

Lesson Four: The Epistles: The Hermeneutical Questions

- I. Remember the more limited definition of “hermeneutic” used in our text.
 - A. “How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth” (Fee) uses the word more specifically in reference to studying the Bible for personal application.
 - B. So, the heading “The Hermeneutical Questions” is referring to questioning the biblical text for personal application today.
 1. “What do these texts mean to *us*?” (Fee, p. 71).
 2. So, we will make this lesson an exercise in how to determine what is unique to the 1st Century setting and what has application regardless of time and culture.
 - a. Remember that the Epistles are “Occasional Letters.”
 - b. There are elements of those occasions that are specific to that time and that culture, that would not have specific application to use today.
 - c. However, there are principles contained in those historical and cultural settings that transcend time and place.
 - d. These are the Word of God for us today that must be applied and adhered to for faithful Christian living.
- II. General principles for determining applicable principles from historical and cultural settings.
 - A. Common Sense is Key!
 1. By common sense logic we would understand that where the historic and cultural setting **match exactly** with our current setting that the application would be exactly the same (cf. 2 Tim. 2:3; 2 Pet. 1:5-9).
 2. By common sense logic we would understand that commands made to specific people in specific settings only pertain to those specific people (cf. 2 Tim. 4:13; Luke 24:49).
 - B. A biblical text cannot mean now what it could not have meant then (cf. 1 Cor. 11:22).
 - C. We must distinguish between matters of indifference and binding doctrine (Fee, p. 79).
 1. What the Epistles specifically indicate as matters of indifference (cf. 1 Cor. 11:16; Rom. 14).
 2. “Matters of indifference are not inherently moral but are cultural.”
 3. Things that are specifically identified as sin are never connected with matters of indifference (cf. Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9-11).
 4. Things that are specifically identified as necessary to faithful Christian living are never connected with matters of indifference (cf. Rom. 12; Col. 3; 2 Pet. 1:5-9; et al).
- III. Some exercises:
 - A. 1 Corinthians 12-14
 1. What about the text is unique to the 1st Century church that would not apply to the church today?

2. What about the historical context helps understand the application being made to the 1st Century church and is there a general principle there that would apply to the church today?
3. What about the remote context of the book that would help understand the application to the Corinthian church specifically and is there a general principle there that would apply to the church today?

B. John 13:1-20

1. What is the historical context of the passage?
2. What are the cultural aspects of the passage?
3. What is the general principle of the passage?

C. Hebrews 5:12-6:3

1. How does the immediate audience help understand the original application of this passage?
2. Are there specific elements of the passage that would only apply to its original audience?
3. Is there a general principle that transcends the historical, cultural original application to be applicable to us today?