

Dear Friends,

My friends often tease me, and I gladly accept it, because of my emphasis in Bible study and interpretation on context. With no tease whatever, I believe the first three major rules of correct interpretation of any Biblical passage are 1) Context, 2) Context, and 3) Context. Literary context refers to thoughts which appear in the same location as a passage we may want to study or interpret. Singling out one word in our passage and chasing every appearance of that word all over the Bible is not context. And it will cloud the right interpretation of the passage in question.

The context of the oft-repeated thought from our study passage, 'If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?' deals with how believers live their daily life, including how they suffer, as a sinner or as a Christian. Nothing in this context teaches about eternal salvation, so taking "Scarcely saved" to refer to Jesus' redeeming work as barely accomplishing our salvation can claim no credibility whatever in this context.

The longer I live and study my Bible the more I profoundly respect the teaching I learned early in my ministry from my mentors. Regardless the word or the doctrine, context must be respected if we hope to learn what a passage teaches us. Any particular word that theologians may have branded as meaning "A" and only "A," when studied in its Biblical context, usually means far more than "A" alone. A major word that serves as a good example of this point is the word "**Save**" in Scripture. Every appearance of "Saved" in Scripture does not teach about going to heaven when we die. Study the word in its context. Ask the context, not a confession of faith or your favorite commentary, at least two questions. 1) "Saved from what?" 2) "Saved to what?" If we follow the popular interpretation of "Saved" always referring to going to heaven when we die, we surely conclude our study with confusion. Did Jesus truly "...**save his people from their sins,**" or did He not? (Matthew 1:21 KJV) If we accept this truth, how do we interpret, for example, the following verse?

Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety. (1 Timothy 2:15 KJV)

Who will claim that a woman having children is an eternally saving act? And more to the point of this example, who will accuse the childless woman of being hopelessly doomed to eternal separation from the Lord? The absurdity of the idea alone should capture our attention and urge us to study this word--and our Bibles--more carefully. In the context of this verse, Paul just taught that a woman cannot be a preacher or pastor. However, Paul was blessed with godly, faithful women in his life. He quickly adds balance and value to godly women. A godly woman is "**Saved**" to a God-honoring purpose and value by bringing children into the world, and by teaching them the truths of Scripture as they grow up. A godly woman understands that she has a "Church," her own children, she is "Pastor" of her church, her children, and she has a spiritual obligation to "Preach" to them, to teach them Biblical values and conduct. In this way, Paul teaches that godly women are "**Saved**" to a godly purpose in the same area as a pastor or preacher. Her "Audience" is different, but she can influence her children in ways no one else can imagine. When she uses her position as their mother to teach, to influence her children according to Scripture, God is praised, and she should be honored in the community of the faithful.

In broad terms, Scripture uses "Saved" of our eternal salvation, always attributing our salvation wholly to the purpose, Person, and work of God. However, Scripture also uses the same word to remind us of multiple obligations we shoulder based on Scripture's teachings. When we honor Scripture in our lifestyle, we are, based on Scripture's contextual use of the word in this theme, **saved**. We save ourselves from ourselves (Jesus' foundational teaching of discipleship, denial, not enthronement, of self). We save ourselves from self-proclaimed "Religious" people who do not honor Jesus and His teachings. (Acts 2:40 KJV) Saving ourselves in this context in no way diminishes or contradicts the Biblical truth that Jesus alone is our Savior for eternity.

It is a Biblical truth that Jesus fully does "...**save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.**" (Hebrews 7:25 KJV) This and similar verses refute any idea of Jesus "Scarcely" saving His people from their sins. While Scripture teaches us of multiple temporal or timely deliverances in and by our walk of faith, it also teaches that God saves all His people through Jesus alone without any act, mental or physical on their part to ensure that eternal salvation. Context and right division of Scripture demands our prayerful best in our study of Scripture. Lord give us wise grace to "**Rightly divide**" this precious word. (2 Timothy 2:15 KJV)

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

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House of God—What Judgment?

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.
(1 Peter 4:15-19 KJV 1900)

During my business career, I observed several godly, sincere Christian people who honored their faith by their life. On a few occasions, I also encountered people who loudly professed to be Christians, but in the trenches of their business ethics, they ignored and contradicted Biblical moral teachings.

Peter's teaching in our study verses directs us to the reality of our daily life. How will people who know us in the workplace think of our profession of Christianity? Will they see the Jesus-ethic in our business decisions? In the way we treat other people? Or will they hear our profession, but see the opposite in our conduct? When Peter wrote to his first readers, he knew their present sufferings.

In hyperbole, at least for us, they (Or we) could choose by their conduct whether they would suffer as (For their devoted Jesus-ethic conduct) a Christian, or they could ignore Jesus' moral teachings and face "Prosecution" (Not "Persecution") as criminals. We choose why we may suffer when we make our choices and decisions regarding how we live our life.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. The first three lifestyles put a person in danger of righteous arrest and punishment by the civil government for criminal conduct. We cannot—and should not—overlook that Peter equates being a "**busybody in other men's matters**" with criminal conduct. In Peter's teaching, a "**Busybody**" refers to someone who presumes that your personal life and conduct is his responsibility. He/she will sit in perpetual judgment of everything you say or do. Rest assured; they will never approve. They always know far more about your business than you know. And they will freely critique your words and actions, eagerly telling you how you could have done it better than you did. People with this prideful, always-know-more-than-you-know-about-your-life are, in Peter's inspired assessment, not helpful gracious Christians. In fact, their conduct puts them in the same category as criminals, murderers, and thieves.

I suggest that we should regard even the idea of murder or theft by devoted believers as far more than civil law defines those crimes. Remember Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. (Matthew 5:21-22 KJV)

We should regard Jesus' warnings against being angry with our brother or sister "**without a cause**" as morally wrong as murder. Contextually, He used anger without a cause to explain His higher morality than the Mosaic Commandment against murder. If I speak harshly against you to others, or if I even foster angry, judgmental words against you in my heart, Jesus warns that I have sinned as gravely as if I committed murder, and He also warns that our angry words or thought shall surely face His righteous judgment. However much we rationalize our anger against a brother or sister to other believers, we are not the Lord's judge of the matter. He is, and He warns that He shall not ignore this conduct. He shall surely judge righteously but obviously also severely. We could not have a clearer and simpler teaching against this common—and commonly accepted—sinful conduct. Whether the person who is on the receiving end of our anger deserves it or not, Jesus teaches us, and Peter affirms, that the Lord regards this conduct as a grievous sin. Solomon also wrote in similar terms.

These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren. (Proverbs 6:16-19 KJV)

People who try to sanctify these evil habits succeed **only if godly folks listen to them**. A wise and godly example. Many years ago, I walked up on a small group of people who were talking. One person at the center of the group was raving angry words about someone, and the others were listening, thereby empowering the sinful conduct. However, one wise believer walked up, heard the angry words, and immediately turned around and walked away. Good for her! If the whole crowd had walked away instead of listening, the angry person would have had no one to hear.

I've known precious few people, even among the godliest, who could not profit from these words. This is an attitude—and conduct—that we too often take for granted. How can a faithful believer ignore or lightly regard something the Lord says He hates? If God hates this conduct, so should we, so fully that we refuse to practice it. Let's all heed that quiet and wise believer. First, never, for any reason, allow Satan to gain an advantage over us and push us to speak angry, hateful words. And second, when we hear someone speaking angry or hateful words, quickly turn around and walk away.

Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. Although I pray we never face actual persecution for our faith, we daily face difficult choices. If we follow Peter's teaching, we shall search Scripture and choose the "Christian" way, not our personal whims. If we make our decisions with this mindset, supported by specific Bible teaching and examples, we have no reason or need to "be ashamed," to question or doubt what we did. Beware; we can do the right thing with anger or unkindness, and be wrong, gravely wrong. Live as a Christian, including Jesus' kindness and forgiving, healing grace toward others. If you practice this way, the "Jesus way," as a Christian, thank the Lord and praise him for the opportunity and grace to shine your light for Him.

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? In the verses leading up to this lesson, I've emphasized the Lord's righteous judgment against the "Family" sins named and forbidden in the lessons. There comes a time in the life of godly people that we must do more than

read about the Lord's judgments. We must practice them in our own lives. David wrote of this truth.

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever: **the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.** (Psalm 19:9-11 KJV)

David applies this lesson to our lifestyle and choices, including words and deeds. We are to desire them, not ignore them and think our private opinion always agrees with God's. Knowing the Lord's judgments puts us on notice. We are to live our life by His judgments, not ours. They warn us. Ah, but keeping them, living by them, brings "**great reward.**" Our choices, therefore, predict whether we shall face the Lord's judgment or receive "**Great reward**" at His loving hand.

What is Peter's teaching regarding judgment beginning "...**at the house of God**"? Further, what is this judgment? Most of us have heard near endless ideas about this lesson, most of them ignoring the context of the lesson. Consider a few thoughts.

1. If judgment is to begin "...**at the house of God,**" the "Judge" or judges are the people who live in "**the house of God.**" They are the judges in this lesson. And Peter's emphatic teaching is that they are under divine commandment to make their judgments in harmony with the Lord's. Desire and practice His judgments, not ours.

2. What is this judgment? What are we to judge? What is Peter's contextual lead-in to this verse? It is the reality of suffering, coupled with his teaching that we avoid ever suffering as a "**murderer, thief, evildoer, or busybody.**" Further, he teaches us to glorify our Lord if we ever suffer as a Christian. Whether the suffering involved is persecution or any of the various unpleasant trials of life, Peter teaches the house of God to engage in some kind of judgment. Let's follow the context and see where it takes us. We've likely known those black crepe hangers who view everything bad that happens as divine judgment. They readily proclaim that the latest tropical storm, earthquake, wildfire, or whatever to be the grave judgment of God finally fallen upon the wicked. If we regard every trial as divine judgment, there is no judgment whatever. On the other extreme, we've encountered those dear souls who attempt to live their lives never passing judgment about anything. Here too, there is no judgment going on whatever. Peter's lesson instructs us to avoid both extreme views. Consider. You see one believer, to your knowledge, devoted and sincere. However, he/she suffers with seemingly endless bad health. You see another believer, also sincere and devoted in your eyes. But this dear soul makes one wrong decision after another. If there is a choice to be made, he/she always makes the wrong one. And,

no surprise, he/she just as surely suffers the consequences of their bad choices. If we follow Peter's teaching and accept some sense of "Judgment" for the house of God, how should we regard the two people in the examples above? I suggest that we regard—judge—the believer with poor health to suffer in well doing, for we see them, despite their illnesses, working hard to serve and encourage other believers. Likewise, we should as wisely assess—judge—the believer who makes bad choices and suffers the consequences of his/her own making as suffering because of their sinful self-absorption. They seem so absorbed in their latest ordeal that they never have time—or make time—to minister to others or to encourage them. He/she is suffering, but not as a Christian. If we follow Peter's teaching, we encourage the first and admonish the second person. That is a family "Judgment" at the house of God, and Peter teaches us to exercise it wisely according to Scripture's teaching, according to the Lord's judgments.

3. And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? First, no, this context does not at all deal with eternal judgment at the Second Coming. It is dealing with life in the here and now, specifically with our suffering, either as a Christian or as an evildoer. In our personal discipleship, even the strongest believer stumbles and wrestles with maintaining their faith. Folks who regard themselves as disciples of Jesus, but who coast and make more choices based on personal convenience than on Scripture are not "saved" in this discipleship sense of the passage. And they seldom come to fully realize the amazing joys they lose by their own sinful neglect.

Remember. This judgment occurs at the "**house of God,**" not at the "Great white throne" of final eternal judgment. If the "Citizens" of the house of God honor their faith and its divine Author, they live in **His judgments**, desire them more than wealth or the best foods. Therefore, our judgment in the house of God should be, to our best and faithful study and devotion to the Lord and to Scripture's words, His judgments. What about this "**scarcely saved**" idea? We cannot know beyond doubt why anyone suffers. It may be due to genetics that predisposed them to bad health. It may relate to poor diet or lifestyle. We should approach any form of judgment we make with much prayer and reflection on the Lord and Scripture. At our best, we scarcely measure up to the Lord's familial commandments and example. If we chose to judge and to live by our own imagined right and wrong instead of faithfully seeking and following Scripture's "Judgments," we never rise above the daily struggle. How easily we might have made the wrong choice, said the wrong thing. Have we not all failed at times? Oh yes, we have. We can be thankful that the judgments of the house of God are the Lord's "Family" judgments, not His final and eternal judgments. When we do fail, we face His certain and fearful chastening judgments, as well as the discerning "Judgment" of the house of God. Not one of us has so perfectly obeyed that we never experienced that chastening. Our task as believers is to strive daily to live more in the Lord's judgments, less in ours, and thereby suffer ever less as evildoers and more as Christians.

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. So, what is the outcome of this judgment that begins at the house of God? When we realize that we failed, that we are suffering the Lord's

chastening, shall we give up and stop laboring to live better and to serve the Lord and His people? No. A thousand times no! Instead of giving up or ceasing to work, we are to follow Peter's teaching. Commit the keeping of your soul to the Lord and keep doing good. He, after all, is faithful. And He is our faithful Creator, rightly deserving what He commands, our obedience to Him and His ways. We "Have a right" to do what we wish **only** if we can successfully make a case that we are our own "Creator." Impossible! Our Lord holds that title alone. All this lesson deals with conduct and judgment in "**the house of God.**" It is the Lord's "Family" teaching. Let's live together in fellowship with our Lord, our Father, and our example "Brother," Jesus in well doing.

Elder Joe Holder