

# INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

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## Steps for Proper Application

### 1) State the principles of the passage

Professor Hendricks defines a principle as “a succinct statement of a universal truth.”<sup>1</sup> A principle is transcendent. It is always true, for every person, in every culture and every age. A principle takes a time-bound truth in Scripture and relates it to our modern setting. It bridges the gap between the text and our world. The Scripture is bursting with principles, so it is best at this point to focus on the truths emphasized by the author.

#### Explicit Principles

Some principles are clearly stated in the text. For example, “God is love.” (1 John 4:8b) We know from this text that God’s personality is always, for all people, characterized by “love.” From this principle I can easily make many applications, or more simply work from the one provided directly in the text (1 John 4:8a).

#### Implicit Principles

Other principles are not so easily seen, being veiled by the historical or cultural setting of the text. These are called implicit principles. For example, the passage previously quoted in Leviticus 11 seems to be applicable only for a specific group of people at a specific point in time. However, there are universal truths that we can isolate from the setting of the original reader: God shows concern for all aspects of life, even diet and physical health (He is good; He is imminent, that is, not isolated from the affairs of this world but intimately involved); there are standards for personal holiness (although these may change in their specific expression with further revelation).

What guidelines can help us to determine whether a truth in Scripture is immediately applicable or we should look for implicit principles? In other words, is the truth local or universal, temporary or timeless? J. Robertson McQuilkin offers this basic rule, “Every teaching of Scripture is to be received universally, unless the Bible itself limits the audience, either in the context of the passage itself or in other biblical teaching.”<sup>2</sup> Examine the text for clues:

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<sup>1</sup> *Living by the Book*, p. 317

<sup>2</sup> *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, J. Robertson McQuilkin, p. 239.

### **Does subsequent revelation limit the application?**

Such was the case with the illustration given from Leviticus 11. Hebrews 9 and 10 explicitly teach that the levitical laws are no longer applicable because of the finished work of Jesus Christ, our new High Priest.

### **Does the author address a specific person or group to whom you do not belong?**

For example, in Titus 1 Paul lists the qualifications for an elder. If you are not an elder in a local church these standards do not directly apply to you. However, if the office of elder is the highest office in a church, then every Christian should aspire to these standards. Further, if you are a woman, it is impossible for you to be “the husband of one wife,” but the universal principle is marital fidelity and sexual purity, which is applicable for all - men, women, married, single. Another more blatant example is found in 1 Samuel 15:3 where the Lord commands Saul, “Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” Obviously this is a command given specifically to Saul as God’s instrument of divine judgment. We do not carry that same responsibility, but the universal principle is that all who reject God will eventually fall under divine judgment (such judgment will be executed according to God’s sovereign will and in His timing) unless they repent. One urgent application for us from this principle is that we should share with others the message that will remove them from judgment.

### **Is the author merely recording what took place?**

In 1 Corinthians 15:29 Paul alludes to the practice of baptism for the dead without comment on the legitimacy of this practice. Are we to engage in this practice based on their example? Given the history of the Corinthian church, we should immediately be suspicious of this application, and from the context we discover that Paul, in his occasionally sardonic way, is not affirming them in this practice. Paul’s point is this - *Some of you are actually participating in the false practice of baptism for the dead. What do you suppose the benefit would be of this if the dead are not raised? Even in your false practice you affirm the truth of resurrection.* Another example is found in the advice Job receives from his counselors. Should we follow their counsel - much of which sounds quite good - simply because it is recorded in the Bible? Job is suspicious of his friends’ counsel, and shortly thereafter God confirms that they have missed the mark; at the very least they have wrongly applied their insights into God’s attributes and activities to Job’s situation.

### **Has the historical and cultural context significantly changed?**

In John 2 Jesus turned water to wine at a wedding in Cana. Are we to attempt this same miracle? Or at the very least, does this passage teach us that we should serve wine at our weddings? John himself tells us, “Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written

that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” (John 20:30-31) This miracle, along with the other “signs” were recorded to confirm Jesus Christ’s identity. Thus, they each served a specific purpose in history, and the application is limited by that purpose. Or take for example these very popular verses from 2 Chronicles 7:13-14, “If I shut up the heavens so that there is **no rain**, or if I command the locust to **devour the land**, or if I send **pestilence** among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” This promise was made to the nation of Israel. Should they experience the curse of God because of their disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Dt. 28-30), and then repent of their wicked ways and seek God, He would remove the **physical curses** He had placed upon their land. We, the Church, are God’s people (1 Peter 2:9), but we cannot directly apply this verse to ourselves because this promise was made to a different group of people in a different historical context; that is, if we humble ourselves we cannot expect God to bring physical blessings upon our land. The promises for righteous living in the present age are outlined by Paul and Peter, “And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Timothy 3:12) “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you...Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.” (1 Peter 4:12,19) However, righteous living is healthy living. God’s rules work because they are true. Therefore, when a group of people follow His rules, even if they do not have a personal relationship with Him, they can expect good results. If on the other hand they pursue unrighteousness, they can expect the negative consequences. For example, abstaining from sexual immorality, will reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases. Marital fidelity will strengthen the family and produce on average more emotionally and socially well-adjusted children. If bribery is discouraged and contracts are honored, businesses will have a better environment in which to operate. Therefore, if we Christians can influence our culture to follow God’s rules, we can expect our country overall to be a “better” place.

## 2) Create an application statement

Based upon the universal principle you have derived from the text, the next step is to create an application statement. By putting your application in words you begin to hold yourself accountable for becoming a doer of the Word. Some basic guidelines for constructing an application statement are: 1) focus on the main themes expressed by the author; 2) keep it short; 3) make it practical. An example of a universal principle from Matthew 28:18-20 is, “All believers have been called and empowered to participate in the process of making disciples of all nations.” Based on this principle, I could make the following application statement, “By the power of the indwelling Jesus Christ, wherever I am, I can and should proclaim the gospel to all men in the hope of making some disciples.”

Consider the following questions as you create your application statement:

Is there an example for me to follow or avoid? (Genesis 34; Joshua 1:9)  
Is there a sin or error for me to avoid? (1 Cor. 5:1)  
Is there a promise for me to claim? (Heb. 13:5)  
Is there a prayer for me to repeat? (Eph. 3:14-21)  
Is there a command for me to obey? (2 Timothy 2:22)  
Is there a condition for me to meet? (John 15:5)  
Is there a verse for me to memorize?<sup>3</sup> (Psalm 119:11)  
Is there conviction from the Spirit to which I must respond? (1 Thess. 5:19)

### **3) Relate the application statement to your various relationships**

“...Christianity is best understood as a series of new relationships.”<sup>4</sup> Ask yourself, How should this application affect my attitudes, thoughts or actions:

In relationship to God  
In relationship to myself  
In relationship to my family  
In relationship to my Christian friends  
In relationship to my non-Christians friends and the world  
In relationship to my adversary

### **4) Create a plan of action**

This is the final step, the step of commitment. What will I do today, or this week, or this month to implement this application? Who will I ask to hold me accountable? How and when will I evaluate my progress? A plan of action for our application from Matthew 28 might look something like this:

By the power of the Holy Spirit I commit myself to asking my neighbor to lunch this week. I commit to daily pray for his salvation and for the opportunity to present a verbal witness to him during lunch. I will ask my Bible study leader to hold me accountable to initiate this plan by asking me next week if I have followed through.

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<sup>3</sup> *Living by the Book*, p. 304-307

<sup>4</sup> *Living by the Book*, p. 294