

Scriptures and Doctrine :: Interpreting Scripture in light of culture when it was written

Interpreting Scripture in light of culture when it was written - posted by TMK (), on: 2020/3/24 7:35

By Steve Gregg
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This recent correspondence might clarify some issues for some people. I received this email today:

Steve,

I have read your article on 1 Corinthians 11, and the head coverings for women, at your website. I believe you place too much emphasis on culture. In one of your lectures (I forget which one) you talked about a certain point where people excuse use because they believe it is a cultural thing. I don't believe it is consistent to say it's cultural on one point, then not cultural on another.

But, if it is cultural, I don't really see the point of including it in the Bible because it then would not apply to us, or anyone other than those people.

Well, when you do get time, I would love your insight...but I'll leave it with you.

Thank you,

 $V \hat{\in} \epsilon'$

Hi Vâ€²,

Thank you for writing.

You wrote:

" I don't believe it is consistent to say it's cultural on one point, then not cultural on another. "

It is not inconsistent at all to say that certain things in the Bible are cultural and others are not. In fact, in documents like the epistles, this is the only responsible way to read them. To avoid what you call an inconsistency would require either that we recognize nothing in the scriptures as a reference to contemporary, local culture, or else that we take everything as merely cultural, and nothing as stating transcendent, eternal truths.

If we recognize that the epistles have the specific cultural situations of their readers in view, and that they teach eternal truths, requires that we must decide, case-by-case, which instruction is reflective of local culture, and which ones embody transcendent truths to be applied in every culture.

Paul frequently tells his readers to greet each other with a holy kiss. He tells them to lift holy hands in prayer, etc. If you practice every cultural practice mentioned in scripture, that is fine. I don't believe that the Bible is written in a vacuum, but to people in an actual historical situation. That's™ why Paul told Timothy (but not you or me) to visit him before winter and to bring to him his personal library of books and parchments. Paul also said that he had to get to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles and he took a Nazirite vow. That is because of his Jewish culture. There is no New Testament command to do such things.

You wrote:

"But, if it is cultural, I don't really see the point of including it in the Bible because it then would not apply to us, or anyone other than those people."

Paul did not include this book, or any of its contents, in the Bible. That was done without his knowledge centuries after his death. In Paul's day, the Bible was the Torah and the Prophets. Paul did not expect his writings to be included in the Tanakh. Paul was not writing to anyone other than his readers. He identifies them at the beginning of the epistle. They were Corinthian Christians living around the middle of the first century in Greece. This is the same for every epistle of his. He didn't write a Bible. He wrote epistles, which are letters addressed to churches and individuals. The New Testament canon did not exist in his day, and there is no indication that he knew that it ever would.

Reading the Bible in such a way as to understand its authors' intentions requires us to let them speak for themselves. Paul says that the household of Chloe reported to him that, as he put it, "there are contentions among you," and that he "baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius." Since he says "you" in these verses (1 Col.1:11, 14), am I to understand that he is addressing me? Did Chloe's household inform him about contentions in my church in Southern California, and did Paul baptize Crispus and Gaius in my city? He obviously did not know that I would be reading this letter, nor did he address it specifically to me. When he tells the Roman Christians to greet Priscilla and Aquila, should I assume that I am also supposed to greet this couple when I see them?

To study the epistles responsibly requires that I know something about the identity of those to whom the letters are addressed, what they were going through, what the author's concerns were about their situation, and what transcendent principles the author might appeal to in framing his counsel to them. Once I have managed that, I may claim to understand his words. The next task is to understand how the principles used to address their problems might be applied to the problems in our present situations.

I can see from your arguments that you have a very different way of approaching these ancient letters than I have or than any responsible Bible scholar would. But that is all right, if you are satisfied with the level of understanding that this method yields. I believe that we need to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." So that is the way I will approach the biblical texts. God bless you.

In Jesus,

Steve Gregg

Re: Interpreting Scripture in light of culture when it was written - posted by Sree (), on: 2020/3/24 12:32

The problem with this explanation is there is no place for Holy Spirit nor God. It is intellectual reading of Bible just like how you read Chemistry or Physics. One can understand Bible but cannot live it. I can challenge, including the author, anyone who reads Bible this way, will be defeated in sin, there will be no spiritual fruit in their life. It is holding a form of Godliness and denying its power. I would like to see how the married life, Church life and Children of such a person who advocates such useless Bible reading. I am sure such a person cannot be example even to anyone. Their personal life will be useless life defeated by sin.

Quote:

Paul did not include this book, or any of its contents, in the Bible. That was done without his knowledge centuries after his death.

This logic is good enough to show that the author is devoid of Holy Spirit and any spiritual insight.

It is not Paul but God who allowed those books to be included in our Bible. If you take God away then you need to read all cultural books and history books to understand Bible because Holy Spirit is not present in you. But if you have Holy Spirit, then that is enough to understand scripture that produces life not intellectual knowledge like this guy!

Re: - posted by TMK (), on: 2020/3/24 16:28

You know nothing of Steve Gregg so I can laugh at your aspersions of his character as ridiculous.

What specifically do you disagree with? Everything he wrote makes perfect sense to me and he did not say anything that is not 100% true.

Re: - posted by Sree (), on: 2020/3/24 18:32

Quote:

You know nothing of Steve Gregg so I can laugh at your aspersions of his character as ridiculous.

Please do not take it personal. I went through the self Biography of Steve and I can find enough reasons to reject him as a minister of God. I do not want to shame anyone here by highlighting them. I do not want to continue this conversation. I know what I said about his is right.

I have clearly posted (in my previous post) why his bible study is wrong and should not be encouraged. If one takes God and Holy Spirit away from the Bible then Steve's explanation will make perfect sense!

Again I do not want to partake anymore in this discussion.

Re: - posted by jochbaptist (), on: 2020/3/25 16:41

Steve Gregg speaks with forked tongue.

Paul's epistles were read at other churches.

Colossians 4:16, Paul explicitly instructs the sharing of epistles between the Laodiceans and Colossians:

16 And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

Paul does not give a single cultural reason for women to pray covered.

9 Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. 10 For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head...

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Re: bio - posted by savannah, on: 2020/3/25 20:26

Sree wrote,

"I went through the self Biography of Steve and I can find enough reasons to reject him as a minister of God."

I concur

Note: Steve advocates 'open theism' as well.