



BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION GUIDE

At the outset of this journey, the elders and pastors want to clearly state our commitment to the inspiration, truth, and authority of the Bible. While recognizing the authority of Scripture, we also understand that all Scripture is interpreted in some form or fashion.

Please use this guide to help understand the role that interpretation plays in understanding Scripture in general, as well as ten specific examples as it pertains to our present discussion.

Please work through this guide in advance of our discussion and bring any questions or thoughts that you have.

Three Basics of Biblical Interpretation

1. We All Interpret

- Everyone who reads Scripture interprets Scripture, even when we don't know we're doing it.
- The question is whether we will do it well or poorly.

2. Be Open to New Insights

- We don't fear truth, we pursue it.
- Openness does not necessarily imply acceptance.

3. Study Prayerfully

- Don't just talk about God, talk with God as you study.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to "guide you into all the truth" (John 16.13)

Interpretation Exercise

For each of the following verses, choose the description that best fits how the biblical command should be interpreted by modern readers. Think about *why* and *how* you make your decision.

- P = Permanent:** Timeless commands that we should obey at face value today.
- F = Figurative:** Wise commands given in figurative language that we should take seriously, but not literally.
- S = Specific:** Specific commands given to specific people, at a specific time, in a specific cultural context that don't apply to us today.

- ___ "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28.19)
- ___ "Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together." (Deuteronomy 22.10)
- ___ "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else that will cause your brother to fall." (Romans 14.21)
- ___ "Anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord must be put to death." (Leviticus 24.16)
- ___ "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6.5)
- ___ "Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife?" (1 Corinthians 7.27)
- ___ "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church." (Ephesians 5.25)
- ___ "On the Sabbath day, make an offering of two lambs a year old with defect." (Numbers 28.9)
- ___ "And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away." (Matthew 18.9)
- ___ "A new command I give you: love one another." (John 13.34)

Context is Key

It's difficult, if not impossible, to make an informed interpretation without knowing the context of a particular passage. This is true of most literature, and there are even more considerations when interpreting the Bible.

1. Consider the text in its *biblical* context

- How does this text *concur* or *conflict* with what other parts of Scripture say about this topic?

2. Consider the text in its *literary* context

- What genre of literature are you dealing with? (Narrative, poetry, parable, epistle, etc.)

3. Consider the text in its *historical* context

- Where does this text fit within the Big Story of Scripture?

4. Consider the text in its *cultural* context

- How did the original author and audience understand this text?

Ten Key Texts Regarding Men and Women in the Bible

These are the primary passages of Scripture that deal with the relationship between men and women, in relation to God and his people. For each text, consider its biblical, literary, historical, and cultural contexts to determine what should be received permanently, figuratively, or culturally. (For the epistles, read the paragraphs before and after the text to get a fuller picture.)

1. Genesis 1.26-27

26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

*27 So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

2. Genesis 2.7, 19-24

7 Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

19 Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23 The man said,

*"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man."*

24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

3. Genesis 3.14-16

¹⁴ So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

*"Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.*

¹⁵ And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel."

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

*"I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
with painful labor you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you."*

4. Acts 2.14-18

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd:
*"Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen
carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in
the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:*

¹⁷ *"In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.*

¹⁸ *Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.*

5. 1 Corinthians 11.2-16

² I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you. ³ But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵ But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. ⁶ For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.

⁷ A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹² For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

¹³ Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, ¹⁵ but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. ¹⁶ If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

6. 1 Corinthians 14.34-35

³⁴ Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. ³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

7. Galatians 3.26-29

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

8. 1 Timothy 2.9-15

⁹ I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, ¹⁰ but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

¹¹ A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵ But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

9. 1 Timothy 3.1-13

¹ Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.

² Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

⁸ In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹ They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

¹¹ In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

¹² A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. ¹³ Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

10. Titus 1.5-9

⁵ The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. ⁶ An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷ Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸ Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.