

**Responding to God Word: How to Faithfully Interpret the Bible**  
Men's Bible Study at Park View  
A Study of Paul's Epistles  
February 1, 2005

NOTES

In these studies we're learning how to study, interpret and apply the Bible more effectively. This lesson is a Bible study from one of Paul's letters in the New Testament.

The letters of the New Testament may seem easier to interpret than other parts of the Bible. They were written to churches. They were written to teach, and they often describe the question or issue or situation that they were written about. But they are not always easy to interpret and apply. For example, sincere Christians have differed sharply over the answers to the following questions:

- Is Paul's opinion to be taken as God's word? (1 Cor. 7:25)  
How does Paul's teaching about excommunication (1 Cor. 5) apply today when people easily move from one church to another?
- How do we decide when something is culturally relative and when it is an unchangeable moral principle?

**Before we interpret the Bible we must first understand what the text means. And that requires us to read and think contextually**

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**Look at 1 Corinthians 3:16-17**, first in the NRSV:

*16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*

*17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

Taken by itself, what could this text mean? Who is the *you* in v. 16? **Now read the larger context, 1 Cor. 3:10-23.** What is Paul talking about? How does the context clarify the meaning of these verses?

Now look at the New Living Translation (a dynamic equivalence translation):

*16 Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that his Spirit lives in you? 17 God will bring ruin upon anyone who ruins this temple.*

How does the *NLT* clarify who *you* refers to?

These verses are sometimes used as a reason why people should not smoke. Is that a good application of this scripture? Why or why not?

**Now look at 1 Cor. 6:19, and read its context (1 Cor. 6:12-20).** *Temple* is used in both passages. What is different here? Might this passage be properly applied to practices hurtful to our physical bodies?

**Read Philippians 1:27-2:13 several times.**

What is the larger context of this passage? Where is Paul? What is happening to him?

What is happening in the church at Philippi? What concerns does Paul have for the Christians there?

What kind of writing is Phil. 2:6-11? (Look at these verses in a contemporary version like the New International Version). How might this have been used in the church at Philippi?

What is the foundation of Christian unity as shown in this passage?

What principles of unity might be applied to the church today?