

Discerning Truth in a Post Christian Culture

Understanding Difficult Parts of the Bible

Timeless Truth vs Cultural Application

QUESTION: *How do we approach interpreting passages in the Bible in the cultural context vs. literally true for all cultures in all times? For example, passages in the New Testament about women (being quiet in the church, not having authority over a man, etc.). Another example—because having multiple wives was considered normal in the Old Testament, did God choose to overlook that?*

Our goal is to learn how to study the Bible so as to get God's answers to life's questions. Sometimes, however, the Bible itself raises those questions and perplexes us with respect to timeless truth intended for all people in all times vs guidance that has a cultural application for a specific group at a specific time. Before addressing some of those specific questions, we need to establish some general principles for interpreting Scripture (cultural issues):

- 1) *Is it a moral question (related to the 10 commandments)?*
- 2) *Is it normative in all the Bible (or does it only occur in isolated passages)?*
- 3) *Is it true to God's character as expressed throughout the Bible?*
- 4) *How does it fit into progressive revelation?*

In addition we should also apply the fundamental rules of interpretation (hermeneutics) to each passage we have in question:

- 1) *What is the context of the passage (chapter, book, testament, whole Bible)?*
- 2) *What is the plain meaning of the words in the passage?*
- 3) *What are the answers to the basic interrogatives—who, what, when, where, how, why?*
- 4) *Is the language intended to be metaphorical, figurative, or a parable, or is it intended to be taken literally? (Take it literally unless it obviously cannot be literal and still make sense.)*

Specific Assessment of the Role of Women in Cultural Institutions (Particularly in Marriage and in the Church):

- 1) ***Is it a moral question?*** (NO)
- 2) ***Is it normative in all of the Bible or only isolated passages?*** (NO; only two passages—
I Timothy 2:9-15; I Corinthians 14:33-35)
- 3) ***Is it true to God's character throughout the Bible?*** (NO; consider God's call & Jesus' treatment of women) Exodus 15:20—Miriam the Prophetess; Judges 4:4—Deborah the Prophetess & Judge; I Samuel 2:22—women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. Luke 8:1-3—women who served with the 12; John 20:17—Mary the first evangelist; Acts 1:14—women in the upper room prayer meeting; Acts 2:17-18—Spirit poured out on men and women to prophecy; Acts 16:13, 17:4 & 12; I Timothy 5:1-2—treat women as equals; Acts 18—Priscilla and Aquila; Romans 16:7—Junia outstanding among the Apostles
- 4) ***How does this issue fit into progressive revelation?***
Genesis 1:27-28; Genesis 3:16 compared with Ephesians 5:22-33