

## Hermeneutical Lesson 6 Review Question

On page 116 of McQuilkin's article, Limits of Cultural Interpretation, the author states:

"There are a number of injunctions in Scripture which present problems for many contemporary Christians: Women must keep silent in the church; wash one another's feet; greet one another with a holy kiss; women must wear a head covering; wives are to be in subjection to their husbands; children are to obey their parents; do not be divorced; do not lust; do not take interest on money that is loaned. And there are many others. In each of these, cultural understanding of the context of the original author and recipient may well clarify the meaning. But if it is used to set aside that meaning, the interpreter has assumed greater authority in determining truth than he has permitted the Bible itself."

1. Use one of the examples and explain how cultural interpretation can be used to set aside the plain meaning of Scripture.
  - A. A strict rule on women speaking in the church is not just inconsistent with the Scripture 1 Corinthians 14 but it is also inconsistent within the same letter. In chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians, just three chapters before the supposed restrictions on women speaking in the church, the Apostle Paul gives both men and women instructions on how to pray and prophesy in the church assembly (1 Corinthians 11:4-5). One can pray silently, but prophesy is always audible. If Paul instructed women on how to prophesy in the church, he did not expect them to be silent. Nor did the Holy Spirit expect women to remain silent as his fiery baptism caused both men and women to prophesy and speak in other tongues at the church's gathering on Pentecost. It is illogical to suggest that Scripture requires women to be silent in the church just moments after instructing women on how to prophesy in the church. It is contradictory to think that God requires women to be silent in the church

assembly when the Holy Spirit caused women to prophesy and speak in other tongues at the Pentecost church gathering. And let's not forget Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah prophesied over the nation of Israel, not just a small church assembly. Scripture must interpret Scripture and if something is inconsistent, it must be in our understanding, not in God's intention. Why Does Paul Tell Women to Be Silent in Church in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35? The answer lies in the words that Paul chose in 1 Corinthians 14. For silence, he could have chosen the verb *phimoo* which means "forcing someone to be silent," or *hesuchia*, which means "quietness and stillness," but he didn't. Paul chose the verb *sigao*, which is "a voluntary silence." "*Sigao* is the kind of silence asked for in the midst of disorder and clamor." Likewise, when Paul said "it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church," he could have chosen any one of dozens of Greek words that imply speaking in ministry. "Five of them denote preaching or proclaiming, and twenty-five others can be translated 'say,' 'speak,' or 'teach.'" Paul didn't use any of those words. Instead he chose the word *laleo*, which can mean speaking something important. "But of all the verbs that can be translated 'speak,' only *laleo* can also mean, simply, talk." Paul was telling women to stop chattering during what had become very unruly gatherings. And the context of order, which is the clear theme of the entire chapter, supports this interpretation. The silence required in chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians is a voluntary silence in accordance with the need for order in the church service. It was not intended to silence women outright. It is an oppressive atmosphere for women permeating from the Greek culture and Jewish practice of the day, "Teachers, at first, had to be men, for only men were educated in the faith. And Jewish custom strictly forbade women from conversing with men other than their husbands." In the New Testament church, there were some serious roadblocks for women leading and instructing as Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah

had in the Old Testament. First, Greek culture and Jewish practice restricted them from learning. Then it restricted them from speaking.

2. How does cultural interpretation influence our interpretation of these principles?

A. We inevitably come to the Bible loaded with cultural presuppositions about the nature of reality which can sometime be very helpful, some not so helpful when reading the Bible. The remedy for the dangers posed by cultural blinders, the radar we can employ to detect hidden icebergs in our worldview, is the church itself. As we acknowledge humbly our need for the mentoring and guidance of all members of Christ's body in the church past and present our understanding of the Scripture will expand like a balloon, filled with the breath of the Holy Spirit. The exegetical and theological insights of different members of Christ's church are throughout the world's cultures and histories like so many stars provide the illumination we need to read and understand the Scripture. Our eyesight brightens and clarifies as we listen to one another to past believers who have journeyed with Christ before us, and to present-day believers who initially seem so different from us. As we embrace the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in the church's journey through time and humbly receive the Spirit's enlivening of Christ's body around the world, our ability to read the Bible well significantly increases. We are encouraged, then, to read the Bible as a "global community." By doing so, we can "open the chamber and allow new voices in." And by consciously expanding the circle of our conversation partners, we strengthen each other where we tend to be weak, shortsighted, stunted, or blind. Christ continues to speak to all Christians and all cultures through the Bible where a text always points to Jesus himself. We can't stop being

North American or Asian, African or South American; our cultural identity and language, though warped by sin, is a gift from God. What we can do, though, is increase our awareness of the cultural and historical settings in which God has graciously and providentially placed us. And we can better appreciate through immersion in the global Christian family and through books on how the settings help and hinder our understanding of the Bible.