

## Keeping the Passage in Context

I recently read **John 5:18** and was again impressed with the concept that one can prove anything he wants if he is willing to take enough Bible passages out of context. *“This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God”* (ESV).

There it is; the Bible proves it. Jesus was a law-breaking sinner. He broke the Sabbath. Or did He?

This passage does not tell us what Jesus did. Rather, this was what the Jews thought of Jesus. They viewed His lawful miracles on the Sabbath as Sabbath violations. They also viewed His statement about doing His Father’s work as blasphemy, but this didn’t make Jesus a blasphemer.

When we study the Bible, we cannot just take each verse for its face value without considering the context. Who was speaking or writing? To whom were they speaking or writing? What was the purpose of the greater surrounding passage? How does this verse fit in that greater purpose? What was the significance of the statement within its historical context? These are all questions we must ask before we just make a statement about a particular verse all by itself.

Throughout my time as a Christian, I have heard this point made repeatedly with an accusatory finger at all those denominationalists out there who take things out of context. However, we need to think primarily about our own study. We can just as easily be guilty of this very thing.

For instance, I don’t know how many times I’ve heard Christians start off a congregational assembly commenting about Jesus’ presence because where two or three are gathered in His name, there He is in the midst of us (cf. **Matthew 18:20**). Or, even worse, suggesting that they don’t actually have to meet with a congregation but can just meet with a few Christians on the lake because where two or three are gathered...

Look at the context. **Matthew 18:20** was not defining a sanctioned assembly. Rather, it was talking about when two or three witnesses bring testimony to the church about an impenitent sinner. If two or three are testifying in truth, they are doing this with the authority of Jesus. It is as if Jesus Himself is bringing the charge against the sinner, therefore the congregation has authority to act in discipline.

How easily we can take things out of context. Let’s double our efforts to study thoroughly and keep things in context before we spend too much time pointing fingers at anyone else.

—Edwin L. Crozier