

Colleyville Presbyterian Church
Westminster Confession of Faith: Week 5 - Of Scripture (sections 8-10)
January 15, 2023

Creeds and confessions are necessary not because they can replace the Bible but because they're a product of a serious, sustained, communal investigation of the Bible's meaning. They remind us that other godly people were pondering biblical truth long before we got around to it. - Andrew Sandlin

Chapter 8 - *"The Text and Translation of the Scriptures"*

VIII. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; (a) so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal unto them. (b) But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, (c) therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, (d) that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner, (e) and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope. (f)

a. Mat 5:18. • b. Isa 8:20; John 5:39, 46; Acts 15:15. • c. John 5:39. • d. 1 Cor 14:6, 9, 11-12, 24, 27-28. • e. Col 3:16. • f. Rom 15:4.

The emphasis in classical protestantism is not only the translation of the Scriptures for the laity, but the knowledge of Hebrew and Greek for the clergy.

"It is not often that the Westminster assembly spoke of the 'rights' of Christians. But the men gathered there were convinced that every child of God has an equal right to hear his or her Father's voice. Every child of God has an interest, has something invested, in hearing and reading God's word. And every person under heaven has a duty to read and search the Scriptures." - Chad Van Dixhoorn

"Translations are required so all can read and hear the Word of God in their own language, so that every nation can worship God in an acceptable manner—note again the missionary vision of the Assembly, extending to the ends of the earth. This is a far cry from Islam, for which the Koran is only the Koran in its Arabic original. In contrast, the universality of the gospel, together with the inability of most people to read the original languages, requires translations, and these translations—while distinct from the Bible in the original languages...are still the Word of God, conveying clearly that knowledge required for salvation." - Robert Letham

It is worth remembering that the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular was one of the primary emphases of the Protestant Reformation — and one of its most lasting impacts on global Christianity and church history. We take for granted that we can read the Scriptures in our native tongue. But this is still a novel phenomenon in the context of church history (and a return to the age of the New Testament!).

IX. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly. (a)

a. Acts 15:15; 2 Pet 1:20-21.

“If some other principle other than Scripture were the key to its interpretation, then Scripture would not be the ultimate authority. Its divine origin also means that Scripture, for all its diversity, is a unity. There is a common theme holding the various parts together, which in turn both justifies and requires its being interpreted as a whole.” - Robert Letham

*This is one of the reasons we have multiple readings of the Scripture in our worship each Sunday, and almost every sermon preached at our church references not only the primary sermon text, but also other parts of the Scriptures which aid in the interpretation of the primary text (this principle does **not** mean that Scripture texts do not have multiple “levels” of meaning - but it does mean that these meanings will work together). Another way to think of this is that any Scripture has only “one” true and full sense or meaning, but a thousand applications.*

“If we wish to search out Scripture truly, and in its fullest sense, we need to read the whole of the Bible and know it well.” - Chad Van Dixhoorn

This is why our church emphasis the Scripture so much in its worship, its preaching, its bible studies, and its daily practices. In order to know God rightly, we must understand the whole of the Scriptures, because that is where God has revealed himself.

X. The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. (a)

a. Mat 22:29, 31; Eph 2:20 with Acts 28:25.

“All religious controversies are to be determined by the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture, in the original languages of the Old Testament (Hebrew) and New Testament (Greek). All decrees of church councils are to be examined the light of Scripture. All the writings of the church fathers are to be considered in terms of how far they correspond to the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture. All human teachings of whatever origin...are similarly to be examined. Moreover, we are to “rest” in the judgment of Scripture; that is, it is to be our authority, too. This is a comprehensive assertion of biblical authority. The Assembly obviously expected the papacy to submit to Scripture.” - Robert Letham

This paragraph communicates the fundamental principle of “Sola Scriptura.” Sola Scriptura does not mean that we do not rely on others (including the church through the ages) to help us interpret Scripture. But it does mean that ultimately, Scripture alone is the Supreme Judge of all doctrines of the church.

This paragraph leads to a very important principle for Reformed and Protestant Christians - any teaching, creed, or confession of the church is amendable by future generations of the church based on a deeper understanding of the Scriptures. This principle applies to the Westminster Confession of Faith — and its writers intended that to be the case.

-Note the example of John Calvin’s Institutes and the contemporary example of John Frame.