

## An Exercise in Interpretation

**Instructions:** Put a "C" beside those items that are "cultural" and a "P" beside those items that are "permanent." Count up the total number of P's. Think about *why* you made the decisions you made.

1. Greet one another with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26).
2. Be baptized (Acts 2:38).
3. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out (Matt. 5:29).
4. If any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also (Matt. 5:39).
5. Give to him who begs from you (Matt. 5:42).
6. Love your enemies (Matt. 5:44).
7. Abstain from fornication (Acts 15:29).
8. Lay hands on individuals when commissioning them for a specific task (Acts 6:6; 13:2).
9. Wash one another's feet (John 13:14).
10. Lift your hands when praying (1 Tim. 2:8).
11. Prohibit women from wearing braided hair, gold, pearls, or costly attire (1 Tim. 2:9).
12. Permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12).
13. Support widows at least 60 years old with the church budget (1 Tim. 5:9).
14. Pay elders (1 Tim. 5:17-18).
15. Ministers should rebuke publicly elders who persist in sin (1 Tim. 5:20).
16. Drink wine for your stomach and frequent ailments (1 Tim. 5:22).
17. Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger (James 1:19).
18. Show no favoritism to the rich (James 2:1-7).
19. Do not make any oaths (James 5:12).
20. Anoint the sick with oil (James 5:14).
21. A man should pray and prophesy with his head uncovered (1 Cor. 11:4).
22. A woman should pray and prophesy with her head covered (1 Cor. 11:5, 10).
23. Long hair on a man is degrading (1 Cor. 11:14).
24. Take the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Jesus (1 Cor. 11:24).
25. Take the Lord's Supper as part of a meal (1 Cor. 11:17-34).
26. Take the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).
27. Use unleavened bread for communion (Luke 22:1, 7, 13, 19).
28. Use wine for communion (Luke 22:1, 7, 13, 19; 1 Cor. 11:21).
29. Take communion in a large upper room (Luke 22:12).
30. Drink communion from a single cup (Luke 22:17).
31. Take communion on Passover (Luke 22:7, 14-23).
32. Sometimes take the cup before the bread (Luke 22:17-19; 1 Cor. 10:16, 21).
33. Have seven deacons (Acts 6:3).
34. Go to the synagogue on Saturday (Acts 13:14, 42, 44).
35. Have all things in common with the church (Acts 2:44).
36. Pray at fixed times (Acts 3:1).
37. Take formal religious vows (Acts 18:18).
38. Preach in Jewish synagogues (Acts 14:1).
39. Cast lots to make decisions (Acts 1:26).
40. Ministers should appoint elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).
41. Do not own property, but meet in house churches (Acts 12:12; 16:40; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Phlm. 2).
42. Don't become angry (Matt. 5:22).
43. Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy (1 Cor. 14:1, 5).
44. Say "Amen" at the end of prayers (1 Cor. 14:16).
45. Each member should bring a song, lesson, etc. to share with the church during worship (1 Cor. 14:26).
46. Women should keep silent in the churches (1 Cor. 14:34).
47. Preach two by two (Mark 6:7).
48. Keep yourself pure (1 Tim. 5:22).
49. Tell people that unless they are born again, they cannot enter heaven (John 3:3).
50. Owe no one anything (Rom. 13:8).
51. Advise married couples to stay married and not divorce (1 Cor. 7:10-11).
52. Advise engaged couples not to seek marriage (1 Cor. 7:25-27, 37-38).
53. Call the church "The Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).
54. Call the church the "church of Christ" (Rom 16:16).
55. Sing songs, hymns, and spiritual songs (Col. 3:16).
56. Wives, be subject to your husbands (Eph. 5:22).
57. Slaves, obey your earthly masters (Eph. 6:5-8).
58. Give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess. 5:18).
59. Do not quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19).
60. When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face (Matt. 6:17).

## Interpretation: Ten Basic Considerations

### Preliminary Considerations

1. **What are we doing when we interpret Scripture?**
  - What we think we do: "It says it, and we do it."
  - What we actually do is more complex. Can we name what we implicitly do when we interpret?
  - We often consider literary, historical, cultural, theological, and hermeneutical factors.
2. **Our social location shapes the default modes that we bring to the text.**
  - What we've seen before or always done is very formative.
  - "We read texts, but texts also read us."
  - Sometimes we miss what is in the text, and sometimes we add to the text.
3. **Consider the full array of theological resources.**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scripture</li> <li>• Tradition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reason</li> <li>• Experience</li> </ul>
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### Concerning Scripture

4. **Consider the text in its canonical context.**
  - Is this topic mentioned in other passages?
  - Is there diversity on this topic in the Bible?
5. **Consider the literary features of the text.**
  - The type (genre) of literature (e.g., Prov 26:4-5; Eccl 3:1-8)
  - The presence of figurative language (e.g., hyperbole)
  - The immediate context of the passage
6. **Consider the historical context of the text.**
  - Is the instruction specific to the historical context?
  - Is the action a prototype (the first example) or an archetype (a model example)?
7. **Consider the role of culture.**
  - Distinguish intent from method.
  - Is this topic an inherently moral issue (e.g., found in a virtue or vice list)?
  - What other options were known, available, or possible?
  - Consider the reality that culture can overlap with truth (i.e., something is *both* permanent and cultural).
8. **Focus on the theological core. "Some things in Scripture are more important than others."**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 (Cross)</li> <li>• Matthew 22:34-40 (Great Commandment)</li> <li>• Matthew 23:23 ("Weightier Matters")</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14 (Love of Neighbor)</li> <li>• Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:6; 6:15 (Not ... but)</li> <li>• Ephesians 4:4-6 (The "Seven Ones")</li> </ul>
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9. **Begin with questions of identity (who) and purpose (why).**
10. **Consider the way that Scripture is normative.**
  - Rule
  - Principle

## Conclusions

1. How we interpret has often not been equal to the complexity of Scripture and real life.
2. We all interpret. The question is whether we will do it well or poorly.
3. Good interpretation includes various kinds of considerations (e.g., literary, historical, cultural, theological, and hermeneutical);
4. Careful study is often difficult. Think of the pain as "growing pains" and allow yourself time for growth.