

from ***“Biblical Authority And Interpretation”*** (1982)

see <http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/resolutions/scripture-use.pdf>

One cannot expect to use the Bible in a positive way for guidance and direction in the midst of controversy if one is not accustomed to using it for guidance and direction in daily lives, both individually and corporately. In fact, a more faithful and constant reading of Scripture might provoke more and not less controversy. Nor should this be something to be afraid of. Controversy is a part of life and growth; it may give us the experience of struggling together with Scripture in an authentic and helpful way. For these purposes, the following guidelines are offered.

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, the Redeemer, is the center of Scripture. The redemptive activity of God is central to the entire Scripture. The Old Testament themes of the covenant and the messiah testify to this activity. In the center of the New Testament is Jesus Christ: the Word made flesh, the fulfillment of Israel's messianic hope, and the promise of the Kingdom. It is to Christ that the church witnesses. When interpreting Scripture, keeping Christ in the center aids in evaluating the significance of the problems and controversies that always persist in the vigorous, historical life of the church.
 - 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 two-fold commandment to love God and to love our 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 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 perspective of others. Seek to identify what each one is trying to preserve and defend. Ask whether these elements could be preserved in ways that would 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 issues? If not, can all passages be dealt with by all the parties concerned?
 - b. Is there agreement as 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? If not, discuss the means by which the various applications have been made. Are there different methods of interpretation being used? Are there different presuppositions that need to be discussed and clarified?
 - d. Is there agreement as to what the Christian tradition in general and the Reformed tradition in particular, as reflected in the Book of Confessions, have taught concerning this issue? Are different points in the traditions being used?
6. When there are potentially long-term controversies, covenant together to study the Bible in regard to the issue. Plan Bible study groups where opinions differ. The following procedure may be used.

- a. To ensure openness to hearing the whole Bible as it speaks to the whole issue, hold one session where all participants introduce a passage for discussion that they feel is relevant. Bring contemporary methods of Bible study to bear on the issues by using speakers and other resources. Study the complexity of the issue in today's society, using secular as well as theological materials.
 - b. To ensure that the Bible is heard in depth and leads to decision, encourage sub groups to specialize in one biblical passage, theme, or book as it relates to the issues; structure a debate or forum where differences of interpretation can be clarified; decide what actions will be taken individually or by groups and plan how to support this action. When approaching a biblical passage:
 - (1) Study the sense that the language makes. Look at the words used, the sentence structure, the kind of writing (story, debate, poetry, etc.).
 - (2) Consider what the passage refers to in that particular historical situation.
 - (3) Consider where there may be an analogous situation today.
 - (4) Look for the significance of the text for the present situation that corresponds to the meaning of the text in its original situation.
7. Together try to determine the range of options that are open to the church for speech and action in regard to the contemporary problem.
 8. Rely on the democratic processes 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 as part of the minority. Be willing to accept decisions and welcome the continuing advocacy of minority views.