

Seven Guidelines for Biblical Interpretation In the Reformed Tradition

1. **The Centrality of Jesus Christ** (the Christological principle): No understanding of what Scripture teaches us to believe and do can be correct that ignores or contradicts the central and primary revelation of God and God's will through Jesus Christ. Any teaching of the Bible on a matter of faith or life is to be used in a manner consistent with scriptural accounts of Jesus' own teaching and embodiment of the person and will of God.
2. **The plain text of Scripture:** This guideline warns against reading into Scripture what we want it to say. We must take seriously the text as it is given to us and seek to understand it fully in its context. This means understanding what it says in the original language of either Hebrew or Greek; understanding the social, historical, and cultural circumstances of the writing – its author and audience; and understanding its literary genre.
3. **The guidance of the Holy Spirit:** This guideline is about relying on God's Spirit to help us rightly hear, believe, and obey God's word. It is about having a receptive attitude to the essential message God wants us to receive. Scripture is to be interpreted with awareness of our limitations and fallibility and with openness to change our mind and be corrected by God's Spirit at work in our hearts and through the Biblical text. "Reformed" means always being reformed afresh by the Word of God.
4. **The rule of faith:** Scripture is to be interpreted in light of the past and present Christian's community understanding of Scripture. Although the church's traditional interpretation of Scripture is fallible and subject always to revision and correction, nevertheless, we are to be guided by the church's creedal statements.
5. **The rule of love:** The fundamental expression of God's will is the two-fold commandment to love God and neighbor, and all interpretations are to be judged by the question whether they offer and support the love given and commanded by God. Any interpretation of Scripture is wrong that separates or sets in opposition love for God and love for fellow human beings.
6. **The use of knowledge and experience.** The interpretation of Scripture does not exclude but requires respect for knowledge acquired from other disciplines – the natural sciences, psychology, sociology, philosophy, economic and political research. The entire company of believers is both a resource and a participant in the process of interpretation. The experience of church members must not be discounted.
7. **The scripture principal.** Scripture is to be interpreted in light of all the Bible. It involves searching the whole Scripture for all texts bearing on the question under consideration. A special dimension of this guideline had to do with the interpretation of the Old Testament in light of the New Testament, as well as the interpretation of the New Testament in light of the Old Testament.