basically giving some background as to how God had brought him out to Colorado to pastor this church, and he read this. He

started with verse 3 of Haggai chapter 1. Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai.

Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses while this house remains in ruin? And the pastor proceeded to say, as he read that verse, he looked around and noticed that he was sitting in a room with paneling on it. I think he was living in the state of Alabama in the United States at that time. But he was living in his home in Alabama, and he looked around and he was living in a house that had paneling on the walls.

And he kept reading. He kept reading and he got to verse 8. Go up into the mountains. And he took that as a call to go to Colorado.

So he looked now in Colorado, a state full of mountains, the Rocky Mountain state. Now he found in Haggai a call for him to go to Colorado. Now, again, I don't want to question his move to pastor this church in Colorado back then, years ago.

And I don't want to suggest that God could not have led him there. But again, the difficulty is when you read Haggai chapter 1 in its context, the whole historical and literary context is that God's people, this emphasis on to look around and they are living in paneled houses, the whole point is while their houses are suitable for living, the house of God, the temple, is in shambles. And so the call to go to the mountains in chapter 1 verse 8 is not a call to move.

It clearly says they're to go to the mountains to cut down timber so they come back and build the house of God. So this is not a call for someone to leave your paneled house and go into the mountains and live. But it's a call for God's people to sit up and take notice that while they live in comfortable surroundings, the house of God is in shambles.

And it's a call to rebuild God's house, God's temple, and to give it priority in their lives. So any application, any application to be valid must fit within its historical and its cultural and literary context. And any application must be consistent with how the passage functions within its context.

Another example that I was made aware of in a textbook by Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard on biblical interpretation was a text that I frequently heard read, for example, at weddings or something like that. And that is Psalm 127 and verses 3 through 5. Psalm 127 verses 3 through 5 is a reference to, apparently, a reference to having families or sons, actually having many sons, and the virtue of having several sons as a heritage from the Lord. And so verses 3 through 5, Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him.

Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

Now often this verse is used as a justification for having large families, even a command to do so. Especially the reference to having a full quiver. But the key is, historically, the last lines, They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies at the gate.

The significance is that the gate was a place where, apparently here, one would do warfare, or one would gather to decide legal cases. And so, perhaps in a day and age where mortality rates were much different or even higher, perhaps in today, having a large family ensured safety against enemies, and also ensured safety in legal situations. So this is not a call for everyone today to have a large family, and that somehow it is disobedient to not have a large family.

But instead it needs to be understood within its larger historical context. And notice the reference is primarily to sons in this context. They would have been the ones that would have contended at the gate, not daughters.

So this is more of a call for a large family to ensure safety against enemies, and a representation in legal affairs, not a command for everyone to have, especially today, to have a large family. So simply to make sure that application is consistent with the broader historical and literary context of a text. Another error or mistake in interpretation is a failure to recognize the salvation historical or redemptive historical structure of the Old Testament and New Testament.

That is, we've already seen in our discussion of theology that the Old Testament stands in relation to the New Testament as one of promise and fulfillment. So that some texts find their fulfillment in the person of Christ in a way that shows that they played a temporary role in the Old Testament. So that we have to ask, how ultimately, when it comes to applying text in the Old Testament, we have to ask, how do those texts ultimately find their fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ? For some texts, such as food laws or sacrificial laws, we find that they are no longer applicable in the way they stand in the Old Testament, but that they only apply as they are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ in light of the new revelation that comes through Jesus Christ.

So simply to look at the food laws in the Old Testament that forbid eating certain types of food and simply to apply them straight across the board, as if we should also avoid those types of foods, ignores the salvation historical structure of the Old and the New Testament. A third failure or error in application, I think, is to neglect the different literary genres that one does not apply, for example, narrative in the same way one applies epistolary literature. Especially in narrative literature, understanding

the entire story and understanding the wider and broader literary context and how the story works is essential for application.

We saw that in relationship to Exodus 18, the story of Moses being told by his father-in-law, Jethro, not to try to do too much, but to delegate some of the cases. Moses is functioning as the judge of Israel, but Jethro tells Moses, you can't handle all these. You handle the more important, larger ones and delegate the other ones to other individuals.

If all I did was read Exodus 18, I might be tempted to apply that in terms of delegating responsibility and how to run a business. Those may indeed be valid, I don't know, but when you put Exodus 18 in its broader context, we said it's a story of how Moses is portrayed as a weak human being in response to a question, is the Lord really with us or not? The Lord must be with Israel because Moses is simply a weak human being. Moses can't do it.

It must be God who is doing all these things. It must be God who is with his people. So Exodus 18 is more a reminder of the fact that God often showcases our weaknesses in order to make clear that it is his power that is at work within us.

So application needs to take into consideration the different literary genres and how that might make a difference in the way we read it. A final one is insufficient analogies, the danger of trying to apply a text in a way where the analogy between our present situation and application is not entirely applicable to the original situation. That is, for example, to apply a text that refers to national Israel to a nation such as the United States of America is again to miss the fact that especially, and this also takes into consideration the principle of the failure to recognize the historical redemptive structure of the Old and New Testament.

But to, for example, as I have often heard done, to take a promise made to the nation of Israel that God would bless them if they do that and to apply that straight across the board. That if any nation, for example, the United States of America, in order for God to continue to bless them as his people or as a nation, that they must do this and this and this, misses the fact especially that God no longer shows preference to any one nation. God no longer relates to his people nationally, but now relates to them solely through the person of Jesus Christ.

That God's people are now transnational and transcultural. Or another example is to take text in the New Testament that refer to the institution of slavery, the relationship between a master and his slave, and to apply them straight across the board to the relationship between an employer and an employee. Not that there are not some ways to apply that and that there might not be some application, but to simply be unaware of the differences.

It is to rely on an insufficient analogy between our modern-day employee-employee relationship in our society and the ancient master-slave relationship. So what should we do? Again, this is something we should attempt to do from the beginning. We do not simply tack on application to the very end of the interpretive process.

But instead, one possible suggestion is that we, and a very common method of application is to extract an abstract principle from the biblical text and then ask how that principle applies to the modern-day situation and the modern-day reader. This is very similar to the three aspects of translation, where you have a source language, that is the ancient language and an understanding in its original historical context, followed by a message, that is trying to uncover the main message of the text, and then communicating it in a receptor language, in a way that will be understood by those who are reading the text in the receptor language, especially through the

process known as a dynamic equivalent translation. So in analogy to that, we often find a three-fold process of application that looks something like this.

Number one is to uncover the meaning of the text in its original historical context by studying the text in its original context. One asks questions about the author's intended meaning, what most likely did the author intend, through a careful study of the literary historical context, in light of the meaning of the words and the grammar and the literary genre, is what is the meaning of that text? How is it applied to first-century readers? Then the second step is, what is the underlying cross-cultural principle? What is the underlying meaning that transcends the specific original historical situation? That is, what is the timeless principle, or what are the timeless principles that arise from this text? And then third, corresponding to the receptor language and the process of translation, is what are, or what isn't appropriate, or what are appropriate applications of this principle, or these principles, for the modern-day context and situation? And again, in many ways that resembles the process of, especially associated with dynamic equivalent translations, of moving from the receptor language to the message, and then communicating that message, transferring it into, I'm sorry, starting the resource language and understanding the message, but then transferring that message into a receptor language that will be understood by the majority of readers for whom it is intended. An example of how that might work could be found in 1 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. One could study 1 Corinthians 8 and 9, or one begins by studying it in its original context.

This is the section of Corinthians where Paul calls on Christians in Corinth to be willing to not eat meat that had been offered to idols, so most of the times if you would have eaten meat in 1st century Corinth, so you're, you know, someone invites you over to eat, or you decide to buy meat in the marketplace, if you have the money to do so, is usually that meat at some point had been offered to an idol, and now being sold in the marketplace, or now you go over to someone's house to eat a

meal, and they are serving meat that had probably been offered earlier that day to an idol. And some of the Corinthian Christians felt that it was okay to do that, and that idols are nothing, and this is simply meat, and I'm not participating in any idol worship in eating this, I'm just enjoying a good steak or whatever, in saying that I've already contextualized, but some Corinthians thought that it was okay to eat meat offered to idols, while others felt that their consciences would not allow them to do that, they felt that it was wrong. And Paul addresses those in Corinth who thought that it was okay to do so, to be willing to give up that right, so as not to cause another Christian to stumble, and what he means by that is not offending them, or making them feel bad, but actually causing them to participate in that activity in a way that violates their conscience.

The principle then that emerges out of this text, or could emerge out of this text, is Paul calls upon Christians then to be willing to give up their rights, or the principle of this text would be to be willing to give up your right for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ, so as not to hinder the faith of Christ, or another Christian's faith in Jesus Christ, and not causing them to participate in an activity that they know is wrong. The application is, without giving specifics, an application then would be to ask what specific ways in our own day and age, in our own church context, might we be in danger of ignoring this, of violating this. Probably it won't be with eating meat.

Most of us do not live in societies, some of us might, but many of us do not live in societies where you go to the supermarket and buy meat, and it was probably offered to an idol. So this form of application probably will change. Instead, we will ask what are more appropriate modern day analogies in applying this text.

So that three-fold method is a very common one, often known as principalizing, that is through study of the text in its original context, is identifying the meaning or principle that transcends the context, that now can be placed in or applied in a new

context, a principle or principles. Most would not want to suggest that there's just one. While there's a lot of value in that approach, at the same time it's important to recognize that that should not be treated as a mechanical approach, that a simple three-step method, like a recipe, that if you just apply the correct methods, that the application emerges naturally.

For example, in my opinion, much creativity and careful thinking must take place in order to arrive at valid applications. But in addition to that, I think, perhaps to take that three-fold approach, in addition, one must also recognize the more dialogical nature of application, or the more interactive nature of application. As I said, at the very start of the application process, one is thinking in terms of not only the meaning of this text in the original context, but usually if you think about it, when you approach a biblical text, one is interested, ultimately, in asking how does this text apply to the modern reader? So that some have proposed that application is more interactive.

That is, at the very start of the process, one begins to study the biblical text in its context. But also, one is alert to possible analogies and possible applications, and the possible relevance of that text to readers today. But I think two other factors, any application of the biblical text, whether I'm extracting a principle that then I will apply in subsequent situations, any application of the text must conform to at least two factors, and that is that the principle must be guided, the principle and its application must be guided by the broader context of the book itself.

That is, there must be coherence with what's going on in the text, with the broader context. And second, any principle and its application must be consistent with the intention of that text, with the purpose of that text. What's the text trying to do? For example, we saw this when we talked a little bit about legal literature, or the genre of law, that one of the laws that one finds in the Old Testament is a command to

farmers not to harvest their fields out to the edge, but leave some of the crops standing.

One might ask, is a valid application that this is only for farmers, and that they should not harvest all their crops? Or instead, consistent with its intention, with the broader context, and the intention of this law is that this is the way that the poor would be cared for in Israel's midst. So that according to the intention of that command, or that law, is now I ask how can that principle or intention of caring for the poor in that law, how can that be applied within my situation? Again, looking for analogies that are consistent with the intention of that law. So those two factors, the principle that we derive and the application, must be consistent and guided by the broader context, and also must be consistent with and guided by the intention of the text.

So what might the process of application look like? First of all, again, as an interpreter, I enter the world of the text. I try to make sense of the text and understand it, through applying the methods of interpretation that we've discussed, by trying to understand the text in light of its broader historical context, in light of its literary context, in light of its genre, in light of its theological context. I attempt to understand the text, and enter the world of the text, and understand it on its own terms.

As I do so, and as I understand the text, I begin to see possible connections between the ancient world of the text and my own world. And I begin to see possible overlap between the biblical world and my own world. But I continue to study the text, and I continue to weigh these possible correspondences, in terms of whether they conform to the biblical text.

Do they conform to the broader context of the biblical text? Do they conform to the intention and purpose of that text? So in essence, I'm allowing the questions and

insights that I gain from reading the text to be challenged by the biblical text itself. I'm allowing my perspectives on the text to be shaped by a study of the text itself. So I continue to study the biblical text, and enter its world.

I seek to hear the message of the text. And finally, I then, again, I test any proposed application against whether it fits the context, and whether it fits the purpose or intention of the text. So that's a little bit more interactive approach than just following a rigid three-step, study the text in its original context, extract the principle, and then look for methods of application.

But perhaps taking that method and looking at it more as an interaction with the text, where again, I try to enter the world of the text, and start to recognize and explore possible correspondences, but continually test those by looking at the text, and test correspondences and applications by the broader context, and the intention and purpose of the text. There is a final step that's often missed in application, and that is the reader must respond by obeying. It's not enough to uncover or to come up with applications of the text until one actually responds by obeying it, and allowing the text to transform one's life.

The process of interpretation has not yet been completed, until it evokes a response in the reader that is consistent with the response that is called forth by the text itself. A couple of additional features to mention when it comes to application is, first of all, I'm convinced that interpretation of the biblical text must ultimately be done in the service of the Church of Jesus Christ. The ultimate context of our scholarship and interpretation is not the college or seminary, and it's not our learned Bible societies, although those can provide important checks on the work we do, but ultimately our interpretation has to be shown to be relevant to the Church of Jesus Christ.

Scripture is meant to shape the community of the church to which I belong. So application is more than just asking what in my own life needs corrected, it also asks how I live out Scripture in the context of the church, of the people of God. So ultimately, interpretation and application must take place within the context of the church, and must be of service to God's people, the Church of Jesus Christ.

Second, related to this, when we do that, we discover that God's community of believers is transcultural and spans the globe, and is far broader than the limited historical cultural context in which I find myself, so that I must also listen to the voice of others who have interpreted and read the text and applied it to themselves, in order to help me to see new ways of seeing things, or to help correct where I may have misunderstood or misapplied the biblical text. I find more and more that it's usually my foreign students. All my teaching has been in a North American context, in the United States of America, but often it's my foreign students who have been instrumental in helping me see blind spots in my own interpretations and my own applications of biblical text.

Helping me realize that I approach the text from a North American, Western, middle class, white perspective. Not that that is a negative, or will necessarily cloud the text. Other perspectives can cloud the text as well.

But sometimes I find that those who come from a situation of poverty and oppression are in a position to better understand and apply the biblical text, because I think they come from a situation that's more in line with the original historical and cultural context that the biblical text was addressing. And therefore they may be in a position to help me understand the text better. Because they come from a situation closer and more analogous to that of the biblical text.

For example, I used to read the book of Revelation and its visions of suffering and oppression and persecution. Either not sure how to apply it, often I thought that this is something that really doesn't apply to me, but maybe someday later will apply. Or, I often applied it to the rather menial and occasional minor ridicules and inconveniences that I suffered.

But, from listening to those of my foreign students who have come from cultures where suffering and death for the sake of the gospel, or any suffering and oppression and death are a reality, especially at the hands of foreign oppressors, I began to read the book of Revelation in a new light. I read it not as a reference to my own occasional, menial, trivial inconveniences at times, but instead I began to read it from the perspective of others. That is, I began to ask, how might I be guilty of contributing to the suffering and oppression of others? Or, how can I alleviate the pain and suffering and the injustice that others are experiencing? So, I think it's important, again, number one, as we think about application to do our application and interpretation within the context of the church.

To demonstrate how the biblical text is relevant to the church of Jesus Christ. And second, is recognizing that the church of Jesus Christ is transcultural. As Revelation says, the church consists of people from every tribe and language and tongue and nation.

I need to interpret in light of what my brothers and sisters in other cultures and countries, how they are reading the biblical text as well, and to listen. Because they might help me see through my own blind spots in interpretation and application. So, application then, should not be seen as an add-on or something tacked on to the end of the interpretive process.

It's the very goal of the interpretive process. And in some respects, it begins at the very, it starts at the very beginning of the interpretive process. Where I enter the world of the biblical text.

I try to understand it in its own terms. In light of what the author was intending. But I start to consider possible areas of relevance to my own day.

Or I try to uncover principles that may be able to transcend the original historical situation and apply to my own situation. But as I do so, I must test that through whether it fits with the original historical and literary context. Whether it's consistent with the text.

And also whether it is consistent with the intention and purpose of the original text. But all in all, one must do this. One must apply the biblical text.

Because the process of reading and interpreting the text is incomplete. Is short-circuited and stop short. Unless one not just explores areas of applications.

But unless one actually submits to the biblical text. And allows it to transform us. Unless we respond to it in obedience.

In a way that is called forth by scripture itself. We have not yet completed the process of interpretation. What I want to do in the next session is kind of draw everything together.

And be able to perhaps put this together in a framework. What might an interpretive approach look like? Especially from an evangelical perspective. How might we integrate the methodologies and the criticisms that we've talked about.

What might an interpretive approach look like? And then we'll also end by applying that approach. Showing how it works in a couple of biblical texts.