

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Making Bible Applications

By Joe R. Price

Many people (including some Christians) are uncomfortable with Bible preaching that makes specific applications. Teach the principles of truth all day long, and they are ardent supporters. But start applying the principles of truth to real-life situations and people, and they become squeamish, even adversarial. These people have missed the fundamental point that we must apply God’s truth to our lives for it to save us. A good grammar instructor teaches the principles of grammar and then applies those principles to sentence structure, etc. Likewise, a faithful Bible teacher shows the Bible principle and then applies that truth to help us be faithful to Jesus. He makes applications.

Some have little problem when the Bible teacher makes applications as long as he applies them to someone else. Someone said, *“The average person’s idea of a good sermon goes over his head and wakes his neighbor up.”* We are hypocritical and sinfully judgmental when we are satisfied with applying truth to those around us but unwilling to apply it to ourselves (Matt. 7:1-5).

Jesus taught the principles of truth along with specific, pointed applications. Read Matthew 23; 16:22-23; 15:1-14; John 9:40-41 for a few examples of Jesus applying the truth to His audiences. The apostles followed His example and made specific applications of divine truth to those they taught (Acts 2:36; 8:20-23; 24:24-25). They even identified people by name when it was necessary to know who was worthy of imitation and who was not (3 John 9-12).

Some brethren warn, *“You will run people off if you name names and make specific applications.”* Others object that *“you are not loving as you ought.”* The determining factors for whether truth is being taught and whether its applications should be made are not “Will it run folks off,” “Will it hurt someone’s feelings,” or “Will they be offended.” Love **“rejoices in the truth”** (1 Cor. 13:6). We do not set out to hurt feelings when we speak the truth (John 6:60-61). But we cannot let that possibility silence us from speaking the truth in love (Gal. 4:16; Eph. 4:15). How people react to God’s truth does not determine whether we should teach it (Ezek. 2:3-7). The whole truth of God must be preached and applied to save souls (Acts 20:27; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:2).

After Jesus roundly rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for nullifying God’s word with their traditions, the apostles told Him, **“Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying”** (Matt. 15:12)? The word they used (*skandalizō*) means *“to put a stumbling-block or impediment in the way, upon which another may trip and fall; to be a stumbling-block...to entice to sin...to cause a person to begin to distrust and desert one whom he ought to trust and obey...to cause to fall away”* (Thayer, 576). The apostles told Jesus His teaching placed an impediment before the Pharisees. It is as if they said, “Jesus, you are causing the Pharisees to stumble!” (Sadly, some Christians say this when applications of God’s truth expose false teachings and other sins.) Jesus denied their claim and explained the scribes and Pharisees were already blind guides leading the blind (Matt. 15:13-14). Applying the truth when we teach it is not why people reject the truth. Truth is rejected when the hearer’s heart is unwilling to obey God’s word (Matt. 15:15-20; 13:18-23; John 7:16-17; James 1:22-25).

Paul taught Timothy to have faith and a good conscience and identified men who did not, but were blasphemers (1 Tim. 1:18-20). Paul warned against **“profane and idle babblings,”** then identified men of this sort by name (2 Tim. 2:16-18). John identified Diotrophes as an ambitious, spiritual bully whose words and deeds were malicious and destructive (3 John 9-10).

Instead of a false humility that feigns allegiance to truth while complaining against its application, let us be unashamed to judge what is right (Col. 2:23; Luke 12:54-57). Be doers of the word, not mere hearers.

We make applications from God's word because it profits the hearer (2 Tim. 3:16-4:2). Paul said, ***"I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you..."*** (Acts 20:20). When we refuse to accept and follow the God-given pattern of making Bible applications, we are an impediment to sound teaching, not a supporter of it. ■

Elymas

By Jim McDonald

The second half of Acts (chapters 13-28) is a history of the activities of Paul as he fulfilled the call Jesus had made to him. When Ananias hesitated to fulfill the direction of the Lord to go preach to Saul, the Lord said, ***"Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel: for I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake"*** (Acts 9:15-16). Before the book is completed, Saul will have experienced all that God commanded him to do or warned he would experience. He had preached to Gentiles, to kings, and to the children of Israel, and suffered greatly for the sake of Christ.

Acts 13 records that at first Saul and Barnabas were with other prophets and teachers in Antioch, and as they ministered to the Lord the Holy Spirit said, ***"Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them"*** (Acts 13:2). So the teachers and prophets, after prayer and fasting, laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them away. This ***"laying on of hands"*** was a setting of these two men apart to a special task, just as hands were laid on servants of the church in Jerusalem who were to minister to the needs of impoverished widows (Acts 6:6). The record says of the prophets and teachers in Antioch that ***"they sent them away."*** Whether this phrase meant the church provided funds for the task Saul and Barnabas were "sent away" to do we do not know. What we do know is that there was a special relationship between the church at Antioch and these two. When that journey was completed ***"they sailed to Antioch from whence they have been committed to the grace of God for the work they had fulfilled"*** (Acts 14:26). Even when Paul's second journey was finished (although it appears that journey was at the suggestion of Paul to Barnabas, Acts 15:38), Paul visited Antioch again (Acts 18:22-23). He didn't visit Antioch at the conclusion of his final journey because he was a prisoner of the Roman government, sent to Rome to be tried before Caesar.

Acts 13 shows that the two preachers, Barnabas and Saul, went from Antioch to Seleucia and then to the island of Cyprus (Acts 13:40). Cyprus was familiar territory to Barnabas; he was from that island (Acts 4:26). The two traveled from one end of the island to the other – from Salamis to Paphos (Acts 13:5-6), and although they preached in all the synagogues as they traveled the length of the island, the Holy Spirit chose to record only one incident from their preaching there – the conversion of a proconsul named Sergius Paulus. At the same time, Paul struck a Jewish sorcerer named Elymas or Bar-Jesus blind.

Sergius Paulus was a significant Roman official yet he had a sincere heart and called the two evangelists so he could hear the Word of God. Elymas obviously was one who, being in the employment of the proconsular and a trusted advisor to him, feared that Barnabas and Saul might convert Paulus and destroy his own credibility with him, so he ***"withstood"*** Barnabas and Saul. It was then that Saul worked his first recorded miracle. He said to the sorcerer, ***"O full of all guile and all villainy, thy son of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind and not see the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness and he went about seeking for someone to lead him by the hand"*** (Acts 13:9-11). The proconsular was astonished at what had happened and became a believer in Christ.

How fitting that Elymas should be smitten with physical darkness when he, by his sorcery, had been imposing spiritual darkness on others when working his sorceries! Paul knew how Elymas would feel: he himself had been struck with blindness for three days and nights when he had seen the blinding light on the road to Damascus. God sent Ananias to Paul, who when he came, laid hands on him and restored sight to him. So, while permanent blindness was not imposed on the sorcerer, the time he was blind would be a reminder to him of the darkness he had imposed on others by his deceptions. And, if he had not so hardened his heart that he was beyond this truth piercing his conscience, perhaps he would repent of his ways and follow Sergius Paulus. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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