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Application and Significance in Bible Interpretation

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- **Application is putting an interpretation into practice. Interpretation is tied to history.** Application extends the author's meaning through all the centuries to today. Application does not necessarily mean that I should do something. It may mean that I should think something, or believe something, or have a certain attitude about something. But application will always be a matter of putting the meaning of the passage to use. How do we bridge the gap, or make the transition, from the meaning to the application? The key to application is what I call **SIGNIFICANCE**. That is, Application is putting to use the significance of a passage.
- **Application answers the question: If the author of the passage we are studying were alive today, how would he respond to our situation?** It's like we are sitting around a table discussing how to apply a certain passage. Then we slide another chair up to the table for the biblical author and ask him how he thinks we should apply that passage today. In order to know what his answer would be, we need to get inside his thoughts.

Application brings the author to the table today

The *significance* of a passage is the mind of God, which is determined through the mind of the author, which is determined through the text of Scripture. **Significance** is the (moral, theological, and philosophical) **mentality of the author**, which is manifested in a specific passage. In the case of Scripture, it's that piece of **the mind of God** that inspired the human author. And I want to keep emphasizing that the author's mentality must be determined from the biblical text.

- **Application does not always perform what the passage means, but it always puts to use what God means in that passage.**

Meaning is true for one time or in one situation
Significance is true for all times and all situation

We apply the Bible the same way we apply any literature. We must observe what the author says, use the context to interpret what he means, then look for the significance of that before applying it to our lives. But there are two differences between applying the Bible and applying other literature:

1. Most literature does not need to be applied. If I am reading a novel, a newspaper, or an article from a website, usually I don't intend to (or need to) apply it. But the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, so all of it merits, indeed, demands, application.
2. Most literature has just one author. The Bible has two—God and the human author. The thoughts of God superintend the thoughts of the human author, but do not eliminate the personality and understanding of the human author.

The **significance** of a biblical passage is always in the mind of God. But our only access to the mind of God is through a biblical author. It is possible that God may have something in mind that the human author does not have in mind. But the only way we can know that is through the mind of some other human author who wrote down his God-inspired thoughts.