

There is a Persian proverb that goes: The wise man sits on the hole in his carpet. Picture this wise man as he brings his guests through the door of his living room and invites them to seat themselves on the carpet, as is customary. Meanwhile, he strategically positions himself on the spot where the carpet has worn away into a hole. It might be beyond the host's capacity to buy a new carpet for the occasion, but it would shame the host if the guest were to notice this shabby spot. And so, the host cleverly solves the problem by seating himself on the hole in his carpet. He stays put till the guests, having enjoyed his hospitality and conducted the business for which they came, rise to depart. It is only if we can picture that scene that the proverb makes sense. We smile at how succinctly it makes its point. Don't throw your money away if you can help it, it exhorts; it's only one little hole in a carpet that is otherwise fine. Simply choose where you sit, and the problem (literally!) disappears. There are, the proverb is saying, ways to solve problems that need not be as intensive, expensive, or complicated as you first think.

Keep that in mind as we think about how we read and apply the Bible. Biblical texts belong to a time long ago, and to places (often) far away. The text needs to be accessed with a bridge, and the building blocks of that bridge are (among other things) an understanding of the culture in which that biblical text came to be. Once the text has been accessed, another bridge needs to be built between the text and our particular culture, so that we can walk the text into where we live. An understanding of culture unlocks the text, both for appreciation and application.

The Summer issue features five articles and a sermon. Juliann Bullock argues that in the cultural context of the Corinthian church, some women were being disallowed the privilege of covering their heads. Paul's instruction was a radical one, giving that privilege to all women irrespective of their social circumstances. But how far did Paul go in his resistance to

cultural practices that were in collision with the gospel of Jesus Christ? Colin Gauld explores these through selected examples to show that Paul pushed socio-cultural boundaries but exercised wisdom in how far he went.

In the direction of working from text into present-day culture(s), Ziv Reuben studies how the gospel was instrumental in bringing caste egalitarianism, and, through it, a measure of gender egalitarianism into an indigenous church movement in India.

Language is a particularly significant component of culture. Jim Reiher's exploration of the thorny 1 Tim 2:8-15 injunction that women should "be quiet" makes its focus the Greek word *sōphrosunē*. He arrives at the conclusion that what Paul was setting out in this passage was a route for women to be trained for future ministry. Joshua Barron considers the gendered language English speakers use for God, perceiving him to be male. Comparing this with an array of African languages, he proposes a non-gendered understanding of God as both a fatherly mother and a motherly father.

Beulah Wood's sermon thinks through women across the biblical canon who acted counter to the modern cultural expectation that the husband should be the one who makes decisions and takes initiative, while the wife simply follows. She lists women who went ahead of their husbands and (yet) received the biblical narrator's applause.

We pray that this issue of *Priscilla Papers* inspires and informs greater insights into Scripture for us all.

Together, side by side, in God's world.

Havilah Dharamraj  
Editor

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