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GOD DID NOT GET DISTRACTED

This may seem like a strange title for an article, but I believe it is a good reminder to those of us who are interested in Bible study and learning the truth (Jn. 17:17; II Tim. 2:15). When we read the words of Christ, or the prophets, or the apostles in the Bible, please understand that they did not begin speaking on one subject and then simply change their thoughts in “midstream,” as it were, and start talking about something else! The books, paragraphs, and verses of the Bible have a context. There is a consistency in flow and context to the Bible! When respected, it opens up our understanding of God’s mind (I Cor. 2:7-11; Eph. 3:4, 5:17). **Men Made Chapter And Verse Divisions** Perhaps part of our temptation to think that God got “distracted” and switched subjects at times in mid-sentence comes from the chapter and verse divisions in the Bible. If we are not careful, we might find ourselves more

divisions than we ought to be. Let us remember that men made chapter and verse divisions. History tells us that Stephen Langton began in 1227 to devise the chapter divisions we see in the Bible books. The Wycliffe Bible (1382) was the first to have chapter divisions. The current verse divisions were the work of a man named Robert Estienne (or Robert Stephanus) in the mid-1500s. Beginning with the Geneva Bible (1560), every Bible version has used these verse divisions. Chapter and verse divisions literally divide the Bible into single sentences or phrases. While this aids us in finding a specific thought, phrase, or teaching of God, the disadvantage is that it promotes the idea of thinking of the Bible as individual sentences or phrases. Men are then tempted to lift statements and teachings from their context to teach “pet theories” rather than recognizing and respecting the actual teachings of the Bible in context

Men Are Often Careless About The Context of Scripture.

Lifting a verse from its context results in being dishonest with the Bible. Studying the Bible demands that we respect all that the Lord has said concerning a subject (Ps. 119:160). We must be able to recognize the context even though the text has been divided into chapters and verses. This is a warning that I need to heed as much as anyone! All of us need to listen to the Lord's word and respect what has been revealed in the complete paragraphs, chapters, and books! I am writing these things because I have observed folks who misused individual verses to "prove" a certain point. Sadly, they essentially had no regard for the context of the Scripture and therefore used a passage in the wrong way. If they read a particular sentence or statement that they felt promoted their "pet theory" or false doctrine, then they used it in their own context rather than respecting the context in which the passage was found. A few examples come to mind. **John 3:16.** Some use John 3:16 as a "proof-text" that baptism is not necessary for salvation. When we fail to read the context of John 3, and see that Christ had talked about baptism back in verses 3 and 5, and instead merely read one verse alone, then folks fall for this false doctrine of salvation by "faith-only"! Acts 16:31 (*"And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. and thou shalt be*

saved and thy house") is used in a similar way. Without any respect for the verses before and after that enlighten us on what verse 31 truly means; people have been duped into believing a false doctrine that says baptism is unessential to salvation!

Matthew 7:1 This passage may be second only to John 3:16 for being misapplied. We know this verse says, *"Judge not, that ye be not judged."* To hear some talk, though, we might think Jesus said no one can ever judge anyone on anything. What happened to the context? When we respect the context (Matt. 7:1-5), and supplement our study with parallel passages like Luke 6:37-42 and John 7:24, we see a very different message taught by Christ than the "popular" thinking! Study those passages and see for yourself! **Romans 10:13.** *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."* is another well-known verse that is taken out of context by men. To listen to some folks talk, we might think Romans 10 ends at verse 13! This is not the case. When we read Romans 10:14-17 and supplement our study with Acts 2:21-38 and 22:12-16, we will have the true understanding of what it means to *"call upon the name of the Lord."* It is quite different from the modern-day interpretation of "calling," that is for sure! We could add many other passages to our list of misused and abused verses that are taken out of context. Our

Our point is that God did not get “distracted” while inspiring the men to write (II Pet. 1:20-21). He did not inspire men to write on a particular subject, and in the middle of the context, throw in “random” thoughts for people to find like a scavenger hunt!

“Cherry-Picking” Verses Is A Mistake. What I mean by the term “cherry-picking” is teaching that occurs when folks read a verse, find a “key” word or thought they want to emphasize, and then use this word as a “jumping-off point” for their doctrine. This happens more often than perhaps we care to admit. As an example, go back to John 3:16. Imagine someone reading this and focusing on the word “gave” in the passage, and from this, developing an oral or written lesson on the need for people to give of their means for a particular work in the church. While there are passages that teach us to give of our means, such teaching based on John 3:16 is being dishonest with the text! Christ was not distracted! He did not start talking to Nicodemus about God’s love and sacrifice and the need for being born again, and then say, “Wait, that reminds me, let’s talk about giving your money to me.” Another example of this misuse of Scripture can be seen when folks read Matthew 5:34 (*“But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne”*) and then apply this to the “swearing” or “affirming” which takes place in a court of

law when one is called to the witness stand! Please read Matthew 5 and supplement the study with 23:16-22! Jesus is correcting the practices of those who were following the hypocritical actions and traditions of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:17-20; 6:2, 4, 18). Let us respect this context! Jesus was not talking about the practices of the Pharisees and then stopped in mid-thought to say, “By the way, I also don’t want you to swear when called to testify in U.S. Courtrooms.” Christ was not distracted when He spoke! Unfortunately, folks teach like this at times, and it does a disservice to the Scriptures. It is not right to take a word or phrase from a context and essentially “run with it” to teach what we please! Where is the respect for the context? God was not distracted when He had the Bible written. Neither should we get distracted when reading it! **Conclusion** Please understand this is not to say we cannot teach the truth from a single verse or paragraph in Scripture. We can. Our point is that the context of that verse must be respected when teaching others! God did not inspire men to write about one subject, and then in mid-sentence, inspire them to start talking about something else! We cannot “cherry-pick” words and phrases and place them within a context we want. We must respect the context of all Scripture! – Jarrod Jacobs



MONTHLY CHALLENGE

DIRECTIONS: Each first Sunday of the month, we will have challenges that you should attempt to complete by the end of the month. If we all, as members, complete these challenges, our church will grow in spirit and in number.

1) Praying For Others Challenge

James 5:16 *"The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."* Prayer can turn night into day, and can change the worst of circumstances into amazing blessings. There are so many areas where our prayers can make a difference. We can pray for one another. "Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God," Col. 4:12. We can pray for our enemies. "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," Matt. 5:44. We can pray for those we wish to share the gospel with. "Praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word," Col. 4:3. There are so many areas where prayer is the difference maker. Devote this month to praying diligently in these specific areas and watch God clear pathways to make progress. "I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, rivers in the desert," Is. 43:19.

2) USING YOUR BIBLE IN THE WORLD

Share the following verses with someone who does not attend this congregation at least twice this month:

Titus 3:3-8

"For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men."