

STEPS TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Men's Bible Study at Park View

January 18, 2005

Because of the wide range of interpretations of scripture that exist, one could readily be overwhelmed or discouraged when reading scripture. But there are some clear steps that one can take when seeking to be faithful to the true meaning of any scripture passage. In today's study, we will explore those steps in relation to I Timothy 5:23.

First, let's look at a number of principles of Biblical Interpretation as adopted by the Mennonite Church. The following nine principles were approved by the Mennonite Church General Assembly at Estes Park, Colorado in 1977.

1. Observe carefully what the text says.
2. Be sensitive to different literary forms.
3. Study the historical and cultural contexts of the passage.
4. Make use of various translations.
5. Consider how the text has been interpreted by others.
6. Consider the message of the Bible as a whole.
7. Meditate upon the Word in a spirit of prayer.
8. Listen for the guidance of the Spirit, individually and congregationally.
9. Respond obediently to the Bible's message.

Although the above principles do not necessarily set forth a step-by-by process, it is helpful to work through most of them in the order they are listed.

We will attempt to apply many of the above principles in our study of I Timothy 5:23 in today's study. First of all, 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 *οινος* (**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?