

Interpretation vs the Bible Text

Warren and I contracted to shear Ian Ross's sheep. At the end of each day, Ian provided a 1.5 litre bottle of beer for Warren and a 1.5 litre bottle of lemonade for me. If I was struggling with a tough sheep, or having an average day, everyone in the shearing shed would mercilessly tease me about drinking out of the wrong coloured bottle! Despite averaging over 600 sheep per day between us, come 5:00pm Saturday, there were still a significant number left to do on Sunday.

As Warren and I prepared our gear ready to begin first thing the next morning, Ian came to me and said, "What are you doing?" I replied, "Setting up for tomorrow." "Look," said Ian, "Tomorrow's Sunday and you have to go to church." "But," I protested, "I need to help Warren finish the job." "No way," replied Ian, "I've arranged for a neighbour to come over and help out. After that we're going to have a booze-up. Tell dirty stories. Frankly you'd be an embarrassment. I'll pay you now so you are free to go to church tomorrow!"

We were part of a church planting team in Rome, Italy. Quite a number of new Christians wanted to be baptized. In the church building there was no baptistery. So it was decided that one Sunday the whole church would go to a lake just outside Rome. A bus was hired. Off to the lake we went as a church.

At the lake we held an 'Open-air Meeting.' Soon quite a crowd of non-church people were listening. Those being baptised explained how they had become a Christian. All were then baptized. This was followed by a communion service with various men taking part by praying, reading from the Bible, or asking us to sing a hymn. What we were doing was explained to the on-lookers.

As soon as the service was finished, most of the church people changed and into the lake they dived for a swim. We were dumb-founded because in Australia in the 1970's it was considered wrong for Christians to go to a lake or beach to swim on a Sunday!

A Rabbi and his disciples were walking through a paddock of wheat on a Saturday. As they walked they pulled off some wheat grains, rubbed them in their hands to get rid of the husks, and then ate the grains. These actions scandalized the Pharisees who roundly condemned them for breaking the 'oral' Sabbath Law that prohibited reaping grain on a Saturday [Mark 2:23-28]. How could the Pharisees make such a tragic mistake? First, they lost sight of the fact that the Sabbath Law was given to teach two spiritual truths (Exodus 31:14; Deuteronomy 5:15). Secondly, Pharisees placed their oral interpretation and traditions on the same level as the Old Testament itself.

Christians today often make the same mistake. They appeal to an author like Calvin, or to emerging church leaders, or to a custom, or an interpretation, giving these the same authority as the Bible itself. Don't make the same mistake as the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes and priests of Jesus' day.