

Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, 1995

Article 4. Scripture

We believe that all Scripture is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit for instruction in salvation and training in righteousness. We accept the Scriptures as the Word of God and as the fully reliable and trustworthy standard for Christian faith and life. We seek to understand and interpret Scripture in harmony with Jesus Christ as we are led by the Holy Spirit in the church.

We believe that God was at work through the centuries in the process by which the books of the Old and New Testaments were inspired and written. [1] Through the Holy Spirit, God moved human witnesses to write what is needed for salvation, for guidance in faith and life, and for devotion to God. [2]

We accept the Bible as the Word of God written. God has spoken in many and various ways through the prophets and apostles. [3] God has spoken above all in the living Word who became flesh and revealed the truth of God faithfully and without deception. [4] We also acknowledge the Scripture as the fully reliable and trustworthy Word of God written in human language. [5] We believe that God continues to speak through the living and written Word. [6] Because Jesus Christ is the Word become flesh, Scripture as a whole has its center and fulfillment in him. [7]

We acknowledge the Scripture as the authoritative source and standard for preaching and teaching about faith and life, for distinguishing truth from error, for discerning between good and evil, and for guiding prayer and worship. Other claims on our understanding of Christian faith and life, such as tradition, culture, experience, reason, and political powers, need to be tested and corrected by the light of Holy Scripture. [8]

The Bible is the essential book of the church. Through the Bible, the Holy Spirit nurtures the obedience of faith to Jesus Christ and guides the church in shaping its teaching, witnessing, and worship. We commit ourselves to persist and delight in reading, studying, and meditating on the Scriptures. [9] We participate in the church's task of interpreting the Bible and of discerning what God is saying in our time by examining all things in the light of Scripture. [10] Insights and understandings which we bring to the interpretation of the Scripture are to be tested in the faith community.

(1) Jer. 30:2; Jer. 36; 2 Tim. 3:16.

(2) 2 Pet. 1:21.

(3) Exod. 20:1; Jer. 1:9-10; Gal. 1:11-12; Heb. 1:1-4.

(4) John 1:14, 18; Rev. 19:13.

(5) Prov. 30:5; John 10:35.

(6) Isa. 55:10-11; John 20:31.

(7) Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27; Acts 4:11.

(8) Mark 7:13; Acts 5:29-32; Col. 2:6-23.

(9) Ps. 1:2; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 3:15-17.

(10) Acts 15:13-20; Heb. 4:2-8, 12.

Commentary

1. According to Scripture, the term "the Word of the Lord" or "the Word of God" or "the Word" refers to:

- a message that God has communicated through persons in the Old and New Testaments, especially through Moses, the prophets, and the apostles (for example, Exod. 20:1; Jer. 1:9-10; Acts 13:44-47);
- Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God (for example, Luke 4:43-5:1);
- the preached gospel of Jesus Christ (for example, Acts 8:25; 18:5; Col. 1:25-27; 1 Thess. 2:13);
- the living Word of God who became flesh in Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14);
- a word or words from God that have been put into writing (for example, Jer. 36:4; John 15:25; Heb. 4:1-12).

Referring to the Bible as the Word of God therefore means, first of all, emphasizing the richness and scope of "the Word" in the Bible. Limiting the term "the Word of God" to its written form blinds us to the total witness of Scripture. Second, in referring to the Bible as the Word of God written, we are acknowledging its authority for the church. All other claims to represent an authoritative word on matters of faith and life must be measured and corrected by Scripture through the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the community of faith.

2. The authority of Scripture has its ultimate source in God, who has inspired ("breathed") it for specific purposes in the life of the church and its members (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The church confesses and recognizes the authority of Holy Scripture; it does not take upon itself the right to give the Scripture its authority. Precisely how God has inspired the Scriptures through the Holy Spirit is not explained in the Bible. We therefore content ourselves with the assurance that Scripture is fully reliable and trustworthy because the One who has inspired it is faithful and true.

3. We recognize the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of New Testament as belonging to inspired Scripture. What we call the Old Testament was accepted by Israel as the standard for faith and life in three stages over several centuries: the law, the prophets, and the writings. The Old Testament, the Gospels, the Pauline letters, and gradually the rest of the New Testament were broadly recognized by the church as Holy Scripture by the fourth century.

4. Since the beginning of the Anabaptist reformation in sixteenth-century Europe, Mennonites have sought to be a biblical people in ways that both borrowed from the Protestant reformation and differed from it. Mennonites have shared the traditional Protestant emphasis on the authority of Scripture for doctrine. In addition, Mennonites have underscored the following emphases:

- the authority of Scripture for ethics, for the relation of the church to society, and for church polity.
- the interpretation of Scripture in harmony with Jesus Christ, in the sense that his life, teachings, death, and resurrection are essential to understanding the Bible as a whole.
- the congregation of believers as the place where individual understandings and interpretations of Scripture are to be tested.

This confessional statement assumes and affirms these emphases.

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