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All Scripture interprets itself in the verse, in the context, and as used before. In previous articles we focused on how the Scripture interprets itself in the verse. Now let's consider how the Scripture interprets itself in the context. Context means the parts of a discourse that surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning. Biblically speaking, this would refer to the verses or even chapters that surround a particular verse. Understanding the context is an important step in allowing the Word to interpret itself because the context gives us the "big picture" of what's being conveyed.

Philippians 1:21 is an example of a verse that has been misunderstood and misapplied when taken out of context. Philippians 1:21 states in part: "...to die *is* gain." This phrase has been privately interpreted to mean that death is personally profitable for an individual. At a funeral, for example, we may hear it said that someone's death was advantageous for them because they are at peace or they have rest from their labor or they are with the Lord. But the Apostle Paul, who wrote this statement by revelation, was not saying that to die would be gain for himself. The full verse reads: "For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain." Let's read some verses from the context to get the big picture of the chapter.

Philippians 1:12:

But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.

Paul was writing this epistle to the Philippians while he was imprisoned. And he wanted them to know that everything that had happened to him (his arrest and imprisonment) had only served to further the movement of the Word.

Philippians 1:13,14:

So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;

And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

His imprisonment had actually emboldened many of the believers to speak the Word fearlessly!

Philippians 1:15-17:

Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:

The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction [pressure] to my bonds:

But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.

Some people preached Christ with ill intent, desiring to increase the pressure on Paul; but others preached Christ out of good will.

Look at Paul's wonderful attitude:

Philippians 1:18-20:

What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

Paul rejoiced that Christ was being preached and concluded that even if he should die, Christ would be magnified. His logic was that if Christ was being preached on account of his bonds, then surely Christ would be preached even if Paul died. This is the logic leading up to Philippians 1:21.

Philippians 1:21:

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Paul is saying that if he lived, he could serve Christ; and if he died, it would still be gain for Christ because Christ would still be preached. We can see from the context that it was not a question of Paul's own furtherance; Paul cared only that Jesus Christ was preached. As long as it was for Christ's gain—the furtherance of the gospel—it was immaterial to Paul whether it should be by his living outside of prison or by his death in prison.

Philippians 1:24,25:

Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith.

The context shows that Paul concludes that his living would benefit the believers. He knew it was more needful for them that he live, get out of prison, and continue to boldly fight for the furtherance of the gospel, which is the context of this section. We too can live for the furtherance, the advancement, of the good news regarding what Jesus Christ made available.

Reading the context of Philippians 1 shows us what Paul considered gain: the furtherance of the gospel. The more of the Bible we read, the more we will see verses in their proper context. This is an important step in allowing the Word to interpret itself. Enjoy reading the Word for greater understanding, and go out and preach Christ for the furtherance of the gospel!

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