Literary Context

- Literary context
- Immediate context
- Book context
- Biblical/theological context

The Bible is literature, so we must understand its literary features in order to interpret it.
- Context is the most important word in biblical exegesis.
- Ignoring the context → prooftexting.
- Literary context is best guide to word meanings and structure (Klein 158-159).

Circles of context - Klein, 162
Move from smallest to largest...

- Immediate verbal context
- Rest of book
- Other books by same author
- Rest of the OT or NT
- Whole Bible

Interpreting the Immediate Context

- The immediate context is the best guide to interpreting a passage.
- Colossians 3:15
- Matthew 5:37
- 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 vs. 1 Cor. 6:19-20
- 1 Corinthians 12:21 vs. Ephesians 4:15-16

Interpreting the Book Context

- Determine the purpose and/or central theme(s) of the book.
- The purpose may be explicit or implicit.
- Interpret the passage in light of that purpose or central theme.
- How does the passage contribute to the purpose or central theme?
Biblical/Theological Context

- Place the passage in the context of the Bible as a whole.
- Where does it fit in salvation history?
- What does it contribute to the teaching or theology of the Bible?
- Check quotations or parallel passages.
- Don’t read the NT into the OT or vice versa.

Literary Context

- Read Matthew 18:12-14.
  - Who is the lost sheep?
  - What is the point of the parable?
  - Who is the lost sheep?
  - What is the point of the parable?
- Context in Matthew and Luke
- Differences and similarities

Consider this...

To what extent should we analyze the Bible as literature? What are the potential benefits and dangers of such an approach?

Suppose that a friend tells you that he often gets guidance from God by opening the Bible at random and taking whatever verse his finger falls upon as God’s direction for his situation. He asks you what you think of this method. What do you say and why?