

Session 2: Crossing the Bridge

It's one thing to know what Scripture meant to the original hearers, but how can we work out what it might mean to us? In this session we will consider how we can bridge the gaps of time, geography, language and culture, to discover the relevance of God's word in our world.

Crossing the Bridge

A note on passages that seem unclear

They are unclear to us because they were not written to us.

We may lack awareness of cultural events that were well-known to the original hearers.

We may lack oral teaching which the readers had previously received.

See, for example, 'the man of lawlessness' in 2 Thess 2:3-6

Work out what we can and cannot be certain about.

Example: 1 Corinthians 15:29

We can be certain the practice was happening, even though we can't be certain why, by whom, or even what Paul really thought about it!

Even if we can't be certain about the details, we can often still grasp the meaning.

We don't know what 'baptism on behalf of the dead' was, but we know why Paul referred to it. He used it as a 'proof from experience' in order to show the inconsistency between the Corinthians' beliefs and their practices.

Consult good commentaries, and stay humble.

See the recommended resources for info on good commentaries

Don't be more certain than the text allows you to. And don't build rigid doctrines on uncertain texts.

1 Cor 4:6

What should we do with passages that seem unclear?

Adapted from Fee and Stewart

Crossing the Bridge

Beginning the task of hermeneutics

Step 2: Measure the width of the river to cross



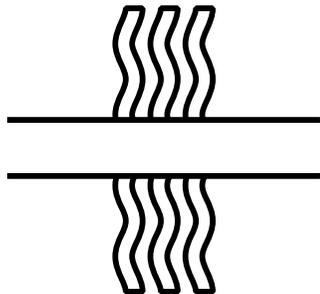
What are the differences between the Biblical audience and us?

Some 'rivers' will be wider than others, depending on the passage you are reading.

Note particular differences, such as:

- Culture
- Language
- Time
- Situation
- Covenant / place in Redemptive History

Step 3: Cross the Principalising Bridge



What is the theological principle that bridges the gap between their world and ours?

Note similarities between the original situation and ours.

The theological principle should be:

- Present in the passage
- Timeless and not tied to a particular situation
- Not culturally bound
- Consistent with the rest of scripture
- Relevant to both the original audience and to us

Write the theological principle(s). Present tense. e.g. "To serve God faithfully, we must..."

Crossing the Bridge

Beginning the task of hermeneutics

Two hermeneutical rules

A text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or their readers

When we share comparable particulars (i.e. specific life situations) with the first-century hearers, God's word to us is the same as His word to them.

Core vs Peripheral

We must distinguish between the central core message of Scripture and things that are more peripheral.

Core items:

Peripheral items:

Moral vs Cultural

We should look at how Scripture distinguishes between things that are inherently moral and relevant for all cultures, and cultural expressions.

Sin lists (e.g. 1 Cor 6:9-10) contain things that are sinful (e.g. adultery, sexual immorality, drunkenness, theft) but not cultural expressions (e.g. foot washing, holy kiss.)

Uniformity vs Difference

We should note whether the New Testament treats things in a uniform way (e.g. the principle of love, the sinfulness of murder, etc) or whether there are different expressions (e.g. eating food offered to idols, keeping or giving away your wealth, church leadership structures)

Principle vs Application

It is possible for a writer to express an absolute principle with a relative application, and if we are to cross the principalising bridge, we need to be able to distinguish between the principle and its application.

Four distinctions to bear in mind.

Crossing the Bridge

Example: Idol food (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:14-33)

Transition: Did the Corinthians write about this? How, where, why, by whom? (See commentaries for context*) Repetition of know/knowledge cf. wisdom Contrast: knowledge vs love Contrast of results: negative vs positive

8:1 Now about food sacrificed to idols. We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. ² Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. ³ But whoever loves God is known by God.

Getting specific. Not just sacrificing, but eating Isaiah 41:24 Contrast: God's knowledge vs ours (see ch2) Deut 4:35,39

⁴ So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that "An idol is nothing at all in the world" and that "There is no God but one." ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), ⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

The food is irrelevant?

⁷ But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. ⁸ But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

Sarcastic?! Specific location. Term that the Corinthians used?

"Knowledge" badly applied Juxtaposition: Strong words! Link to Christ

⁹ Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. ¹² When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

Result

*Christian polemical term, 'idol-food'. Meat sacrificed for pagan gods and served in temple dining rooms, such as the Asklepieion, accompanied by various rituals e.g. libations, pagan worship, etc.

Crossing the Bridge

Example: Idol food (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:14-33)

Chapter 9 - defence of Paul's apostleship. He had rights for financial support, but gave them up for the good of the Corinthians. Why is this here? Does it serve as an example of 8:9, 13?

10:1-13 - stories from Israel's past are warnings to stop us from doing the same things. Many of them were idolaters, eating, drinking and sexual immorality.

What is the
therefore there
for? Israel's
example

Not dispassionate argument,
but real love, 8:1

Timeless principle - true of
Israel's past, relevant now.

Appeal to their love of
wisdom. Judging (ch 2)

¹⁴ Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶ Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

Repetition: Participation

SCENARIO
I

¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? ¹⁹ Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. ²² Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Are idols nothing, or demonic?
See Deut 32, Isaiah 40-55.

Paul says that eating idol food is tantamount to worshipping demons! But in 8:1-13 he said that eating the food is 'nothing.' And he's about to permit it in certain circumstances. Does he have the same circumstances in mind as in 8:10 - in a temple? Menu vs Venue (BWIII)

Crossing the Bridge

Example: Idol food (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:14-33)

Corinthian claim and Pauline response

²³ "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive. ²⁴ No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

Where? In a previous letter?

Timeless principle

²⁵ Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, ²⁶ for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

SCENARIO II

Psalms 24:1

SCENARIO IV

SCENARIO III ²⁷ If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. ²⁸ But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. ²⁹ I am referring to the other person's conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience? ³⁰ If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

³¹ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. ³² Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—³³ even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Everybody! Christian and not, whatever ethnic background. This principle crosses cultures

Crossing the Bridge

Example: Idol food (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:14-33)

Step 1: Grasp the text in their world	Step 2: Measure the width of the river to cross	Step 3: Cross the Principialising Bridge
<p>Summarise the passage in a sentence (past tense)</p> <p>Paul argued that idols are not gods, so there's no problem in eating the food itself.</p> <p>Paul forbade eating idolatrous meals in pagan temples, because 1) the sacrifices are demonic - worshiping false gods - so taking part in the sacrificial meals is tantamount to partnering with demons. And 2) It could cause other believers to stumble.</p> <p>Paul did not object to eating food that had been previously sacrificed, if you bought it in the market, or were served it in a private home. Unless it would offend someone else's conscience, or cause them to think you were condoning/taking part in the sacrifice.</p>	<p>What are the differences between our worlds and how big is the gap?</p> <p>Pagan temples</p> <p>Animal sacrifices</p>	<p>Write out the theological principle(s). (Present tense)</p> <p>Christians cannot worship God and worship demons. We must flee idolatry.</p> <p>Certain practices are matters of indifference, and our conscience may allow us to participate in them.</p> <p>We should seek the good of others over our own good - both those who are believers, and those who are not. We should not exercise our own freedom if it causes others to stumble.</p>