

**OFFICER TRAINING
DEACONS & ELDERS
FALL 2016**



The Bible in Our Tradition and
Guidelines for Holy Scripture

The Confession of 1967

THE BIBLE

9.27 The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel. The church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as prophetic and apostolic testimony in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated.

9.28 The New Testament is the recorded testimony of apostles to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and the sending of the Holy Spirit to the Church. The Old Testament bears witness to God's faithfulness in his covenant with Israel and points the way to the fulfillment of his purpose in Christ. The Old Testament is indispensable to understanding the New, and is not itself fully understood without the New.

9.29 The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of its witness to God's work of reconciliation in Christ. The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding. As God has spoken his word in diverse cultural situations, the church is confident that he will continue to speak through the Scriptures in a changing world and in every form of human culture.

9.30 God's word is spoken to his church today where the Scriptures are faithfully preached and attentively read in dependence on the illumination of the Holy Spirit and with readiness to receive their truth and direction.

Guidelines for Holy Scripture*

For the Understanding and Use of

1. Determining What the Text Says
 - a. Use of the Original Languages
 - b. Employment of the Best Manuscripts
 - c. Priority of the Plain Sense of the Text
 - 1) Definition of Literary Units
 - 2) Recognition of the Cultural Conditioning of Language
 - 3) Understanding of Social and Historical Circumstances
2. How the Text is Rightly Used
 - a. Purpose of Holy Scripture
 - b. Precedence of Holy Scripture
 - 1) Priority of Holy Scripture
 - 2) Use of Knowledge
 - 3) Use of Experience
 - c. Centrality of Jesus Christ
 - d. Interpretation of Scripture by Scripture
 - e. The Rule of Love
 - f. The Rule of Faith
 - g. Fallibility of All Interpretation
 - h. Relation of Word and Spirit
 - i. Use of All Relevant Guidelines

For Interpreting

1. Be guided by the basic rules for the interpretation of Scripture that are summarized from the Book of Confessions.
 - a. Recognize that Jesus Christ is the center of Scripture
 - b. Let the focus be on the plain text of Scripture, to the grammatical and historical context, rather than to allegory or subjective fantasy.
 - c. Depend upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit in interpreting and applying God's message.
 - d. Be guided by the doctrinal consensus of the church, which is the rule of faith.
 - e. Let all interpretations be in accord with the rule of love, the twofold commandment to love God and to love neighbor.
 - f. Remember that interpretation of the Bible requires earnest study in order to establish the best text and to interpret the influence of the historical and cultural context in which the divine message has come.
 - g. Seek to interpret a particular passage of the Bible in light of all of the Bible.
2. Recognize that individual perceptions of the truth are always limited and therefore not absolutely authoritative.
3. Realize that points of view are conditioned by points of viewing—try to see the issues from the perspectives of others. Can differences be preserved in ways that lead toward mutual understanding?
4. The preached word must inform the study of the written word—the search for truth includes the life of public prayer and worship.
5. In the immediate situation when controversy arises, locate areas of agreement and disagreement.
 - a. Is there agreement as to what biblical passages are relevant to the contemporary issue?
 - b. Is there agreement to the meaning of those texts in their original setting?
 - c. Is there agreement as to how these texts should be applied to the present situation?
 - d. Is there agreement as to what the Christian tradition in particular have taught concerning this issue?
6. In potentially long-term controversies, covenant together to study the Bible in regard to the issue—ensuring openness to differing opinions.
7. Together try to determine the range of options that are open to the church for speech and action in regard to the contemporary situation.
8. Rely on the democratic process of the denomination in assemblies. Use the established channels of communication and the process of voting to express conviction, either as a part of the majority or the minority. Be willing to accept decisions and welcome the continuing advocacy of minority view.

*Summaries of

Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture

(A position statement adopted by the 123rd General Assembly [1983] of the Presbyterian Church in the United States)

and

Biblical Authority and Interpretation

(A resource document received by the 194th General Assembly [1982] of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America)