

QUESTION

Why does Jesus tell us to hate our father and mother?

ANSWER

We must understand the basic rules for interpreting literature. The way we interpret the Bible is the same for all literature. Hermeneutics is the art and science of biblical interpretation. We all use principles of hermeneutics in our everyday use of language even if we don't realize it.

One rule in hermeneutics is to understand figures of speech. All cultures have idioms (figures of speech) that are particular to that culture. You must know the culture to really understand the idioms used. "Hate" used the way Jesus used it in Luke 14:26 is an idiom for choosing one over another. See Malachi 1:1-3 for another example. Hate, in this sense, is not an act of literal hatred, but a decision to choose one and not to choose the other.

"Hate" can also be a hyperbole. A hyperbole is an exaggeration to make a point. "EVERYONE is going to see that movie" is a hyperbolic statement meaning that it was a popular movie. A hyperbole is a figure of speech to help dramatize a point. Jesus was very dramatically making a point about the cost of discipleship. This brings up another important rule in the art and science of hermeneutics: context.

If you go back and read Luke 14:26 in context, starting with verse 25 and continuing through verse 35, you will see that Jesus was stressing the rigors of discipleship. The main point, in context, is that we should let nothing get in the way of truly following Jesus – not even the fact that we might have to go against the wishes of our parents and certain social norms in order to be an obedient follower of Jesus (a disciple).

Another important component in considering context is to consider the entire Bible as it relates to any smaller part. We must compare the small portions with the entire Bible. In doing this we will remember that, in Exodus 20, we have the Ten Commandments where we are told to honor our fathers and mothers. Knowing the larger context will help interpret smaller portions. We will then know that Jesus would not go against one of the most basic commands in the Bible.

Jesus would not tell us to break one of the Ten Commandments. This being true, the passage in Luke 14 could not mean that we are to have animosity toward our parents. Instead, it is saying that in certain cases we may have to face the tough decision to go against the cultural norms of our own family as we follow the Lord as a true disciple.

Notice in Luke 14:25-35 that Jesus gave many examples of the cost of discipleship. He ended with, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Not everyone will be able to receive his teaching due to the fact that he has challenged many cultural norms. Perhaps this is why there are very few true disciples today. Many people will not have ears to hear. Jesus was reminding people of the cost of truly following him as a disciple.