

NEVER READ A BIBLE VERSE - Pamphlet by Greg Koukl, Stand to Reason

I. INTRODUCTION

A. About Stand to Reason

1. Mission
2. I gave presentation on Defending the Faith from them

II. GREG KOUKL WROTE "NEVER READ A BIBLE VERSE"

A. The challenge

1. Touts this advice as "... the single most important practical skill I've ever learned as a Christian..."
2. What he means is you should always read at least a paragraph surrounding the verse to get the meaning of the verse
 - a. Example
 - (1) You walk into a conversation, you hear something curious, and say "What are you talking about?"
 - (2) Context is needed to understand what little you just heard
 - b. A basic rule of communication
 - (1) Meaning flows from...
 - (a) The top down
 - (b) From the larger units of information to the smaller units
 - (2) Therefore, the key to understanding any piece of information comes from the surrounding context of paragraphs, not the individual words of a small fragment you focus on
 - c. Same rule applies to understanding a Bible verse
 - (1) It's in the middle of a passage
 - (2) We can't know what God is saying by looking at just the isolated verse
 - (3) We need to know the bigger picture to understand the smaller one

B. This provides a rule by which to answer biblical questions

1. When asked something about a particular verse, don't answer from just the verse
 - a. Read at least the paragraph to get the context surrounding the verse
 - b. Let it tell you what's really going on

2. Overcomes a problem that has occurred in Bible translations
 - a. Verse numbers & verses weren't there originally - it was one long manuscript
 - b. What you think is standing on its own as a verse really wasn't written that way

3. General guidelines to understanding a Bible verse
 - a. What is the broad context of the book the verse is in ?
 - (1) History, poetry, proverb, gospel, epistle, prophetic ?
 - (2) Each has a different way of presenting information

 - b. Gain an overview of the broad passage the verse is in
 - (1) Are there breaks in the text that identify key units of thought ?
 - (2) Do these paragraphs give any clues to the meaning of the verse under study ?

 - c. What stands out about the passage containing the verse ?
 - (1) What is the general meaning of the passage ?
 - (2) What idea is being developed ?

 - d. Importance of following this sequence carefully
 - (1) Words have different meanings in different contexts
 - (a) Examples of "row"
 - (b) Considering a verse in isolation allows us to fix on only possibilities we are predisposed toward

 - (2) General help to understand the meaning of words not helpful
 - (a) Dictionaries ?
 - (b) Thesaurus ?
 - (c) Only complicate things

 - (3) Genuine help comes from the surrounding paragraphs
 - (a) Understand the surrounding context
 - (b) Narrow your focus on the verse, itself
 - (c) Speculate on the meaning in light of the context
 - (d) Depend on the Holy Spirit for true enlightenment

e. Moving into a more rigorous study of the verse

- (1) Analyze the verse in context
- (2) Research the verse by other sources
 - (a) Comparison among a few trusted translations
 - (b) Research in commentaries, Bible dictionaries
 - (c) Word study in concordance
 - (d) Prayerful reflection
- (3) Summarize the passage in your own words
- (4) Employ the "paraphrase principle"
 - (a) Replace the text in question with your paraphrase
 - (b) Does it make sense in the light of the larger context ?
 - (c) Result should be that you say the same thing as the
but in your own words

III. EMPLOYING THE PARAPHRASE PRINCIPLE - EXAMPLES

A. Example # 1: 2 Timothy 1.7 re. "A spirit of fear"

1. Using the KJV for illustration

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (KJV)

2. Interpretation of some is ...

- a. If a believer feels fear, it is the result of an evil spirit
- b. The demon must be resisted, bound, cast out

3. The challenge = what is the meaning of "spirit" ?

- a. A spiritual being - demon, angel, Holy Spirit, human soul ?
- b. A disposition of mind, mood, or defining characteristic ?

4. Applying the Paraphrase Principle

- a. Try to speculatively apply the first option, e.g. "spirit" = "demon"

For God hath not given us the *demonic* spirit of fear; but
a demonic (or angelic) spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

- (1) Problems show up immediately

- (a) Does the Bible teach that spiritual beings have influence over us in qualities of power, love, a sound mind ? ==> Context

- b. Try to speculate on the second possibility, e.g. "spirit" = a disposition

For God hath not given us a *timid and fearful disposition*; but a *disposition* of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

- (1) This makes more sense, particularly when in context
(a) vs 6 & 8 (NAS)

" 6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God,"

- i) Paul talks about the spiritual gift that God has given him to use in testifying to the Lord
- ii) Now note vs. 7 in the NAS
 - (1) "...spirit of ..." fits right in, stated twice
- iii) Both NAS and NIV give the better translation

"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." (NIV)

B. Example # 2: Jesus, the Uncreated Creator

1. John 1.1-3

"1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. "
(NAS)

2. The statements following the passage

- a. Vs 1 "...the Word was God"
- b. Everything that came into being was created by the Word
- c. The Word must have existed before
- d. Therefore the Word couldn't have been created

3. The objection

- a. Lies in vs 3 "...apart from Him..."
- b. The "logic"
 - (1) This excludes Jesus from all the things coming into being from Him
 - (2) E.g. "Apart from Jim, everyone is going home today"
 - (3) Therefore, everything was made by Jesus except Jesus Himself
 - (a) Jehovah created Jesus first
 - (b) Jesus is not God

4. Analysis

- a. Intent is to replace "apart from" with "with the exception of Jesus"
- b. Applying the Paraphrase Principle to verse 3

All things came into being through Him, and, *with the exception of Jesus*, nothing came into being that has come into being

- (1) The reconstructed phrase is nonsense
- (2) So "apart from Him" can be "with the exception of"

- c. The alternative means "apart from His agency, power, authority"

All things came into being through Him, and apart from power nothing came into being that has come into being'

- (1) This makes much more sense

C. Example # 3: Having a "Peace" about it

1. Col 3.15

" And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful." (NAS)

2. Common misinterpretation

a. "rule" = brabeuo (Gk) = arbiter, judge, umpire is accurate

(1) Interpret this as God's will for our lives

b. Typical thinking in the light of this

(1) When confronted with a decision, pray

(a) If you feel "peace", God has given the go ahead

(b) If you don't feel peace, don't proceed

(2) Paraphrase could be ...

"And let feelings of peacefulness in your heart be the judge about Christ's individual will for your life "

c. Shows how dangerous applying Greek without context can be

3. Applying Paraphrase Principle

a. "Peace" can have two meanings

(1) Sense of inner harmony, evenness of mind under stress

(2) Lack of conflict between two parties formerly at war

(3) The Greek word is the same (eirene) in both cases, completely dependent on context for understanding

b. Note the context Paul gives preceding vs. 15 ...

- "11 ... a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.
- 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;
- 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.
- 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. "

(1) He speaks of ...

- (a) No division among them, no what what the classes
- (b) An appeal for unity characterized by forgiveness, humility, gentleness
- (c) vs 15

" And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful."

- i) "peace" should be the rule that guides our relationships

(2) Paul's concern ...

- (a) is fostering a lack of conflict among Christians
- (b) Not a subjective feeling of peace in an individual Christian's heart

IV. CONTEXT IS KING - CRITICAL CLUES TO WATCH OUT FOR

A. Explicit meaning in the context - "...lifted up..."

1. John 12.32 - "...if I be lifted up ..." "...when I am lifted up ..."

- a. Some worship leaders quote it this way ...

"And I, if I be lifted ... will draw all men to Myself"

- (1) Intent is that people should understand that focusing on Jesus and worshipping Him "lifts Him up"
- (2) This then releases the power of Christ to draw those who are listening to Him

- b. But look at the following verse ...

32 "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."

33 But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die. "

- (1) The context clearly explains what Jesus meant
 - (a) It wasn't praising Jesus that will kill Him !
 - (b) He would be killed by being "lifted up" in crucifixion

2. John 3-14-15 "...lifted up..."

- a. Use of "...lifted up..." in first phrase clarifies its use in 2nd phrase

14 "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;

15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

- (1) Moses physically lifted up the serpent for the salvation of Hebrews who looked at it
- (2) Jesus will be physically lifted up in the air for the salvation of mankind (vs 16)

B. Be careful of authors quoting with ellipses ("...")

1. Example of an author quoting John 5.17,19-20

"My Father has been working until now, and I have been working ...
Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself; but what
He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like
manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that
He Himself does"

a. The author's points...

- (1) Jesus received guidance directly from the Father
- (2) Jesus is our model, so each of us must learn to hear the voice
of God to know and do God's will

b. The problem ... he omitted vs 18, part of vs 19, and vss 21-23

- (1) Loss of context directly impacts what is studied

c. Note the full context ...

17 But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself
am working."

18 For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him,
because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling
God His own Father, **making Himself equal with God.**

19 **Therefore** Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say
to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He
sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the
Son also does in like manner.

20 "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself
is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that
you will marvel.

21 "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the
Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

22 "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment
to the Son,

23 so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who
does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

d. Comments ...

(1) vs 18-19

- (a) vs 18 explains that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus because
He was making claims to deity
- (b) vs 19's "therefore" says that what follows is Jesus' response to
the Jews' concern about His claim

(2) vs 21-22

- (a) Have three phrases with parallel construction ...
 - i) "...the Father loves the Son ... shows Him all things..."
 - ii) "...the Father raises the deadthe Son also gives life..."
 - iii) "...not even the Father judges anyone...all judgement to the Son..."
- (b) If the author's point that we are to model what Jesus has been given,
then we should ...
 - i) Give life to whom we wish
 - ii) Judge the world on the Father's behalf
 - iii) Demand all people honor us as they honor the Father

(3) Obviously this isn't Jesus' teaching here

e. What does the context say ?

(1) Note vs 26-27 as the context that clarifies ...

26 "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He
gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;
27 and He gave Him authority to execute judgment,
because He is the Son of Man"

(2) SO the passage is about the divinity of Christ

- (a) Jesus is unique as the incarnate Son of God
- (b) As such, He has ...
 - i) unique obligations
 - ii) unique abilities
 - iii) a unique relationship with the Father
- (c) Jesus, as the Messiah, has a singular role
 - i) He never directs His disciples to follow His example
 - ii) None of the epistle or Gospel writers ever
promote that

C. The Eliminator

1. Context can sometimes do the opposite
 - a. Eliminate possible options by clearly indicating what a verse DOES NOT mean
2. Example - John 20.29

29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

- a. One view of this
 - (1) Jesus criticizing those who seek evidence for faith
 - (2) Supposes Jesus commends "blind" faith as more virtuous
- b. But note the next verses ...

30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;
31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

- (1) Jesus certainly performed a number of miraculous signs, and John made sure we knew about them

D. Limited Scope

1. Context can sometimes "take away" a favorite verse's personal application
2. Example - Jeremiah 29.11

" 'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'"

- a. Key question - who is the "you" that God had in mind ??
- b. Looking at the context of vs 1 & 4 ...

"1. Now these are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile, the priests, the prophets and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.....

4 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon,...'

- (1) God tells the Jewish exiles of 70 years of discipline that they would be restored to their homeland and they would prosper
- (2) This is not a promise for anyone else, and we shouldn't claim it

V. THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

A. Guiding scriptures

1. 2 Timothy 2.15

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."

- a. We are to work at understanding the Word of God
- b. We should not expect the Holy Spirit to whisper it in our ears any time we need to know something

2. 1 Corinthians 2.10 - 12

"10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.
11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.
12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God...."

- a. The Spirit is in us to illuminate the Word we are studying, but we must be studying as a workman

3. 2 Peter 1.20 - 2.1

"1:20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,
21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.
2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. "