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A few words need to be said about the nature of Scripture. This is not an article on exegesis. Nevertheless, because the issue of women in ministry is one that we need to solve by looking at the Bible, we need to be clear about how we are going to read Scripture. Two points may be made.

Firstly, Scripture is true. It may be written in a variety of literary types, it may involve figures of speech and metaphorical expressions, it may have been written by culturally conditioned authors from a particular cultural background, but the overriding principle is that Scripture is God's word, and he arranged for it to say exactly what he wanted it to say. We must not make the mistake of turning interpretation of Scripture into re-writing of Scripture. Recognizing the cultural setting of part of the Bible may be important, but it must not lead us to disobey its commands.

Secondly, having made that point, Scripture is also complicated. For it does contain a variety of literary types, it does involve figures of speech, it was written in particular cultures. Moreover, knowledge of the historical and cultural background and literary norms can be very helpful in illuminating the biblical text and understanding the particular problems the author may have been addressing. God did not give us a list of propositions or an instruction manual. We need to recognize the different ways of reading, says, narrative, as compared to commands. We also need to be sympathetic to the background and recognize that the issues the Bible addresses may not be our own. Nevertheless, we should not make too big a task of understanding the Bible. After all, it is not written in code; it is for our instruction, and has been made accessible to us.

In understanding what a particular passage means, and how it applies to us, there are a few principles which may be helpful.

1. What is the whole Bible about? The Bible as a whole is about God's relationship with his people. There are consequences of this relationship which involve the way people relate to each other, but this is not the main issue of the Bible.
2. What is the passage about? Here we may need to look at the argument of the whole book to see where a particular passage fits in, what the immediate context is, what the particular argument and point of the passage is.
3. What does the passage say about our particular problem? For instance, what women are to do (or not to do) may only be a side issue mentioned in passing, but it may be centrally important in the argument. We need to recognize this so as not to distort the importance we give to different parts of the passage.
4. Are the commands universal? (That is, do they still apply to us now?) Here we need to understand the basis for the command. It could be that the command is specific only to one situation, but the basic principle may still need to be applied in a form appropriate to us.