

“What Do I Do With That Verse?”

The Historical-Cultural Context

How do we know whether certain texts in the Scriptures have a cultural limitation to the application?

Is Scripture clear?

- Ezra 7:10
“For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”
- 2 Timothy 2:7
“Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.”
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
“All Scripture is breathed out by God *and profitable* for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”

Are there limitations?

We are fallible people. We are limited, God is transcendent.

- 2 Peter 3:16
(*Peter speaking of Paul’s writing*) ... There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Cultural similarities and differences

How does culture affect how we read the Bible?

Does the color of your skin, the town in which you grow up, or your financial status, or job — help you interpret Scripture? Does it draw more meaning out of the text?

What does this text mean apart from me?

- **Interpretation** – What does the text mean?
- **Application** – What do I do?

Methods

Prescriptive versus Descriptive

Does this text prescribe something (or command us)? Or does it merely describe something?

EXAMPLES:

- Acts 12:12 – When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.
- Luke 5:15-16 – But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. ¹⁶ But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.
- Luke 11:2-13 – The Lord's prayer encourages Jesus' disciples to pray.

Lenses to Consider

(Points taken from John Piper & Robert Plummer)

1. To the degree that a stipulation is rooted in creation, to that degree it has abiding value.

(Marriage & Divorce – Matthew 19:3-9)

2. To the degree that it is commanded across the whole terrain of Scripture—Old, New, Epistles, Gospels—it has high level abiding validity.

(Homosexuality – Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:10)

3. Would a literal application of the command accomplish the intended objective of the author's original statement?

(Head Coverings – 1 Corinthians 11:2-16)

Cultural Background of 1 Corinthians

1. When Roman men pulled their toga over their heads, it generally indicated their high social status.
2. Wives covered their heads to show they were married and as a symbol of modesty.
3. Women of that day began uncovering their heads, publicly expressing contempt for her marriage and making herself sexually available.

Principle of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: "One should do nothing to distract from the glory of God when in the community of worship." (*Fee, Stuart, How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth. p. 87.*)

2 Types of Commands in Relation to Culture

1. Commands that transfer from culture to culture with no alteration
2. Commands that embody timeless principles that find varying expressions from culture to culture.

EXAMPLES:

A. Leviticus 19:11 – Do not steal.

B. Ephesians 5:18 – Do not get drunk with wine.

C. 2 Corinthians 13:13 – Greet one another with a holy kiss.

D. 2 Timothy 4:13 – When you come, bring the cloak that I left

Holy Spirit in the Role of

- **Illumination**

“Lord, open your Word to us, and open us to your Word.”

- **SG Catechism Question 7:**

Q: How can we understand the Bible?

A: As the Scriptures are preached and read, the Holy Spirit illuminates our minds to understand, cherish, and obey God’s Word.