

THE NEED TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE

Men's Bible Study at Park View

January 11, 2005

The purpose of this lesson is to provide an overview of the issues we face in Biblical Interpretation. We will look at a number of scriptures as examples of the need for Biblical interpretation, then concentrate on the steps to the interpretation of one verse – I Timothy 5:23.

An exercise in interpretation and application

Each of the following scripture texts has been interpreted as indicated below. Read each scripture passage and the suggested interpretation or application. In a few words, make a judgment as to the merit of the interpretation or application of this passage. If possible, state a principle of Biblical interpretation that helped you come to your conclusion.

Table 1 Leviticus 19: 28 -- It is wrong for Christians to get a tattoo.

Table 2 I Corinthians 7:36-38 -- Pastors should teach congregations that the best choice for young women today is to remain unmarried.

Table 3 Proverbs 22:6 -- When young adults drift away from Christ and the church, it is primary evidence that their parents did not properly teach them the way in which they should go.

Table 4 Numbers 32: 20-24 (emphasis on v. 23) -- Christians who refuse to serve their country when drafted for war are guilty of sinning against the Lord.

Table 5 Acts 4:32-35 -- Christians today are called to live together with a community of goods in which no one claims personal possessions. Christian leaders should be responsible for the distribution of goods among believers.

Table 6 I Timothy 5:17-18 -- The church should not pay its pastors because money tends to "muzzle" preachers. They will be tempted to preach less than the full truth if they depend on the church for a living.

Table 7 Acts 1:14-26 -- (emphasis on v. 26). God's pattern for choosing ministers today is to draw lots.

Read I Timothy 5:23 in several different translations. Then take the following steps to determine its interpretation and application for our life today.

Scripture context: In order to interpret the Scripture faithfully, you must carefully consider the immediate context in which the verse is located. Read the verses immediately preceding and following verse 23. What connection, if any, do you see between these verses? Write out your own observations about any theme that flows through these verses. Now think of the whole epistle. How does your knowledge of the letter help us to understand the meaning of this verse?

Original audience: Who was the first reader of this letter? (To whom was it addressed?) What response do you envision that the reader had to this letter? To what extent do you think this advice was intended for a broader audience?

Cultural context: What was the recipient's situation when he received this letter? Why do you suppose the Spirit prompted Paul to write this advice? In what ways, if any might a different cultural context have influenced what Paul wrote?

Word study: Christians often differ in opinion about the meaning of the word **οἶνῳ (wine)**. Was it strong drink or the weakly fermented fruit of the vine? What difference does it make to you in your interpretation of this verse?

Your own context as an interpreter: In what context, if any, have you studied this verse previously? Where have you heard this verse explained? Where have you heard it quoted? What are your convictions about drinking wine? In what way has this verse helped to shape your convictions about drinking?

Application: What practical guidance does this verse offer to the church today? How is the Apostle Paul's counsel best put into practice in our modern context?