

(The Head Covering) 02 - How Culture Influences Biblical Interpretation

by Tom Chaplin

The head covering issue is important because it is a scriptural issue that requires our obedience and submission to God's will, and neglecting it can lead to the erosion of all of God's truth.

Duration: 59:01

Scripture: Matthew 5:17-19, 2 Timothy 3:16

Topics: "Head Covering"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher addresses the question of why it is important to spend time discussing seemingly insignificant issues in the Bible. He uses the analogy of a small hole in a dam to illustrate how even small issues can have significant consequences. The preacher emphasizes the importance of contending earnestly for all of God's truths, from the greatest to the least commandments. He states that failing to do so dishonors God and can result in being least in the kingdom of God. The sermon concludes with the preacher affirming his commitment to teaching the whole of God's law.

Transcript

Well, as the title says, our first installment, the first issue that we're going to be looking at is understanding the head covering, the whole Bible approach. Now we started this study last week. And we began the study by looking at various issues that, while they're not really the head covering per se, they're nevertheless issues that, as you and I look at the head covering issue, come into play.

These matters are always in the background, lurking in our subconscious and not in our conscious. And what you think about, you know, these issues will determine, believe it or not, to a great extent, where you end up on the head covering, what you end up believing. So, last week we started with principles of Old Testament interpretation, and we looked at that, and we reached some conclusions, and I'll put them up here, just for review.

That was the conclusion I hope that we came to, namely that in the study of ethical issues, we should consider the total teaching of God's Word, both in the Old and New Testaments, as well as the New. Instruction may be given by precept, by example, or even by inference. However it is given, it is still God's Word to us, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, fairly furnished unto all good works.

Now that basically was the conclusion of all that we shared last week, and that's an important statement of belief. And I think you'll see, maybe even next week, but certainly in the week after that, how important what you think about Old Testament scriptures is. It's very important, not only for this issue, but frankly for most any issue.

Well today we want to move on, and we want to look at another one of those fundamental issues that was up there just a second ago, namely this, the role of culture in biblical interpretation. And again, this is another big issue, and I think most of us are aware of that. I think it'll become even clearer in just a few minutes.

But this again is a foundational issue, and it affects not only the way you look at an issue like the head covering, it will affect just about any issue in the Bible that you're studying. So it's important that we understand this. It's important that we understand what God says about it.

It's important that we properly use this, because I believe many Bible expositors do not. And as a result, I think they lead many people into error. And that's something I don't want to do that to you, and I know you don't want to be misled in some other Bible study.

So we want to look at this issue real close. And that's what we'll do here this morning. So now we're going to get into our message, but I would like to pray and ask the Lord's blessing one more time before we actually look at the text and deal with this issue.

So let's pray one more time. Father, I feel like the issue we're addressing this evening is a very important issue. Lord, I feel like I've in my lifetime seen many, many, many instances where people that were interpreting the Bible and that were seeking to teach others misled them because of an error in understanding concerning this very subject that we're dealing with this evening.

And Lord, I pray that you would help us to understand the proper role of culture in biblical interpretation. I pray that I might not lead anybody into error, and if I am perhaps in error, that you would show me, or maybe through one of the brothers here this evening. But Lord, just lead us into truth on this matter, because it is very important.

Many times issues are determined and decided based on this matter of the cultural practice of the day in which a commandment was given. And we need to understand what you want us to do with that. So please help us this evening to know your mind and yours only.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, why should we spend time... Let me back up here a second, because I almost forgot.

I was asked a question last week by one of my sisters after the Bible study as to why in the world it's important that we even look at the head covering. And I'm speaking... I'm not trying to say what she said. I'm going to kind of elaborate on what I've heard others say to me.

Come on. This is such a small matter. Should we really spend a lot of time with it? Should we really look at it closely? I mean, there's far more important issues, far more weighty issues out there that we could be talking about.

So why are we even dealing with this? I mean, I'm dealing with it extensively. I mean, I'm not giving you just a one- or two-week lesson. This conceivably is going to go on for five or six, maybe even seven

weeks.

And frankly, I have been challenged by another brother saying that I really am spending more time on this than it's worth. And that's a common view of an issue like this. So what is our justification? Why should we spend so much time looking at something that seems to be so insignificant? And I think I need to answer that question.

And I probably should have done it last week when we first started. But now is the time to do it because I didn't do it last week, so I will. And then we'll get on into the issue that really is going to be the burden of our message for today.

But let me just answer that question by posing some questions to you. Why spend time with the head covering? Well, let's start at the top here. Question one for you to consider and for me to consider.

Is this issue a scriptural issue? And if it is, what does the Bible say about scriptural issues? I won't call on anybody. Just look for a second at 2 Timothy 3.16. What does God say? He says, All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Now, what that tells me is that any time I spend studying scripture is going to be profitable.

Isn't that what that says? All scripture. Now, is 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and some of these other passages, are they not scripture? Well, of course they are. Therefore, it is profitable.

The time that you and I spend grappling with those scriptures and trying to understand them and trying to find out what they mean for me is going to be profitable unto making me perfect. Isn't that what 2 Timothy 3.16 says? You cannot waste your time dealing with a scriptural issue if you're sincerely seeking God's mind as you're studying it. Now, if you're just there to study a scripture so you can go out and beat somebody over the head with it, that's something else.

But if you're a sincere seeker of the word and you know that this is an issue you don't understand and you're spending time trying to understand it, brother or sister, God's going to bless you. That's what you need to be doing. It's not a waste of time.

And until you come to that settled understanding in your mind, you need to keep on pressing on until you come to that understanding. Does anybody question, is it a scriptural issue? I'm sure seeing a lot of debate of it these days in Bible magazines. It must be a scriptural issue because they keep quoting scripture when they deal with it.

So it's going to be profitable for us to deal with it too. Let's look at the second question. If, in fact, this is a small issue, if it really is, what does God think about small issues? What do you think? Let's look at Matthew 5, verse 17.

It seems we're looking at a lot of the same scriptures over and over again, but they seem to all bear on these issues. So it's important that we keep considering them as long as they do. Matthew 5, beginning in verse 17.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one kittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled.

Now what does he say in 19? Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so. What does it say about that person? He shall be least in the kingdom of heaven. It is a serious thing for anybody to stand up here in a pulpit and mislead you even concerning the least of God's commandments.

It's a serious thing for me to tell you, you don't have to worry about this commandment because it's so insignificant. You know what that says about do that as a teacher? It says I'll be least in the kingdom of heaven. Doesn't it? God is concerned about not only the great issues but he's concerned about the whole law and everything that the whole law has to say to us right down to the least most unimportant commandment in scripture.

Look at one more verse, Matthew 23, 23. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. Now look at this next phrase.

These ought ye to have done and not to leave the other undone. Now many people think of the Pharisees in terms of teachers that just, you know, they always majored on minors. And that's true, they did.

But then we go farther than that and say well since they majored on minors we just don't have any minors at all to even think about. And we don't have to worry about the minors and if we do we're a Pharisee. But is that what Jesus said here? He said you ought to have tithed mint and dill and cumin.

He didn't get on them for being scrupulous. And how many of you do the equivalent of tithing mint and dill and cumin? When you grow a garden and you've got an herb garden, you go out and you pick a certain amount of leaves and you give to somebody as a charitable gift. Well we look at that and we think that's, that's pharisaical.

That's not something we need to do. But Jesus commended them for doing that and said you ought to have done that. But he said your error was you, in the process of doing that you forgot the most important things.

But notice it's not wrong to be concerned about the small things. We need to be concerned about that. We need to be concerned about all of God's truth and all of his law.

And we need to bring our entire life into full subjection to his law. From the greatest down to the least of his commandments. And brothers and sisters, if I do anything less than teach you the whole of God's law, I'm going to be least in the kingdom of God.

And I can't do that. I've got to teach everything. Okay.

Question three. Is this issue really as unimportant as we might think it is? Now let me ask you this. Isn't it a fact that at some point clothing becomes an issue for all of us? Isn't it? Now, after all, I think I basically went through this after the service to some extent.

So I'm just kind of rephrasing what I've already said. But, you know, if some pastor would stand up, and you were a member of that church, and he was to tell you that from this point on all members of this church, all the ladies in this church will wear hot pants to the services. It's a church requirement.

Now, what do you think? Would that be an issue? Would it be an issue with you, brother? It would be an issue with me. No, no, no. That's not going to happen with my wife and my daughters.

Suddenly clothing becomes an issue. And in fact, for all of us, unless you're really just totally given over to sin, like you are maybe in some of these other cultures where they don't wear any clothing at all, it will be an issue at some point. The fact is we all draw the line somewhere.

But I'll point this out to you. The problem is that very few of us can give a scriptural reason for the line we have drawn. The line you draw and the line I draw is usually based on many things.

How we were brought up, our conditioning, what our culture thinks. All these issues tend to be what causes us to draw the line at whatever point we draw it. It's just basically a subjective feeling more often than not as to where we get our this far and no farther.

But you know, you see the problem, don't you? Because then we can go to Papua New Guinea or we can go to deep historicist Africa, and whereas you would really be perhaps even incensed that a pastor would suggest that your wife come to church in hot pants, the natives in deep historicist Africa would kind of be quizzical of your concern. It would mean nothing to them because they don't wear anything at all because of their cultural conditioning. So you see the problem in drawing these subjective lines because it just doesn't work.

I mean, there's too many different subjective lines and nobody agrees. That's really not the way we need to determine truth anyway, is it? Where do we get our lines? Where should we get them? From scripture, right? Not from our own thoughts or prejudices, but from what God says, what the Lord Jesus Christ tells us. When we want to find out what is horrendous, what is offensive, what is shameful about clothing, we don't think about what we think is that way.

We ask God, what is offensive to you? And if we don't see it the way he does, guess who needs to get their attitudes adjusted? Is it God? I don't think so. I think we've got the problem. We've been culturally conditioned down.

And we're getting close to maybe where the natives are in Africa. And we need to upgrade our conscience and get it where God is. So we need to get these decisions made not from our own conscious perspective, but from what the Bible says.

And in regards to this issue, I want to make this point. Many people look at the head covering and they will say, you know, the Bible hardly says anything about it, so it couldn't be that important. But to me, they're comparing apples with oranges.

Because the issue is really not how much time God spends dealing with this matter in an absolute sense versus how much time he spends with the Trinity or how much time he spends with the Gospel. The issue is how much time does God spend in the Bible on this item of clothing versus how much he spends on some other item of clothing. And I challenge you to study the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation and you will find, apart from the high priestly garments, the only item of clothing that God spends any amount of the time talking about and giving theological reasons for is the head covering.

Now, I'm going to develop this later, but the point I want to make or ask you to consider is this issue really as insignificant as we think it is. Because I will tell you, based on the amount of space God has given to the head covering in Scripture, it is not an insignificant issue. It's actually more significant than the dress or

the clothing you wear across your torso.

It's more significant than that. If you base your judgment totally on the amount of space God spends in Scripture discussing it. Now, I mean, we obviously have to consider other things, but that ought to cause us to stop and think that maybe, just maybe, our consciences have gotten a little seared.

Maybe we ought to consider that possibility. And let me note this too. Many times, the biggest test in your life or in mine will involve seemingly small issues.

For instance, consider Genesis, consider Adam and Eve and the temptation in the garden. And remember what it was? God just said to Adam and Eve, He said, you're not to eat the fruit of the tree a lot. He didn't say, Adam, you're not to murder your wife.

He didn't say, Adam, you're not to steal whatever from Eve. I mean, these things, as you and I look at them, would be big issues. And we could see how if Adam did something like murder his wife, that that would be a serious issue.

But that wasn't the test for Adam. The test was, Adam, you just can't eat this piece of fruit. Now, do you see, as you and I look at that, how seemingly small an issue that is? Right? Why can't I eat that piece of fruit? I can eat every other piece of fruit in the garden.

There's absolutely no reason in the world why I shouldn't have that piece of fruit. God just said I can't have it. But it was on that seemingly insignificant issue that the whole human race was destroyed.

Wasn't it? Because, you see, when you and I are dealing with big issues, like not murdering or not stealing, we can look at those issues, and apart from any concern about God or His law, we can see the wisdom in that. So many times we obey a commandment, not so much because our hearts are really in subjection to Almighty God, but because our hearts are in subjection to our own minds, and we, in our own minds, see the wisdom. And so we do it not because of God, but because we just think that's good.

It's good for us not to kill. But where we really get challenged is when God gives us these little arbitrary commandments. But we really can't see any wisdom in it.

Well, it just doesn't make a lot of sense to us why we can't do it. And then it's just a test of God's will versus ours. And that, many times, is where the real test is for us, as to whether or not our hearts are really given to Christ, or whether we're really just following our own way.

And so even if the head covering is a very small issue, it could be a very big issue for us, because we need to submit to God in every issue, even if it seems stupid to us. Because in so doing, we manifest that heart of true obedience and submission to our Heavenly Father no matter what. We're obeying Him not because it seems wise or smart to us, but simply because we think God is wise and He knows best for us, and we desire to please Him, even if we can't understand what He's asking us to do.

And so even the small issues can be very significant for us. Maybe the biggest test of our life. Fourth question.

If we don't contend earnestly for those truths of God that are under assault, are we honoring God? Are we honoring God? You know, maybe the head covering is a small issue. But in our time, it is a major battleground. Does anybody here doubt that? I mean, you pick up the Patriarch magazine, and it's full of

letters about the head covering.

It's full of articles about the head covering. It seems like any Christian magazine you pick up these days, they're debating the head covering. And most of the time, the people that are the teachers are telling everybody, you don't have to worry about it, you don't have to do anything with it.

It's a major area of dispute. And this isn't really my original thoughts, but I believe this. If we go out and battle with sword on every single issue of doctrine, and only restrict ourselves to those issues where there's no battle being waged, we've failed.

We have to look and determine those issues in our society where the battle is really being fought, whether they be great or small, and we have to contend earnestly for the faith. We have to contend earnestly for the truth. And if the head covering is an issue in the 20th century, if that's a small part of truth that is being neglected in the 20th century, if that's where the battle is, if that's where the dyke is breaking open, I've got to go stand in the gap.

And I've got to take the sword in the trial, and I've got to repair the breach, because all of God's truth is important. And using that analogy again, you remember last year when they had all the dams, I mean the Mississippi River was flooding, and the dykes, they built these great big sandbag dykes to hold the waters from flooding the fields, and I was reading an article about that, and in this one case, they built this great big dyke along the Mississippi River, and they were holding the water back, but you know what? They looked down, and here's this little bitty hole in the ground, and some water's just coming up. Little bitty hole.

And what had happened was the water had worked its way under the dam, and was actually bubbling up on the other side through a little bitty hole. And boy, let me tell you, they got busy on that little bitty hole, because they knew if they let it get much bigger, they were going to lose the whole nine yards. And Satan knows that too.

And he knows if he can get a little bitty hole started in your theology or in my theology, and we don't stop him, and we don't stand in the gap and withstand him and send him packing, that he'll eventually take the whole field with him. The dyke will break, the dam will break, and you'll lose everything. You know, we didn't get to women's lib and women's preachers in one year, did we? It's taken about 150 years to get us here.

And how did the devil do it? He just chipped away, chipped away, chipped away, on the outside on these little bitty issues until we finally, the dam broke, and here we are. Any point of truth has to be contended for if the devil is battling it. And this is one of them, I think.

There are others, but I think it's worth contending for. Well, so I guess I answer this question with these four questions. So what do y'all think? Is it worth continuing? Should we go ahead and look at this? See what God says? I think so.

I hope y'all agree with me. So let's do that. As I said, today we want to consider the use of culture in biblical interpretation.

What's the wrong way to use it, and what's the right way? Well, I believe the improper use is commonly called, or I call it, the cultural argument. And when I say that, I mean this. That's when a Bible expositor will tell you, either from the pulpit or in one of his commentaries, perhaps, in regarding a particular

commandment that he's dealing with, that that commandment that was given is no longer relevant to us today because the times have changed and things are different.

That is what I call the cultural argument. Have y'all heard that before? I mean, I'm not breaking something new on you. And I've heard that on many different issues.

I mean, the head covering is just one of many. And I think that's an error, and let me explain to you why. What is fundamentally wrong with this approach to Scripture? And the first thing I'd like to note is that if this is a proper way to approach Scripture, then it puts us in a pretty bad position because it leaves us in a state of haze, haze of uncertainty concerning the meaning of Scripture.

Now let me ask you this. Did God give us the Scriptures to confuse us? Did he give them to us to leave us in a haze as to know how to please them? You know, sometimes I'll be talking to Christians, and in the process of the conversation I'll just about reach the conclusion that there's no way to know anything for sure, that the Bible is such a hard book to understand that you just almost can't say much once you get beyond the Ten Commandments. And after that, everything is just so unclear and is so subject to interpretation that you can't know anything.

Have you all ever run into that? I mean, sometimes I think in those terms. I mean, it's a real tendency, and I have to remember there's a couple of Scriptures that tell me I can't think that way because it says in the Psalms that the Scriptures are a light and a lamp, doesn't it? And it says again back in 2 Timothy 3, 16, that these Scriptures were given to make me adequate and even perfect. Now, if they're so hazy and hard to understand, how can that happen? Right? And let's face it, I mean, I've been to Bible school, so I've got maybe a little bit up on you, but, hey, the apostles were fishermen.

They weren't great intellects. They weren't the wise of this world. In fact, God hardly ever saves many of them.

And so the Bible was given for people... Good to see you all. The Bible was given, not to confuse us, but to actually show us the way to go, show us the way to live, and to do it clearly, and it doesn't require a theological degree. You can be a fisherman, and yet if you have that heart to sincerely know God and to do His will, the Bible says you can know it from studying the Bible.

He didn't give it to us to make things hazy and unclear. Well, but what about this cultural argument? Which basically, again, says that, well, we live in a new age, and because of that, this was written 2,000 years ago, it doesn't apply to us today. Now, to me, that makes things very hazy.

In fact, it puts us in a real state where you really can't know anything for sure. And let me explain why I say that. I want you to consider the structure of biblical revelation.

Okay? Wait a second. I bought an encyclopedia up here. Where'd it go? My daughters got real efficient and cleaned it up.

But I had an encyclopedia, and I was going to show you this encyclopedia. It's an old World Book encyclopedia. Now, if I have an encyclopedia, I can take that encyclopedia and say I want to look up cars.

I get the C version of the World Book encyclopedia. I turn to C-A-R, and I can read everything I want to know about cars, right? And I can go to the X version and look up xylophone or whatever. Everything that I need to know about any issue is systematically laid out by subject matter, right? And I can look up any

issue I want and get the answer that I need.

Now, was the Bible written that way? Was it? Now, if you go to seminary, you go to Bible school, you'll study systematic theology. And systematic theology, they give you a book like an encyclopedia. And you'll study all about angels.

You'll study all about salvation. And you can turn to a chapter, and it'll tell you all you want to know about that subject according to whoever you're studying, what he thinks. But you have a systematic layout of various doctrines of the Bible.

But now, is that the way God gave us this book? Is it an encyclopedia? No. What is it? Basically, it's a love letter, isn't it? To a great extent. A lot of it is.

It's written as a lot of Paul's letters. I mean, most of the New Testament is letters. Very personal.

It's not systematically organized at all. It's not abstract. Everything that we have is what? Every teaching that we have is what? It's given to a specific people in a specific cultural context wrestling with specific problems in a specific historical period.

I mean, every command of Scripture is given to us that way, isn't it? Now, do you see the problem that presents? Every commandment of Scripture exists in a cultural context. And therefore, if you want, you can always explain it away if you don't want to obey it. Do you see that? Because these commandments are all... Like in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he talks about neat sacrifice to idols.

Or he's talking to the Corinthians in the first century, dealing with a specific problem the Corinthians were facing. Now, the cultural argument says, because this was given in a certain cultural context, it doesn't apply to us today. Well, every single command of Scripture is in some cultural context, isn't it? So, guess what? If I don't like a particular commandment of Scripture, I just dream up some cultural context, contextual reason and say I don't have to obey it.

I mean, am I following what I'm saying? The problem with the cultural argument is that there's no way to stop it. And to give you an illustration, once I listened to a radio talk show, this was a number of years ago, and on this talk show they had several religious experts and the subject was homosexuality. And one of the members of this roundtable discussion, he just flat out said, as I recall, he said that, yeah, we know the Bible condemns homosexuality.

He didn't deny it. And then he said, but the Bible was written years ago and we live in a different culture, and it doesn't apply today. That's what... Well, you can't stop it.

You can take any commandment you don't want to obey and come up with some reason from culture to why you don't have to obey it. There's no way to get around it. So, my question would be this.

If we accept the cultural argument as being a way to approach Scripture, how can we ever have any moral certainty? How can you and I ever know when what Scriptures we're looking at and what commandments we're looking at really apply to us today? Because I guarantee you, you take any particular commandment and I can go find somebody that will say it's cultural and he doesn't have to obey it. I guarantee you. And probably can find many that'll say that.

Even concerning an issue like homosexuality. I mean, that's a biggie. But they'll even take those issues and say you don't have to worry about the Bible because that's cultural.

And let me ask you this. How many Scriptures do you know that start out this way in the Bible? How many of them say this commandment applies throughout all ages and cultures until the end of time? Do you know of any commandments in the Bible that start out that way? Well, let me ask you this. How many of them start out this way? This command only applies to the culture in which it was given.

Do you know of any? I don't. It's not there. And since such statements are not given, how can you tell the difference? Frankly, I don't think you can.

And that to me is a pretty powerful evidence of the whole argument. I hate to use such a strong term and I'm given to do that and I'm trying to get away from it, but I'm going to use it. It's just absurd.

It's just absurd. The Bible is written in a very personal way because God is a personal God. It was not written the way that it is written to confuse us or to give us an excuse not to obey commandments we don't like.

Was it? Well, now somebody might want to challenge me and say, but Tom, it's just common sense. We just know that this isn't for today. Well, I don't know what your experience with that type of argument is, but my experience has been that common sense more often than not turns out to be nonsense.

And it's really not to be trusted unless you can give some sound scriptural backing as well. Okay. So, that's my first criticism of the cultural argument.

I want to give you another one. And it's this, that as best I can tell, it is contrary to the plain teaching of Scripture. As I've looked at this, I haven't seen that Scripture recognizes that culture per se is a restriction on the way that we apply divine commandments.

Let's look again at Matthew 5, 17. Let me read this one more time. Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets.

I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.

But whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Now, stop with me for a second and think. When were these commandments given? They were given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

At least that's primary, I think the primary emphasis here. Now, think how many centuries had passed since the time that Moses gave these commandments and the time that Jesus is making this statement here. Century after century after century.

Now, during that period of time, several things happened. The Israelites were under the Canaanitish culture, weren't they? They lived in the midst of the Canaanites and that proved to be a snare to them. They lived under the Babylonian culture when they went into exile.

They were under the Greek culture and great efforts were taken by Antiochus Epiphanes to really destroy Jewish culture and institute Greek culture. That's where we get the abomination of desolation, where he

went into the temple and sacrificed a pig on the altar, if I'm not mistaken. But he really tried to bring in Greek culture and destroy Judaism.

So they were under Greek culture big time under him. Then you have Roman culture. Now, you have all this different culture that has transpired since God gave the law at Sinai and Jesus comes and says what? Not one jot or tittle has changed, folks.

Not one jot or tittle. Now, don't you think that if culture was going to set aside any of God's laws that it would have happened even back then? Between those, I don't know how many years, I'd have to check a Bible history book that is over a millennium, if I'm not mistaken. And yet Jesus says, look, my law hasn't changed since I gave it.

In spite of the fact you've lived in all these different cultures, my law still is good. So what is the biblical perspective on this? It looks to me like God doesn't have to preface every commandment to indicate it binds forever because he's already done it in Matthew 5, 17. Am I missing the boat? I mean, isn't that what Jesus is doing? He's saying if it's my commandments, if it's my law, it binds until heaven and earth pass away.

And I think that's the biblical perspective, and that's why I think you will struggle in vain to find any instruction on how to recognize when a scripture is cultural. Because on the surface of it, it doesn't really make a lot of sense. Would you expect the Bible, a book that God had given to man, to be the instruction book to make him perfect? Would you expect a book like that to have a lot of cultural commandments in it? I mean, on the surface, that doesn't even make sense to me.

Because he gave this to make us perfect, all men of all times. It's the instruction book to give us direction on how to live. God wouldn't waste a lot of time putting things that were irrelevant, would he? I don't think he would.

And of course, I think Matthew 5, 17 indicates that he didn't. Well, so my conclusion is this. We should assume that every jot and tittle of scripture is for us and should be obeyed by us unless God himself has clearly released us from obedience.

For instance, I don't believe we have to keep the ceremonial law. Now, why do I believe that? Well, I believe it because I'm specifically told in many scriptures in the New Testament that I don't have to observe days and months and seasons and years. I mean, I am released by the teaching of the apostles from that aspect of obedience to the Old Testament commandments.

But it's not left up to my opinion or my subjective judgment. I actually can go to scripture and show you why I don't have to do that. Now, to me, that's a sound footing to be on.

I mean, that's where I want to be. If I'm going to tell you as a teacher you don't have to obey this commandment, I want to be able to tell you from the Bible why you don't have to obey it. I don't want you to have to rely on my assessment of the culture 2,000 years ago, which, frankly, scholars are not even sure what the culture was 2,000 years ago.

I can tell you that because I've studied it and I've seen all the disagreements. Now, how in the world can I tell you how cultural affects this when scholars can't even tell me for sure what the culture was? It's not a good, it's not a sound footing to teach scripture or to teach you on how to live your life or how I should live my life. Well, then what is the proper use? We do need to be concerned with culture to some extent.

We need to study the cultural setting of a command so that we might understand the command and know how to use it and how to apply it. That's why I study the cultural environment. Not so I can figure out why I don't have to obey it, but so I can learn how to use it in my life to make me perfect, to make me a man of God.

Let me give you an example of a commandment that I have seen that is frequently brought up to basically teach that we don't have to be concerned about certain passages of scripture for reasons such as we're discussing here today. Look in Deuteronomy 22, verse 8. Now, back years ago when I lived in Texas, this particular commandment was really made fun of. And I think some magazine had a picture of a house with a fence around it.

And I think it was to just say, you've got to be crazy to think that a passage like this has anything to say to us today. Let's read it. It says, When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from the fence.

So this passage is teaching that you should have a fence around your house, Tom. Now, what do you think about that commandment? Do you think that has anything for us today? Does this commandment require us to, whenever we build a house or when you do your porch, you've got this top, I mean you've got to go out and put a big fence around the top of the porch, or you're breaking God's law. Now, some people have interpreted it that way.

That's where you've got to understand culture. In the days of Jesus, apparently even in the days in which the law was given, it was not, it was very common, and it was actually the accepted architecture of the day, it would appear that people lived on their rooftops. I mean the classic case is David and Bathsheba, where David was out on his rooftop when he shouldn't have been, and he saw things he shouldn't have seen going on on another rooftop.

So you actually had the roofs of the houses that were actually living areas, and people went out on the roofs regularly for various activities. And so you have to understand the command in light of that fact. And if you don't, you'll end up thinking that every house has to have a fence around it, and ha, ha, ha, Deuteronomy doesn't have anything to say to us today.

That's absurd. But that's not the way I think we understand this passage. If we understand what was going on there, then we do like what Paul did with, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.

We look for the reason, the principle behind the commandment, and then we understand that it even has a broader implication than maybe the specific instance that it's referring to. Now as I look at this commandment, what I see it saying is, if I own a house or a piece of property and there is a precipice or some high area on my property that somebody might fall off of, I have an obligation to put some protection around it so that out of love I'm going to take steps to protect my neighbor from hurting himself. And so, yes, if I have a house and everybody can get on the roof of it, I'm going to have to put a fence around it or some type of barrier because out of love for my brother, I don't want him falling off the roof.

That's God's law. It's not optional. Now we don't have that much in America because we just don't build that type of housing structure, but we still have balconies.

We still have balconies, don't we? And so if you have a house with a balcony, God's law requires you to fence it so that there's a barrier to keep somebody from falling off the balcony. And I'll even say it's

broader in application. If you have a big cliff on your property and somebody might get hurt, if there's any way you can somehow fence that area so that they can't fall.

At the Grand Canyon, they have fences all along the canyon, I believe, to keep people from falling off. They don't. Don't they in some places, though? Okay, I'm wrong.

But I see this command as exceedingly broad, and we have a right and an obligation to use it the same way Paul used, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. What it's telling me is that I have an obligation to you as my neighbor to protect your interest when you're on my property, and if I have hazardous areas on my property, I need to put up some barrier to keep your children or even you from hurting yourself. For instance, we've got a well right down here by the side of the house.

It's a very deep well, and if you fell into it, we couldn't help you. You'd be dead before we could get you out. We've covered it up.

Now, I believe we're doing it in obedience to this commandment. Now, that's not a fence, but you understand we're getting the principle, and we're using God's law usefully. And so that's why I think we need to use culture to help us understand the commandment, not so we can shove it off and say it doesn't apply, but so that we can make use of it to make us perfect, make us righteous individuals.

And when we do that, suddenly all sorts of things become helpful in the Bible, the Old and New Testament. Any questions? I'd hoped I wouldn't nutty the waters. Maybe I have.

I hope I might have cleared some things up. I will tell you this regarding 1 Corinthians 11, that we'll have more to say on the cultural argument because there are a number of issues specifically related to that particular passage in addition to just these general comments that make it very difficult to see 1 Corinthians 11 as being just a cultural phenomenon. Well, here let me just kind of make a conclusion statement.

The view that we can choose not to obey one of God's commands because it is given in a different cultural setting than our own is contrary to Matthew 5.17 and other scriptures which teach the usefulness and binding character of all God's commandments throughout all ages. Since all scriptural commands are culturally bound, this method of interpretation must inevitably lead one to the conclusion that we can know nothing or practically nothing of ethics with any degree of certainty. Instead of giving life, the scriptures become a hazy, uncertain beacon and unable to guide us through the difficulties of life.

This is also contrary to scripture's testimony of itself, 2 Timothy 3.16, which clearly says that all scripture was given, the doctrine for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that we might be perfect, firmly furnished unto all good works. It was given to be a light to us, not a hazy beacon that we never were quite sure what applied to us and what didn't. So in conclusion, culture in and of itself cannot be used to set aside God's commandments.

Only a clear word from God can do that. We should instead study the cultural setting of a particular commandment so that we might come to a proper understanding of what it means and this way we can determine how to properly apply it to our lives. And I did underline that bottom statement, which I think is very important.

If you're inclined to use the cultural argument, I hope you would see that from what I've said today, that the burden of proof always rests upon the one wishing to set aside God's commandments. Doesn't it?

Because God himself says, if you set aside even the least of my commandments, you'll be least in the kingdom of heaven. So the burden of proof always rests upon the preacher who would tell you you don't have to do something.

It's not on the person that says, this is for you to do, this is a commandment. It's the person that would tell you it isn't for you. Because it's serious business for me to tell you that.

And it's serious business for anybody to tell you there's some commandment in Scripture you don't have to obey. And you and I should both be very... We should really take such a person to task and say, just why do you believe that? What are your reasons? And can you tell me more than just you think it's because in this culture or whatever that it means something if it doesn't today? Can you give me something better? Can you give me some Scripture? We need to ask questions like that. Do you all have any questions? Well, just a preview of next week.

Next week we want to look at... Let's see here. Let me get this. The theology of clothing as it relates to authority and modesty.

It's these two issues down here on the bottom. I'm going to try and cover them both in the same lesson because they are very, at least for our purposes, I feel like they're very closely related. They go together hand in glove.

And I really feel like this lesson, as I've thought about it, may prove to be the most important lesson of the entire series. We'll just have to come back in here to find out why I think that. We might have to do that two times in a row.

We're not going to make it. That's right, you told me that. Okay, we'll try to work through that somehow.

But this will be our topic. At least that's the planned topic for the next Bible study. Most people don't realize that there's any connection at all between these two topics.

And yet I believe that the whole issue of clothing is just unbelievably wrapped up in the issue of authority. We tend to think of modesty strictly in terms of male and female lust and that type of issue. And yet as I've looked at this issue from Scripture, really that doesn't seem to be the focus.

And I'll try and bring this out next week and show you what I mean. But it's very important, the connection here. And I think maybe you can see just kind of where it would lead you because what is the whole issue of the head covering? It's authority.

And maybe you can just kind of see how that might be very important to our subject. So anyway, that's what we're going to look at. After we do this and finish this, I'll be done with the foundational studies and we'll actually start looking at the Scriptures that specifically deal with the head covering passage.

But anyway, that's where we're headed. And we'll see what happens next week. Well, let's go ahead and close with a word of prayer.

And then I believe there's a food ready downstairs. We'll go ahead and ask the Lord's blessing right now. And maybe I'll get a word from my girls on how we're to proceed.

But let's do prayer. Father, we thank You for this day. Lord, again, we thank You for Your Word.

And we just pray that You would help us. Help us to understand it aright. Help us to really have hearts to obey it no matter what it says.

Deliver us from a heart that would seek to escape Your perfect will for us. Lord, to the extent that's in my heart, I just pray to be crucified. I just pray that my heart would be to obey Jesus no matter what He wants me to do.

Even in these difficult issues maybe. Even in these issues that are unpopular. But keep us from doing foolish things too, Lord.

We don't want to do things just to be different from others. We want to obey You. So bless these studies to that end.

Show us Your mind. Give us Your correction if we need it. And just show us what You want us to see concerning this issue of the head covering.

I ask this in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.

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