

Responding to God Word: How to Faithfully Interpret the Bible

Men's Bible Study at Park View

A Study of the General Epistles

February 8, 15, 2005

NOTES

Read James 2:1-13

What seemed to be the occasion for this letter? To whom was it addressed?

In 2:1-13, James expressed deep concern about favoritism. What kind of favoritism was being shown in the situation that James was addressing? How was this favoritism expressed?

Identify the questions in this passage of scripture. What answer did James anticipate in response to each of these questions?

In his warning against the dangers of favoritism, James quoted from several Old Testament scriptures. Briefly summarize his arguments from scripture.

Do we face similar temptations to show favoritism today? If so, give examples. What is God's word for us in this passage?

When you are interpreting epistles, remember the occasional nature of these letters. The so-called general epistles have a more general occasion than the more personal letters.

Remember to look for key words in the biblical text.

Sometimes the writer uses questions to prompt readers to think in new ways or to learn to think for themselves.

It is common for epistle writers to apply theological arguments to the situation in the churches.

Remember two basic rules for interpreting epistles: 1) A text cannot mean now what it never could have meant to its author or the first readers, and 2) Whenever we share similar circumstances with the first century setting, God's Word to us is the same as his Word was to them.

Read II Peter 1:3-11

What was the occasion or purpose for this epistle? (See 3:1-2). To whom was it addressed?

Identify the two sentences in this passage of scripture which are imperatives. (That is, they exhort the readers to a particular action.) What does Peter exhort his readers to do?

What incentive does Peter offer for the actions that he calls forth? In other words, what theological argument does he employ? What good things will result from the efforts that he hopes to call forth from his readers?

Identify the list in chapter 1. What kind of list is it? (Note the progression in the list).

To what extent are our circumstances similar to the ones that Peter describes? To what extent, then, are the promises made to Peter's readers also applicable to us? In what ways can we apply this scripture?

When studying the scripture it is helpful to separate descriptive (indicative) sentences from prescriptive (imperative) sentences.

Epistle writers often give theological reasons for the actions they seek to evoke from their readers. For example, one of the strongest motivations to action is a promise of reward from God.

It is always helpful to make note of the lists in the scriptures. Lists may be used in a variety of ways, for a variety of purposes.

Whenever we share similar circumstances with the first century setting, God's Word to us is the same as his Word was to them.