



THINK ON IT...

In order to understand the meaning of a passage of scripture, we need to keep in mind some basic principles of interpretation. These principles will not only lead us to understanding the passage of scripture we're looking at, but will lead us to personal application, to live what we're learning. Let's take a closer look at some words of Jesus from John 14 (NIV):

"¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

1. Understanding a passage of scripture starts with considering its historical context, for example, who is speaking and who is being spoken to? Why? Describe the scene in which Jesus speaks these words (remember, John 13 to 17 are Jesus' final words of comfort to his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion). The apostles did not know these were Christ's final hours on earth. How do you think the significance of Jesus' message in these verses changed after his resurrection?
2. In v.18, Jesus says: "*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*" What does the word "orphan" mean in this verse? In Christ's day, orphans were often neglected, destitute of comfort and prey to their environment. Why is it important that Christ tell the disciples they are not orphans? How does the promise that Christ will come to us bring you comfort?
3. Another principle of understanding scripture includes interpreting unclear verses with clear ones. Look at v.19 above. As you search the surrounding verses as well as the context of verse 19, see if you can find a clear verse that would help you to understand what Jesus meant when he said that the world would not see him, but they would. Talk about what it must have meant to the disciples when they heard these words. What fear might they have experienced? When you looked at the surrounding verses to help explain this verse, what promise or comfort did you find?
4. Another important principle of interpreting a text is letting the text speak for itself. Read v.21 above again. Put this verse into your own words. What actions reveal that someone loves Jesus? What promise does Jesus make to those who love him?
5. Christ not only wants us to have an ongoing relationship with him, but also obey his commandments. How can you obey his commandments out of love rather than a sense of duty?
6. What is one thing from this brief study that you sense God is saying to you? How can you apply it to your life this week?