

Rule 7: Absolute & Relative

August 10, 2019 · <https://letgodbettrue.com/sermons/2019/rule-7/>

Hermeneutics: How to Read and Understand the Bible

RULE #7: Distinguish relative or absolute texts.

- I. It is not unusual to emphasize important points by stating relative differences in absolute terms.
 - A. Consider how Jews described Paul's influence to stir up others against him (Act 21:28).
 - B. Paul's influence was relatively small, but the Jews were stressing his danger to Judaism.
 - C. Be certain of this: the Bible is absolute truth, even when declaring a relative principle!
- II. When Scripture deals with an important subject, it may use absolute statements with relative force to drive the point home more strongly, given a context of hearers needing just one side.
 - A. This is neither exaggerating nor lying – it is stressing a point by ignoring exceptions.
 - B. The lack of modifiers requires our diligent study and easily confuses God's enemies.
 - C. James condemned worldly friends (James 4:4), but Paul allowed them (I Cor 10:27).
 - D. Jesus condemned planning (Mat 6:31-34), but Solomon taught it (Proverbs 6:6-8; 22:3).
 - E. James condemned swearing (Jas 5:12), but Paul himself swore (Rom 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)?
- III. Such a distinction is necessary to study Proverbs – short pithy statements conveying maxims of experience and inspiration.
 - A. Proverbs are general rules needing some caution before making specific applications.
 - B. The results of slothfulness and diligence are not always apparent (Proverbs 10:4; 13:4).
 - C. There are incorrigible children that cannot be trained (Proverbs 22:6 cp Deut 21:18-21).
 - D. Diligence definitely pays off, but not all diligent men end up with kings (Prov 22:29).
 - E. Excellent speech is wonderful, but don't expect kisses from every man (Proverbs 24:26).
 - F. Sometimes you can cheer up a man with a word, but sometimes you cannot (Pr 12:25).
 - G. Wisdom allows a caveat, "All other things being equal," which applies to Proverbs.
- IV. Analyze general statements for limitations. Watch universal words closely. Identify exceptions.
 - A. Rules 1-4 are very helpful here, for they help determining what is absolute or relative.
 - B. "All" is understood with very definite limitations in passages such as Acts 2:44; I Corinthians 6:12; and 9:22. Context and Scripture dictate the extent of the limitation.
 - C. "World" is understood with definite limitations in places like Luke 2:1 and John 12:19.
 - D. These statements can be synecdoche of the genus: universal words used for particulars.
 1. Universal words are put for a great part (Hos 7:4; Mat 3:5; Mk 1:33; Rev 13:3).

2. Universal words are put for all kinds (Joel 2:28; Jn 12:32; I Tim 6:10; He 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; Lu 18:1; I Cor 4:17).
 5. Eph 1:22 and Heb 2:8 have all things under Christ, but what of I Cor 15:27.
- E. Consider the following examples of texts where universal statements are often abused.
1. The “all men” God will have to be saved are all sorts of men (I Timothy 2:4).
 2. The “every man” Jesus tasted death for was every one of His brethren (Heb 2:9).
 3. The “whole world” Jesus atoned for were Gentiles as well as Jews (I John 2:2).
- F. Learn a few choice examples of universal expressions to force opponents to more study.
1. They love “all” and “world,” but they hate the combination (Luke 2:1; Col 1:6).
 2. They love “not willing that any should perish,” but they ignore “all which he hath given me I should lose nothing.”

← Rule #6

Rule #8 →