

Getting all we can from Scripture

Men's Bible Study at Park View

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Session 3

Discipline #3

Consider the author's situation

Are there any historical or cultural facts that help explain the text?

Example: Matt. 5:13

As we read the Bible, we ask "what would someone in the original situation be meaning by those words?"

Example: Mark 7:1-5

Explanation of the historical and cultural background is generally not in the text because the audience already knew it.

Where can we find these unspoken historical and cultural facts?

- Bible Dictionary / Encyclopedia
- Study Bible
eg. *NIV Study Bible* or *ESV Study Bible*
- commentaries
- online Bible study helps
eg. biblegateway.com
- thought-for-thought translations (in contrast to word-for-word translations)
eg. New Living Translation

Example: Luke 18:9-14

Example: Luke 14:27

Example: Luke 15:11-32

When the text is a command, this Discipline is especially important.

Many commands in the Bible were intended for a specific situation.

Example: 2 Cor 13:12 (also Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 1 Thes. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14)

Example: 1 Tim. 5:23

What do we do with commands that were given to life situations different from ours?

- 1) Ignore them?
- 2) Start them up again?
- 3) Discern the (timeless) principle behind the specific (timebound) instruction and how to how to best express that principle in our culture.

Eg., the intent or principle behind the holy kiss ("show warm affection to fellow believers") is perhaps best achieved in our culture by a holy hug or firm handshake.

Example: Deut. 22:8

Questions for Table Discussion:

Share an idea that struck you during this session.

Do you agree that the Spirit of God intended most commands in the Bible to be universal, to apply to all believers? Skim some passages (eg. Eph. 4:22-5:4; 1 Thes. 5:11-22; Rom. 12:9-21) and identify any instructions intended only for the original audience and not also for us.

Discuss a few of the following biblical commands, sharing impressions as to whether they are 1) still in force for us today exactly as articulated on the page or 2) still in force only in part or in a modified fashion through their underlying principle:

Do not ... put tattoo marks on yourselves (Lev. 19:28)

Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly (Lev. 19:32)

Do not take interest of any kind from your countryman (Lev. 25:36)

Praise God with tambourine and dancing, ...praise him with the clash of cymbals (Ps. 150:4-5)

Go and make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19)

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet (Jn. 13:14)

It seems that it would have been easier if God had given us abstract, universal principles in the Bible. Are there advantages in having a Bible where God speaks to specific people in real life situations? Contrast the experience of reading a series of abstractions with reading a string of concrete illustrations.