



What Do You “See”?

The apostle Paul asked the Corinthians to “*bear with me in a little foolishness*” (2Corinthians 11:1)- you’re presumably not Corinthian, and I’m certainly not Paul, but I make the same request in what follows...

By looking at this picture, what do you “see” or understand?

If you don’t know me (yes, it’s my foot), then you might perceive that: a) I like outdoors given the darkness of my ankle; b) I probably don’t like to wear “real” shoes (but you’d be wrong since most people at church have only seen me in “dress” shoes as I endeavor to preach and teach God’s Word); and if you’re really sharp, c) that I sometimes wear open-toed sandals since my toes are slightly darker than the top of my foot, but not as dark as my ankle.

If you know me a little better, you might also “get” from the picture that: a) I

have relatively small feet (size 9.5) given that I’m 6 feet tall; b) since I like to fish, I probably wear sandals or crocs (as in “c” above) while I fish; and, c) given the overall darkness of my ankle, I’ve been fishing pretty regularly lately.

But if you really know me well, then the picture might also indicate to you that: a) the fish in our backyard pond have finally started biting since I have apparently been spending more time fishing of late; b) but that since you also know that I like to fish from my little kayak- and don’t wear any shoes while doing so, I haven’t been fishing from it much lately; and therefore, c) given all the above, that either the kayak has a hole in it (it doesn’t), or that the water level is too low for me to launch it and that I have instead been fishing from the rocky banks where crocs are better than barefoot or sandals!

Too much of a stretch? Of course, but I hope the “foolishness” is worth it to make a point:

Context is critical. The more and better you know me, the more this picture tells you. Let that sink in for a moment before proceeding.

The importance of context to how much or how well we “see” is paramount. Those who don’t have any context through knowing me “see” or discern very little from the picture- and anything beyond the most basic of information is wrong! Those who know me little better can perceive more, but still don’t have the full “picture.” But those that know me the best, and therefore understand my “context” the best, have a tremendous advantage in “seeing” or getting the most and most accurate information from it. This is precisely why “Context is critical” to our perception, and therefore to our understanding and application.

Apparently this week (I don’t follow such things very closely), a “noose” was discovered hanging in the garage of racecar driver who happens to be black. The news outlets went wild with the story, and the FBI was even brought in to investigate. By looking closely at “context” (additional related evidence bearing on the interpretation), it was discovered that: 1) the “noose” had been

hanging there for at least a couple of years; 2) since garage assignments at that particular racetrack are random, there was no way of knowing that the one black driver would occupy that particular garage; and, 3) the “noose” was simply a loop on the end of a rope used to pull down the garage door. Without any “context,” it looked like a racially based symbol intended to bully a minority driver. With “context,” it was a handle on the end of a rope to pull down a roll-up door.

“Context is critical” to Bible interpretation too. Without it, those looking for “evidence” to support their story or theory find an abundance. But with “context,” vitally important, eternal life-giving and life-sustaining truth is discerned. Let one quick example to drive the point home. Philippians 4:13 says, *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”* This verse has been quoted at more graduations and in more pre-game locker room speeches, and has become the personal motivational mantra of more undiscerning people than can be counted. “Context” is needed: Paul was imprisoned for preaching the gospel when he wrote this, Philippians 1:13; it was written to Christians facing persecutions for their faith, Philippians 1:28-30; urging them to remain strong despite violent opposition, Philippians 1:27; and the writer is using his own personal past poverty and prosperity as an example to demonstrate the importance of *“contentment,”* Philippians 4:11-12. Now that information, in “context” and when appropriately practiced, will allow us to *commence* to **higher living and eternal life**, will enable the spiritual victory over sin and death in the *big game of life*, and will empower us to *move any mountain* or *overcome any obstacle* hindering our way **to heaven!** Please don’t cheapen this great text by taking it out of “context.”

So what’s the take-away from all of this? Simple: *“But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil,”* 1Thessalonians 5:21-22. And might I add that getting the “context” is critical to perception, understanding, and application! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)