

SHARING SCRIPTURE

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Why is Interpretation Needed?

For use: May 3 - 9

Texts: Luke 24:36-45; 1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Acts 17:16-32; John 12:42, 43

Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed an emergency order on April 2, implementing a \$1,000 fine for anyone who violates the state's social distancing order. The accompanying video of the signing ceremony broadcast on a TV report revealed nine people surrounding Gov. Whitmer crowded together shoulder-to-shoulder. The cries of hypocrisy rang down hard and fast from across the nation.

Things are not always what they seem at first glance, however. The TV station has since admitted that the video was actually file footage from a January 2019 signing ceremony totally unrelated to the COVID-19 crisis. The retraction is little consolation at this point, as the social media damage is done. The juxtaposition of the report of the signing (which actually included no such ceremony) and the video told an entirely erroneous story. [1]

It's important to have the whole story, whether viewing a news feature or exploring a passage of Scripture. Sometimes interpretation by those who have a fuller understanding of what is taking place is necessary to gain an understanding of the big picture. It's normal for Bible students to view Scripture through our personal life-experience filters and misinterpret the actual message intended by the author.

A challenge for 21st century North Americans can be to understand the cultural settings in which the stories and lessons of Scripture are based. The oriental culture of the 1st century and earlier Middle East is quite foreign to our experience, so some interpretation is necessary to learn the intended lessons. Once we have an understanding of the cultural back story of a particular Bible passage, we can see how the broad principles can apply to our modern-day

situations. Even though the cultural settings can vary drastically, our basic human condition remains the same throughout the centuries. A reliable source of interpretation and commentary can help us see the big picture of the message God wants to convey to us.

We come to the study of any topic with our list of preconceived notions of what we think we know about the subject. We naturally carry our biases with us at all times. It takes an intentional effort to recognize these notions for what they are and a humble willingness to set them aside if we want to grow beyond our limited boundaries of understanding. When it comes to digging deeper into the lessons of Scripture, the Holy Spirit can give us that willingness and lead us to sources of knowledge and wisdom, helping us expand our Biblical horizons.

~Chuck Burkeen

[1] <https://www.factcheck.org/2020/04/tv-news-report-prompts-unfounded-attacks-on-michigan-governor/>

For Reflection

Connecting: Describe a time when your words or actions were misinterpreted. What damage resulted from this? Were you able to resolve the situation? How?

Sharing: If it's true that every Bible translation is an interpretation based on the understanding and experience of the translators, how can you find a translation that you have confidence in?

1. I choose a translation that I like, and I trust that the Holy Spirit will guide me into all truth
2. The older the translation the better—modern translators have a hidden agenda to disseminate doctrinal error
3. It helps to have a rudimentary understanding of the original languages to avoid deception
4. When it comes to Bible study, it's wise to consult a wide variety of translations to gain a broader understanding of the possible interpretations of a particular passage
5. God will lead every genuine seeker into kingdom truth, no matter what Bible translation is used
6. Other:

Applying: If you are having an online class discussion, open the floor to the group and ask someone to suggest a Scriptural passage that has always puzzled them. Read that passage from a variety of Bible translations and see if you can help make sense of it.

Valuing: Carefully evaluate your openness to learning new truths from Scripture. Are you still willing to let others teach you? Share with someone during this coming week one new scriptural insight that you've gained recently and pray with that person for a richer understanding of the Bible.

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