

From "A Declaration of Faith" in  
The Proposed Book of Confessions of the  
Presbyterian Church in the United States,  
1976.

- (3) The Bible is the written Word of God.  
Led by the Spirit of God  
the people of Israel and of the early church  
preserved and handed on the story  
of what God had said and done in their midst  
and how they had responded to him.  
These traditions were often shaped and reshaped  
by the uses to which the community put them.  
They were cherished, written down, and collected  
as the holy literature of the people of God.  
Through the inward witness of the same Spirit  
we acknowledge the authority of the Bible.  
We accept the Old and New Testaments as the canon,  
or authoritative standard of faith and life,  
to which no further writings need be added.  
The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments  
are necessary, sufficient, and reliable  
as witnesses to Jesus Christ, the living Word.  
We must test any word that comes to us  
from church, world, or inner experience  
by the Word of God in Scripture.  
We subject to its judgment  
all our understanding of doctrine and practice,  
including this Declaration of Faith.  
We believe the Bible to be the Word of God  
as no other word written by human beings.  
Relying on the Holy Spirit,  
who opens our eyes and hearts,  
we affirm our freedom to interpret Scripture responsibly.  
God has chosen to address his inspired Word to us  
through diverse and varied human writings.  
Therefore we use the best available methods  
to understand them in their historical and cultural settings  
and the literary forms in which they are cast.  
When we encounter apparent tensions and conflicts  
in what Scripture teaches us to believe and do,  
the final appeal must be to the authority of Christ.  
Acknowledging that authority,  
comparing Scripture with Scripture,  
listening with respect to fellow-believers past and present,  
we anticipate that the Holy Spirit  
will enable us to interpret faithfully  
God's Word for our time and place.

## Some Traditional Guidelines How to Understand and Use Holy Scripture

(from *Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture*, PCUS position paper, 1983)

Using the Bible as a critical norm for faith and life involves a process of ordering, evaluating, and relating what is said in the Bible to the questions at hand in our lives. These guidelines from the Presbyterian tradition offer assistance in that process.

### **1. Scripture has priority, but not exclusivity.**

In matters within the purpose of scripture, it is authoritative over all other knowledge, opinions, and theories. However, Scripture is not authoritative for any and every question. It is not a textbook, a rule book, nor an encyclopedia of information.

### **2. Knowledge that comes from observation, research, and human experience is important.**

We must not discount the information and wisdom gained from science, from human reason, and from the experiences of believers as we interpret Scripture and seek contemporary faithfulness.

### **3. The Living Christ is central.**

The life and teachings of Jesus must be considered in understanding any part of scripture. The experience of salvation through the living Christ guides our understandings.

### **4. Scripture must be interpreted by scripture.**

The Bible is a very diverse and multi-faceted document. We must search the whole of Scripture for texts relating to any question under consideration. For example the Old Testament must be seen in light of the love and grace of the New Testament, and the gospel must be interpreted with the Hebrew Scripture concern for Law.

### **5. Scripture must be interpreted by the rule of love.**

Jesus said the fundamental expression of God's will is the two-fold commandment to love God and love neighbor. All interpretations of Scripture are to be judged by whether they support loving God and loving neighbor.

### **6. Scripture must be interpreted by the rule of faith.**

The past and present Christian community's understandings of Scripture are important in our interpretation. The historic confessions and catechisms are an important element in this. And the Holy Spirit's guidance in contemporary Christian communities also can give insights. We must not ignore tradition or deny the possibility of new insights.

### **7. All interpretation of Scripture is fallible.**

No doctrinal or ethical interpretation of Scripture, whether long established or new, is to be accepted as the final word, but is always subject to possible revision and correction.

### **8. God's Holy Spirit guides all Scripture interpretation.**

After we have done the best we can with all the means at our disposal, we depend upon God's Spirit to enable us rightly to hear and believe and obey. This is not just a pious platitude, but it insists that we always remain radically open to the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

### **9. Interpretation of Scripture requires the use of all relevant guidelines.**

No interpretation should be based on one or even several of these guidelines without testing it against all of them, or even against still further guidelines for interpretation.