Absolute or Relative

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It is not unusual to emphasize important points by stating relative differences in absolute terms.

A. Consider how Jews and enemies described Paul's influence to create hate (Act 21:28; 17:6).

B. Paul's influence was relatively small, but his enemies exaggerated it for a strong response.

C. Be certain of this: the Bible is absolute truth, even when declaring a relative principle!

When Scripture deals with an important subject, it may use absolute statements with relative force to drive a point home more strongly, given hearers needing to hear just one side.

A. This is neither exaggerating nor lying – it stresses a general rule by ignoring exceptions.

B. The lack of modifiers requires our diligent study and easily confuses the unlearned.

C. Consider the example we encountered on Sunday from our reading of Luke 14:12-14.

D. The commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," seems plain enough. But is it absolute or relative?

E. James condemned swearing (Jas 5:12), but Paul himself swore (Romans 9:1; II Cor 1:23).

F. Does Scripture prohibit curling hair, gold jewelry, and clothing on women (I Pet 3:3-4)?

G. Does Scripture prohibit resisting any evil that might come our way in life (Matt 5:39)?

H. Jesus condemned planning (Matt 6:31-34), but Solomon taught it (Proverbs 6:6-8; 22:3).

I. James condemned worldly friends (James 4:4), but Paul allowed them (I Cor 10:27).

J. Did Paul justify anything to save the lost by being made all things to all men (I Cor 9:22)?

K. Will the right answer at the right time get you a kiss on the lips from every man (Pr 24:26)?

L. Sometimes you can cheer up a man with a word, but sometimes you cannot (Prov 12:25).

M. We understand universal terms with definite limits in obvious places (Acts 2:44; I Cor 6:12).

N. These statements can be synecdoche of the genus: universal words used for particulars.

   1. Universal words are put for a great part (Hosea 7:4; Matt 3:5; Mark 1:33; Rev 13:3).
   2. Universal words are put for all kinds (Joel 2:28; John 12:32; I Tim 6:10; Heb 13:4).
   3. Universal negatives do not deny particulars (Matthew 5:34; John 3:32; 18:20).
   4. Universal positives do not affirm particularly (Mark 16:20; Luke 18:1; I Cor 4:17).
   5. Eph 1:22 and Heb 2:8 have all things under Christ, but what of I Corinthians 15:27.