

## 4. Herman Who?

(The Epistles – the hermeneutical questions!)

### Introduction

Reminder: **hermeneutics** = **application**

What does the Bible text mean to us?

Problem: deciding between **cultural** vs. **eternal**

### 1. Falling between the lines...

All of us read the text and apply what we can to our own situation.

**Activity:** Look up (a) 2 Timothy 4:13 and (b) 2 Timothy 2:3 and obey the commands...

Why do we not do (a) and do (b)? Same letter isn't it? It is because we decided that one is **cultural** and the other is **eternal**.

#### common sense hermeneutics

- Problem is the things that fall between cultural and eternal...
- Our **influences** and **church traditions** determine our common sense (e.g. wearing hair long or short based on 1 Corinthians 11:14-15 or women speaking in church based on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35).
- We are all guilty of reading into some texts and reading around others!
- Christians are divided on infant baptism, women in the church, the second coming, length of hair, drinking of wine, the nature of hell, and so on...

### 2. Rules

1. A text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or reader(s).
2. Whenever we share similar life situations with the first-century hearers, God's message to them is the same message to us.

**Activity:** Remember last week's exegesis on 1 Corinthians 3:5-17? Can this text be applied to us today and why?

### 3. Extended application...

Can we apply an **individual text** outside a comparable situation?

**Activity 1:** Some Christians assert that a Christian should not smoke based on 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. Is this legitimate?

**Activity 2:** Some Christians assert that you should not be married to a non-Christian based on 2 Corinthians 6:14. What is the wider context of this passage? Has a yoke ever meant marriage in the Bible?

### 4. No Western equivalent?

How do we apply an instruction such as:

“Don't attend idol feasts”

**Activity:** Read 1 Corinthians 8 and 10:14-22

1. What is the clear principle?
2. Only apply the principle to comparable situations (that hard bit).

### 5. Cultural relativity

Epistles are occasional documents of the first century – language, culture and situations.

1. Some Epistle situations can be applied to our comparable situations.
2. Some Epistle situations cannot be applied to our situation but we might derive a principle.
3. Some Epistle situations need to be left in the first century!

So what are the guidelines?

1. Distinguish what is the core message of the Bible and what is periphery (e.g. the fall of humankind, head coverings)
2. Distinguish what is inherently sinful and what is cultural sinful (e.g. murder, idol food).
3. Note where the New Testament is consistent and where it is not. (e.g. women in ministry)
4. Note if the writer had no other cultural choice. (e.g. slavery)
5. Be aware of wider context (e.g. women lacking education)
6. Recognise the difficulties and exercise love and charity!

### Finally

Be aware that we have limits in our knowledge and that we won't have all our questions answered in this 'age'.