

## Challenge of Epistles

### **Task Theology vs Systematic Theology:**

Task Theology is focused on addressing a specific situation in a particular culture. Systematic theology transcends cultural situations and particulars. Epistles tend to be on the task theology, the challenge is to not read systematic theology into it, but to understand the context and original intent of the task theology and then apply it to our “now and here” context.

## 2 Cardinal Rules

1. **Rule of Original Intent** “A text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or readers.” (*How to Read the Bible for all Its Worth*, Gordon and Fee, 77)
2. **Rule of Application** “Whenever we share comparable particulars with the first-century hearers, God’s Word to us is the same as his word to them.” (*How to Read the Bible for all Its Worth*, Gordon and Fee, 78)

## 3 Steps:

1. Think in Paragraphs
2. Remember Epistles are occasioned Letters
3. Understanding Cultural Similarities/Differences

## Think in Paragraphs:

1. What is the problem being addressed?
2. What is the content of the paragraph?
3. What is the point? Why is the writer saying this here?

## Remember Epistles are Occasioned Letters:

What does Paul mean in saying that Christians will some day judge both the world and angels (1 Cor 6:2-3)?

*“Because the Epistle is an occasioned either by the author or recipients, we must be content at times with the limitation of our theological understanding.”* (*How to Read the Bible for all Its Worth*, Gordon and Fee, 90)

*“We are merely affirming, therefore, that in scripture, God has given us all we **need** but not necessarily all we **want**.”* (*How to Read the Bible for all Its Worth*, Gordon and Fee, 91)

## Understanding Cultural Similarities/Differences:

1. Core vs Peripheral Cultural Issue – Is this a core Gospel related doctrine (as in efficacy of Christ’s death and resurrection for our salvation) or is it a peripheral cultural question (as in the appropriate length of hair exposure at Church for men and women).  
*“...to safeguard the gospel from being turned into law through culture or religious custom on the one hand and to keep the gospel itself from changing to reflect every conceivable cultural expression on the other hand.”*
2. Inherently moral vs cultural expressions - Adultery is immoral no matter what context it happens. On the other hand exchanging a holy kiss is a cultural expression.
3. Uniformity vs Diversity – There are certain things where the New Testament is consistent as in say loving the enemy. On the other hand different epistles have different perspectives on women in leadership (Pheobe and Junia are women leaders/apostles in Rome. Whereas women in Corinth are asked not speak at the Church).

4. Absolute Principle vs Relative Application – The principles of giving Glory to God is universally upheld. On the other hand veil to cover women's hair during worship is a relative application.
5. Reflection Cultural Attitudes vs Being counter cultural – In the case of Corinth, women are forbidden from speaking at church which is a reflection of the broader cultural attitude. On the other hand, Bible's views on masters treating the slaves as brothers/friends is counter cultural.
6. Cultural Differences - women education, participatory democracy
7. Exercise Christian charity with people who may disagree with you.

**Homework – Read Chapter 5: The Old Testament Narratives**