

# Biblical Hermeneutics Part 2

Family Camp 2008



# Determining the Application: *Historical Particularity vs. Eternality*

What from “back then” is just for  
“back then” and what from “back  
then” is for today?

- 1 Cor 14:33-35

- As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

- Acts 1:4-8

- 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

- 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

- John 13:2 The evening meal was being served, and... Jesus ... got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.
- 12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

## Luke 22:17-19

- 17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

- 19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

# Challenges of Bible Interpretation

- **Distance of Time**: consider that the last words of the Bible were written over 1900 years ago, and the earliest perhaps 3000 years ago.
- **Distance of Culture**: What is the point of anointing with oil? What does “head coverings” refer to in 1 Corinthians 11? Why was the sandal used in the process of redeeming and transferring property?

# Challenges continued

- **Geographical Distances**: We cannot picture the Mount of Olives, nor the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. This impacts our Bible reading.
- **Distance of Language**: In Hebrew, for example, “you” is written as masculine or feminine. English has no means of distinguishing between the two. Sometimes, euphemisms are used, such as “It is good for a man not to touch a women”, meaning sexual intercourse.

# A 4-Step Process for Accurate Interpretation

- 1) Determine the original application(s) intended by the passage
- 2) Evaluate the level of specificity of those applications to their original historical situations. If the original specific applications are transferable, apply them in a culturally appropriate way.
- 3) If the original applications are not transferable, identify one or more broader cross-cultural principles that the specific elements of the text reflect.
- 4) Find appropriate applications for today that implement those principles.

# 1. Determine the Original Application

- How did the Biblical author of a given passage want his hearers or readers to respond?
- What did the author intend the readers to do?
- Is there a command to obey, an example to follow or to avoid, a promise to claim, a warning to heed, a teaching to act on, or a truth to believe?

## 2. Evaluate the Specificity of the Original Application(s)

- How does the interpreter know when certain biblical commands, examples, promises, warnings, etc. are “culturally bound”, limited to their original context, and not timeless or universal?
- When can the interpreter rightly assume that the text presents a specific *example* of a more general *principle*?
- When does the principle remain timeless and unchanging? How may the form of implementing that principle change from one context to the next?

# Example: Women's role in the Church

- 1 Tim 2:8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.
- 9 I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, 10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.
- 11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing-if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

# Women's role in the Church

- Many would agree that it is possible for men to pray without lifting up their hands, and that braided hair for women is not always (or often) immoral.
- Many would also agree that men should pray without anger, and that women should always perform good deeds.
- What about women being silent? How are women saved through child-bearing? How do we separate the historically-particular from the eternally significant?

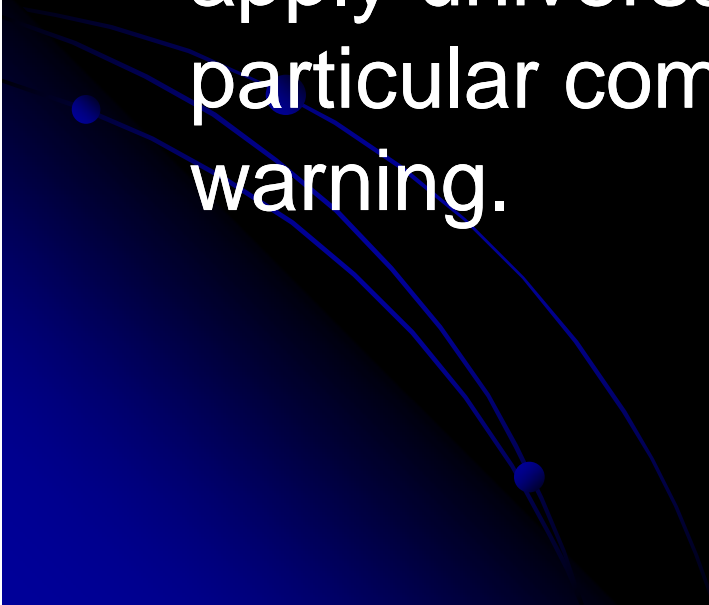
## 2 Approaches to the Cultural/Timeless Debate

- 1) Some interpreters argue that unless something in the text specifically indicates that the passage teaches a timeless truth, we should assume it to be “occasional”, limited in its specific application to the original context.
- This principle makes it difficult to assume the timelessness of clear fundamental principles such as “Do not Kill” or “Do not Steal”.

## 2 Approaches to the Cultural/Timeless Debate

- 2) Others assume the reverse: unless specific textual data supports a “culture-bound” interpretation, we should assume the originally intended application is normative for all believers at all times.
- This principle would seem to require us to bar children born outside of marriage from our churches (Duet 23:2); greet one another with a holy kiss (1 Thes. 5:26); and drink wine for upset stomachs (1 Tim 5:23).

### 3. Identify the Cross-Cultural Principles

- Using the 6 questions we will discuss, determine whether there is a broad principle that a specific biblical text promotes as timeless, even if we cannot apply universally, without alteration, the particular command, example, promise or warning.
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## 4. Find Appropriate Applications that Embody Broader Principles

- If we can discern the principle, we must then devise new illustrations or applications of that principle for new situations.
- eg. Food sacrificed to idols; women's head coverings

# 6 Questions to Ask of the Text to determine Particularity vs. Eternality:

- 1) *Does the text present a broad theological or moral principle which another book of Scripture also teaches?*
- Lev 19:9 "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God."
- James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

## 6 Questions to Ask of the Text:

- 2) *Does subsequent revelation limit the application of a particular passage even if the book in which it appears does not?*
- eg. Paul's changing tune concerning whether women are permitted to speak in Church. In Galatians he writes that there is neither male nor female in Christ, and in Romans, he lists a woman as an Apostle.
- 1 Cor 11:5; Titus 2:4

## 6 Questions to Ask of the Text:

- 3) *Is the specific teaching “contradicted” elsewhere in ways that show it was limited to exceptional situations?*
- Hos 1:2 When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD."
- 1 Cor 6:15 makes clear that believers are not to avail of Prostitutes

## 6 Questions to Ask of the Text:

- 4) *Is the particular cultural form expressed in the biblical text present today, and if so does it have the same significance as it did then?*
- eg. “Greet one another with a holy kiss.”
- eg. 1 Corinthians 8 / Romans 14 and Food Offered to Idols

## 6 Questions to Ask of the Text:

- *5) Is the rationale for the application rooted in a creation ordinance, in the character of God, or his redemptive plan?*
- eg. Gen 2:24, Mt 19:5, Eph 5:31 all affirm God's ideal of monogamous marriage for one man and one woman
- *Gal 3:27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*
- That women have gained equality with men through God's redemptive plan is clearly a point of this passage.

## 6 Questions to Ask of the Text:

- 6) *Does the passage contain an explicit or implicit conditions that limits its application?*
- eg. Passages that would seem to imply that Christians can get whatever they ask for in prayer, are tempered by those which state we must ask according to God's will (Mt 6:33 / Mt 6:10)