

Your Interpretation?

By Wes McAdams (edited for space KSS)

Occasionally you or I may have a religious conversation, or overhear one, where a person is told what the Bible says on a certain subject, but the quick response is, "Well, that's just your interpretation!" As if that statement settled the matter once and for all. They seem to believe everyone has a right to their **own** interpretation of Scripture. People seem to believe one interpretation is just as valid as another. Here are a few thoughts on that line of reasoning.



Understanding Some Important Words: There are some words we use all the time and we just assume people understand what they mean, but perhaps it would be good to take a moment to define important terms:

Translation – The Bible was written in different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). Therefore, in order for English-speakers to read them today, they *must* be translated into English. There are many reliable English translations of the Bible and they have been translated from the original languages by groups of experts and scholars who have devoted their lives to understanding these languages. The primary concern of a translator is: **What does the text say?**

Interpretation – The books of the Bible were not only written in different languages, they were written thousands of years ago in completely different cultures from our own. So, even when a book has been translated to English, it can still be difficult for people today to understand what the author was talking about. We ALL must interpret Scripture, but we must ask the question: **What does the text mean?**

Application – When the biblical text has been translated into English and we have done the hard work to understand what the text means, then we must apply it to our own lives. We must ask the question: **What difference should the text make in my life?**

Only One Right Interpretation: This is an important principle; a biblical text only has only one right interpretation. In other words, it only means one thing. The idea that everyone is entitled to their own interpretation and every interpretation is just as valid, is false.

If the person who hears or reads a statement can decide for himself what the statement means, and there is not one right meaning, then attempting to communicate becomes pointless. Imagine a policeman pulling a driver over for failing to stop at a stop sign. The policeman says, "Sir, did you see that stop sign?" The driver responds, "Yes I did." Confused, the officer says, "Don't you understand that means you have to stop?" What if the driver says, "Well, that's your interpretation"? Would a citation not be justified?

The meaning of a passage might be difficult to understand; however, it only has one correct interpretation. The Bible is not some mystical book that changes meanings depending on who is reading it. It doesn't mean different things to different people. When the prophet or apostle penned the words to the original audience, he meant something. Our job is to figure out, what did he mean by that?

Interpretation Requires Hard Work: Understanding what a passage of Scripture means can be difficult. The books of the Bible were written by men living in an entirely different culture. On top of that, different books of the Bible must be interpreted differently. For instance, Psalms is a book of poetry and you can't interpret poetry the same way as historical narratives like the book of Joshua.

If we want to know the Truth, we must do the hard work of interpretation. We must ask questions like: Who wrote this book? To whom did he write it? When did he write it? What literature style was he using? What was the primary purpose of this book? The more we understand the answers to these questions, the better conclusions we will reach about the correct meaning of Scripture. God wants His people to understand Scripture. The Bible was written to be timeless. It was written to be understood!

Several Possible Meanings: Yes, there are some difficult passages of Scripture to interpret (not nearly as many as some people would have you believe). These passages have various possible meanings. In other words, scholars and theologians disagree on what the passage means and they have come up with several different possible interpretations. But at the end of the day, there is only one right interpretation and all the other interpretations are wrong.

Let's Stop Being Lazy and/or Disobedient: When a Christian admonishes, saying, "Scripture says you're wrong for what you're doing," and we respond with, "Well, that's just your interpretation," at the very least we are being lazy and at the worst we're being disobedient to God. It could be the person is wrong in his interpretation. In that case, we need to sit down together and figure out the correct interpretation of the text and how it applies to the life of a Christian today. It isn't loving or kind to give the impression that it's alright to continue with a wrong interpretation; as if we are all entitled to different interpretations. Yet, it could be that his interpretation is correct. If so, I need to yield my life to God's will. It's easy to just dismiss something with, "That's not how I interpret that passage," but it's easy because it is often disobedience. Disobedience is easy. Obedience is not always easy.

The Bottom Line: Just because you or I don't like what a passage of Scripture means, doesn't mean we can just interpret a different way. If you would be a disciple of Christ, you must accept some difficult and challenging truths as revealed in Scripture.

Have you seen the
"IDEA BOX" YES?
It humbly requests
your kind "input"

"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16)

To all our visitors: *Please feel free to participate!*

You should expect to hear singing with voices only, a few "family" announcements, prayers spoken, and see the Lord's Supper offered, then free-willed giving, and Gospel preaching from the Bible.

Any response is up to you and will be kindly received.

We are glad you decided to worship God with us!

Bday/Anniv Lunch: 2nd Sunday...

Friday Bible Study: 7 to 8 PM; we are studying New Testament commands that apply today...

NMCCCH: SOUPS! Cream of Mushroom or Cream of Chicken. Sounds YUMMY!

Men's Day: at Calera, 8AM breakfast on Saturday (9/7). Speaker Greg Swindle, President, Herald of Truth. "Leadership in Evangelism."

Ladies Day: at Howe, 9AM on Saturday (9/28). Speaker Yvonne Butler, "Life is a Masquerade—Time to Unmask."