

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

*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)

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 general and the Reformed 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 part of the majority or the minority. Be willing to accept decisions and welcome the continuing advocacy of minority view.