

## READING SCRIPTURE III

### Review: Hermeneutics

(1) exegesis

What is “genre” and why is it important?

(2) application

What do we mean by “redemptive history”?

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## How to read New Testament Epistles

### First: doing exegesis with NT epistles

(1) Epistles are only one half of a two-way conversation.

#### **1 Corinthians 7:1**

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”

#### **2 Thessalonians 2:3-6**

<sup>3</sup>Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, <sup>4</sup>who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. <sup>5</sup>Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? <sup>6</sup>And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time.

#### **1 Corinthians 5:9-10**

<sup>9</sup>I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – <sup>10</sup>not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

(2) Epistles are occasional letters addressing specific problems.

**(3) Pay close attention to grammar and to prepositions, such as: *but, for, therefore.***

**Galatians 3:11-12**

<sup>11</sup> Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."

<sup>12</sup> **But** the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."

**Colossians 3:1-3**

<sup>1</sup> If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> **For** you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

**Romans 12:1-2**

<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you **therefore**, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

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**Second: doing application with NT epistles**

**(4) Application is sometimes difficult because the situation in the original context is so radically different from our own modern context.**

**Romans 13:1-4**

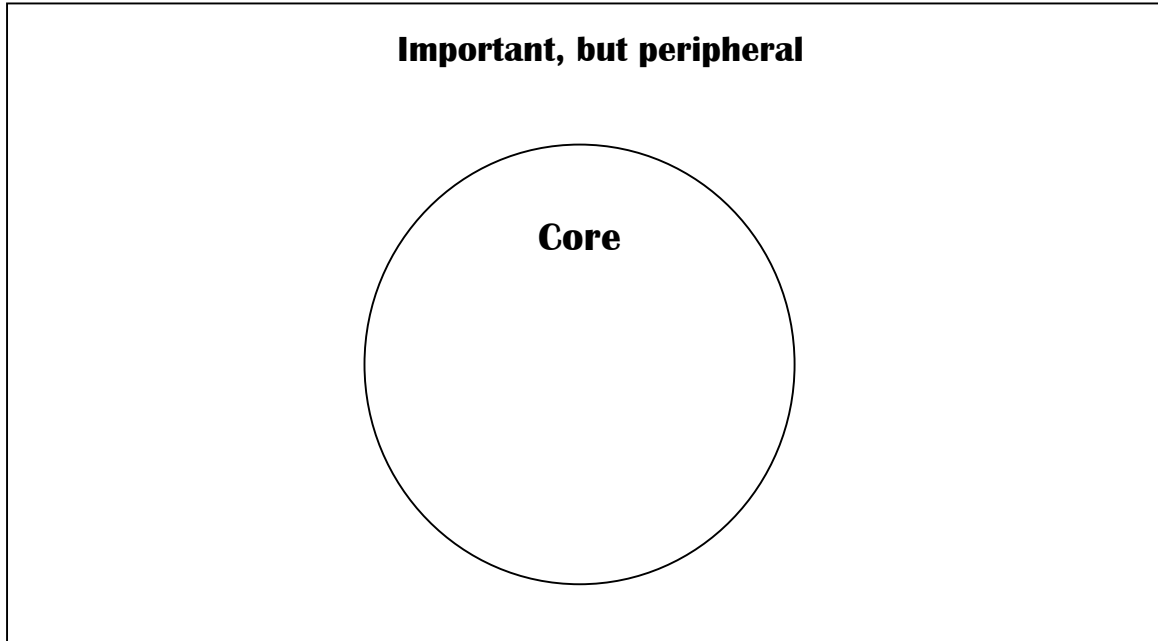
<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, <sup>4</sup> for he is God's servant for your good.

**(5) Be aware of the cultural gap between the 1<sup>st</sup> century world and the modern world.**

**1 Timothy 2:8-14**

<sup>8</sup> I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; <sup>9</sup> likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire,<sup>10</sup> but with what is proper for women who profess godliness – with good works. <sup>11</sup> Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. <sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve; <sup>14</sup> and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

**(6) We need to approach the NT epistles with a certain amount of humility and recognize that thoughtful Christians can come to different conclusions.**



## **Introduction**

- (1) definition of an epistle
- (2) epistles make up majority of NT / 21 of 27 books / 13 by Apostle Paul

The task of reading epistles can be broken down into two parts: exegesis and application.

### **(1) Epistles are only one half of a two-way conversation**

It's like listening to a phone conversation in which you can only hear one side.

We don't have the other side of the conversation – letters, personal questions, etc.

**1 Cor. 7:1** – shows us that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in response to the church's letter asking specific questions and issues. Part of the difficulty in reading 1 Corinthians is that we don't have that letter. It would help a great deal in our interpretation if we could know what were the issues in great detail.

**2 Thess. 2:5** – Paul says, “remember what I told you...so I don't have to go into greater detail, right?” But those details are now lost to us, which makes understanding the “man of lawlessness” hard to interpret, and one reason why there is a wide range of opinions on him.

**1 Cor. 5:9** – Paul mentions a prior letter. We don't have that letter. So even correspondence written by the Apostle Paul himself we don't possess.

Therefore, there will be some things which we can't know. The information is lost to us.

This gets us to the Sufficiency of Scripture. God doesn't give us everything we may want, but everything we need for godliness and salvation.

### **(2) Epistles are occasional letters addressing specific problems**

First thing you need to do is become familiar with the backstory and the occasion for why the letter was written. This is where reading a Study Bible introduction is very helpful. For example, 1 Corinthians was written to a church full of pride – kind of like NYC, LA and Las Vegas rolled into one. Philippians was written by Paul when he was in prison – which helps us to understand what he is talking about when talking about joy, contentment, etc.

Second, we need to understand that letters stand together as a whole. The chapter divisions are artificial. We should try to read the entire letter in one sitting to get a feel for it. For instance, if we got an email or letter from a boyfriend/girlfriend, we shouldn't read it piece by piece, in random order, over several days. We'd sit down and read it all.

Also, because letters stand together, we need to read and reread over and over. Jotting down notes

### **(3) Pay close attention to grammar and to prepositions, such as: *but, for, therefore*.**

But is contrastive. For is causal. Therefore is that the preceding is the ground for what follows.

**(4) Application is sometimes difficult because the situation in the original context is so radically different from our own modern context**

In the original context, Paul is talking to Christians living in the Roman Empire. The governing authorities is the Roman emperor and his appointed governors. Christians were not to try to overthrow the Roman Empire, as evil and corrupt as it was.

But how does this apply to other situations in history? Does this make the American Revolution wrong? What about today in a modern democracy? Should we not try to vote out of power elected officials we believe are incompetent? What place does civil disobedience play, like what MLK Jr. did?

The general rule is that you try to understand the original context and the principle behind. And then apply that principle to today. But you must do this cautiously and thoughtfully.

**(5) Be aware of the cultural gap between the 1<sup>st</sup> century world and the modern world.**

The Bible does not endorse a certain culture, but critiques all cultures in all times. The Bible is written in Hebrew and Greek. Unlike Islam, the Bible does not enshrine a certain culture. This is why we use contemporary music in our worship services.

Gender issues is one place where the question of culture comes into play. The first part of Paul's statement seems pretty straightforward. We are not to apply this rigidly. Woman can wear braided hair and jewelry. Because we can understand the principle behind this.

But what about the second part? Women are not to teach in the church. Is this also cultural? And what does teach mean?

**(6) We need to approach the NT epistles with a certain amount of humility and recognize that good Christians can come to different conclusions.**

Core: salvation, God

Peripheral: spiritual gifts, end times, baptism, gender roles, church government