

Rules for Interpreting Difficult Passages or Words

1. Find the original meaning of the word (a word study).
2. Let the context decide the definition.
3. If context doesn't define, then see how that exact same word is used in other passages.
 - a. in the same book - if it is not used in that book or if it is and it still doesn't define the word then . . .
 - b. by the same author - if it is not used by that author or it still doesn't define the word then . . .
 - c. by other authors in that same language (OT - Hebrew or NT - Greek)

Example: Faithless (II Timothy 2:13)

Step 1 - Faithless (believe not - KJV) is #569 in the Strong's. The definition is unbelieving or disbelieving. Could be talking about the saved who don't believe something (disbelieving) of the unsaved (unbelieving)

Step 2 - Context talks about God being faithful. Is God faithful to the unsaved? Yes! He will do what He has told them He would do. Is God faithful to the saved? Yes! Context does not define the usage of the word.

Step 3 - How is this word used

a) in the same book - it is not

b) by the same author -

Romans 3:3 - Paul talks about those who won't believe in God. This is the only time he used that word besides II Timothy. With it only being used twice, we don't have enough proof to make a definite conclusion so let's see how other authors used it.

c) by other authors in the New Testament (Greek) -

Mark 16:11 - disciples not believing that Jesus had risen from the dead

Mark 16:16 - talking about unbelievers being damned

Luke 24:11 - disciples not believing that Jesus had risen

Luke 24:41 - disciples so happy they couldn't believe that Jesus had risen

Acts 28:24 - some heard the words of the Gospel and they wouldn't believe

Conclusion

Besides II Timothy the word is used six times. Three times it is used to talk about the disciples (who were believers) and three times about those who would not believe in Jesus (unbelievers). This shows us that we don't have enough evidence to be certain of the definition of the word "faithless." We need to understand the passage then in light of both possible definitions and leave it at that. To draw a sure conclusion that Paul is referring to either the saved or the unsaved at this point is drawing a false conclusion and can lead to false interpretation of the passage and not handling the Word accurately (II Timothy 2:15). There may be a way to understand Paul's exact meaning if we would be Greek scholars and be able to study and diagram the passage in the original Greek language. Because we can't do that, we need to be cautious and not draw any solid conclusions.

This is all because some men wanted to build a tower!