

A Reformed Confession Regarding Hermeneutics

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Article 1

God's Prerogative to Reveal Himself

WE AFFIRM that God alone has the competence and authority to define His own character, work and will, so that man's knowledge of the same depends upon divine self-revelation.

WE AFFIRM that the only unchallengeable authority for doctrine or life, either for the individual believer or the corporate church, is the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

WE DENY that human speculation, imagination, tradition (even that of the church), or reasoning (even that labeled "science") has the aptitude or right to repudiate, replace, correct, or supplement what God has revealed about Himself, His works, or His will.

WE DENY that continuing changes in the world's scholarship pertaining to nature or history or changes in the lifestyle of unbelievers justify in themselves amending our interpretation of Scripture or correcting what it teaches.

Article 2

God's Efficacy in Revealing Himself

WE AFFIRM that God is omnipotent and sovereign, so that nothing has prevented Him from clearly and infallibly revealing to man His person and attributes, His works, and His will.

WE AFFIRM that the process of transmitting God's word through the ages has not diminished the infallibility and authority of the original message.

WE DENY that anything about the human mind and its functioning, any feature about human language, or the temporal and cultural particularity of all communication thwarts God from delivering to man a clear and universally applicable revelation of Himself, His works and His will.

WE DENY that God's use of human instrumentality in proclaiming or writing His word entails the fallibility or errancy of that word as a final product.

WE DENY that Scripture's perfection is incompatible with its genuine human authorship.

WE DENY that the inerrancy of the original text of Scripture automatically extends to the process of transmission and translation.

Article 3

God's Non-Verbal Self-Revelation in the Created Order

WE AFFIRM that God continually reveals Himself as Creator, Sustainer, Governor and Judge to all mankind through the external world's order and splendor, as well as through man's internal consciousness as a rational and moral being.

WE AFFIRM that this general revelation so clearly, effectively, and inescapably displays the deity, personal attributes, glory, and moral will of God that all men are left without excuse for sin and unbelief, standing under His wrath and condemnation.

WE AFFIRM that, apart from God's saving grace, fallen men naturally respond to God's general revelation by seeking in a variety of unrighteous ways (ranging from open repudiation to false religiosity) to suppress and distort the truth about God, resulting in vain reasoning and darkened understanding.

WE DENY that God's general revelation communicates God's gracious plan of salvation, and that it can relieve man's spiritual, intellectual, or moral plight.

WE DENY that the planets and stars have been arranged for the purpose of showing us what is to come.

WE DENY that the execution of God's providence invariably shows his favor or disfavor.

Article 4

God's Self-Revelation in the Canonical Scriptures

WE AFFIRM that, both before and after the fall, God has also specially revealed Himself, His works, and His will in a variety of ways: by addressing individuals, by typological events and ritual institutions, by inspired proclamation through prophets and apostles, and supremely by the personal manifestation of His own Son, Jesus Christ.

WE AFFIRM that many of these various divine revelations were verbally recorded for all subsequent ages in the canonical Scripture of the Old and New Testaments, which is also itself the very revelation of God to man as a word of both information and power.

WE AFFIRM that in all of its linguistic functions, whether praises, promises, commands, threatenings, questions, assurances, exhortations, confessions, narratives or propositional teaching, etc. the Scripture is authoritative as God's word.

WE AFFIRM that Scripture communicates in human language that employs rhetorical devices such as analogy, metaphor, and anthropomorphism.

WE AFFIRM that prophetic types and shadows are employed in Scripture.

WE AFFIRM that the Scripture communicates not only all of the theological and moral truths of general revelation, but goes beyond what is available to man in general revelation by especially revealing God's gracious plan of salvation and its accomplishment in history, focusing upon the work of Jesus as the Christ.

WE DENY that there was or are continuing additions to special revelation beyond the historical completion of the canon of Scripture.

WE DENY that the theological truths and moral demands communicated by general revelation disagree with the theological and moral content of Scriptural revelation, either in substance or specific application.

WE DENY that the authority of God may be separated from or set in opposition to the authority of Scripture, in part or in whole, on any matter which Scripture addresses, including details of nature or history.

WE DENY that any human judgment or assertion which purports to interpret and give expression to God's non-verbal general revelation may take precedence in theology or ethics over God's own verbally-expressed revelation.

WE DENY any dichotomy between an inerrant "kernel" and an alleged errant "husk" of the Scriptural message.

WE DENY the inference that, because the Bible does not present itself as a "textbook" in a certain field of study, what the Bible teaches in that field may be dismissed as erroneous.

WE DENY that the veracity of God's verbal revelation may be confined to matters of eternal salvation, or restricted to an absence of willful deception by the writer, or reduced to Scripture infallibly accomplishing God's personal purposes in its hearer or reader.

WE DENY that the genuine presence of certain types and typologies in Scripture, either explicit or implicit, conflict with the conclusions of scriptural exegesis and the enterprise of grammatical-historical interpretation.

WE DENY that Scripture reveals absolutely everything about God.

Article 5

The Relevance of Extrabiblical Scholarship

WE AFFIRM that extrascriptural studies in fields relevant to Biblical interpretation (e.g., linguistics, archaeology, natural science, history) may be a great benefit in elucidating the meaning of the Biblical text and deepening our understanding of it.

WE AFFIRM that when such studies appear to conflict with the Biblical text, they may legitimately occasion the reexamination and possible correction of previous interpretations given to the text.

WE DENY, however, that any Biblical text which has been given its proper linguistic sense (in semantic, literary and theological context) may be challenged, corrected, or ignored on the basis of conclusions reached in fallible, extrabiblical fields of study.

WE DENY that modern studies using sophisticated scholarly tools or computer technology may properly produce such novel interpretations of any Scriptural text that its original recipients, without the tools of modern scholarship, could not have gained that understanding for themselves from the text itself (even with the aid of progressive revelation).

Article 6

The Historico-Grammatical Method of Interpretation

WE AFFIRM that God's verbal revelation in Scripture is intended as a public communication and must be properly understood according to the same principles of interpretation which apply to any human, non-esoteric, literary work.

WE AFFIRM that the Scripture is interpreted correctly only when interpreted according to its letter ("literally") in the normal, historical and grammatical sense, taking account of a text's literary genre (whether figurative or not, etc.) and the author's intent (as determined semantically, and by the local and broader literary contexts).

WE DENY that Scripture contains secret wisdom or hidden, subtle meanings which are ascertained by approaching the Bible on some supposed higher or Spiritual plane.

WE DENY that deeper, creative insights and artistic connections in Scripture should be maximized by lines of interpretation which follow no objective, definite, or consistent rule of interpretation which would make publicly predictable and correctable conclusions possible.

WE DENY that Scripture is properly handled by any "prooftexting" method which fails to consult a text's local context as well as the entire teaching of Scripture as it pertains to any particular text.

WE DENY as well that any theological or moral truth (including the larger theme or thrust of the Bible as a whole) can be established without adducing texts from Scripture which prove it or without showing that it follows by sound logical inference from such.

WE DENY that Scripture, as some would allege about any literary work, is empty of fixed and objective meaning so that its language makes no unchanging disclosure, its authorial intent is inaccessible, and every reading of a text constitutes a misreading.

WE DENY that literary evidence of stylized expression, order or balance in a text of Scripture precludes its historicity or factuality.

WE DENY that the Biblical authors invented illustrative stories or traditions and then narrated or presented them as though they were actual historical events.

Article 7

The Primary and Secondary Authors of Scripture

WE AFFIRM that God used a variety of fallible human authors and editors with differences in background, personality, interest, setting and linguistic idiom in producing the Scriptures, and yet the Holy Spirit was in each case the primary author of the Scriptures, thus requiring that the Bible be acknowledged as completely true in what it teaches and interpreted as one book (with unity, harmony and consistency), not many.

WE DENY that the teaching of one Biblical author may be set in conflict with the teaching of another Biblical author, as though they contradict each other rather than complementing and enriching each other in their distinctive styles, themes, and assertions.

WE DENY that any author of Scripture misunderstood, misinterpreted, or misapplied any previous portion of Scripture which he quotes or to which he alludes.

WE DENY that, at the time the human authors of Scripture received revelation from the Holy Spirit, they fully perceived the full implications of their own words or how they would come to pass in the light of redemptive history and further revelation.

WE DENY that any of the erroneous beliefs and historical limitations of an author's society or his own personal misperceptions were incorporated as truth in the text of Scripture, thereby calling for the correction of modern experts in science, history, sociology, etc.

Article 8

The Self-Interpreting Nature of Scripture

WE AFFIRM that the normative themes or conceptual perspectives by which the truths of Scripture should be organized and interpreted may be drawn from the Scripture itself.

WE AFFIRM that extrabiblical themes, perspectives, frameworks or organizing principles which are brought to the text may be pedagogically convenient or effective in teaching the message of Scripture, but have no authority for determining the meaning of the text itself.

WE AFFIRM that the New Testament may properly be used to understand the Old Testament more fully; the New which was in the Old concealed finally has been revealed by the New, explaining in a final authoritative way how it was concealed in the Old.

WE DENY that any Biblical model or perspective leads to doctrinal or moral conclusions that are at odds with conclusions reached by means of other Biblical models or perspectives.

WE DENY that any inference from the Old Testament can override or invalidate explicit teaching in the New Testament.

WE DENY that the pre-understandings and personal horizon which the reader brings to the text of Scripture may properly function to edit its message or render its meaning not objectively uniform for all readers.

WE DENY that the historical and cultural specifics used in Biblical motifs or paradigms hinder a true understanding of the Biblical text, deter readers from discerning its intended sense, or prevent cross-cultural translation, proclamation, and application of what the Biblical authors meant.

Article 9

The Clarity of Scripture

WE AFFIRM that God's central message and demand in Scripture is so clear that any hearer or reader using the common and ordinary means of literary interpretation may understand it.

WE AFFIRM that those divine mysteries that are less clearly revealed in Scripture may be properly understood by means of careful study of the Scriptures assisted by the inward illumination of the Holy Spirit.

WE DENY that there is a need for a pope, an infallible church or council, or modern scientific experts to interpret the true meaning of Scripture and explain to all men what is and is not incumbent upon them to believe and obey.

WE DENY that the true and full meaning of any Biblical text is indeterminate or subjective.

WE DENY that any aspect of the Biblical message can be expressed only in irresolvably contradictory assertions or in a fashion which requires mystical apprehension.

WE DENY that the Bible is primarily in the form of a parable or code.

Article 10

The Covenantal Framework Within Scripture

WE AFFIRM that all of God's post-fall covenantal administrations complemented (not contradicted) each other, being progressively revealed facets of the same underlying single promise of God which came to fulfillment in the person and saving work of Jesus Christ.

WE AFFIRM that the Old Covenant and the New Covenant are one in purpose and substance, constituting a unified Covenant of Grace established by God, with both Testaments testifying to the person and saving work of Christ as the central message of the whole Bible.

WE AFFIRM that the internal and historical structure of God's Word consists of various covenants, God's relationship with His people in time, and thus serve as indicators as to how various parts of Scripture must be interpreted and applied.

WE DENY that the Old Covenant foreshadows are obligatory after the advent of the reality they anticipated, the establishment of the New Covenant in Christ.

WE DENY that the New Covenant's displacement of Old Covenant regulations places the Old and New Covenants in opposition or antagonism to each other.

WE DENY that Scripture must be interpreted in terms of implicit dispensations, programs, or administrations instead of the covenants that are explicitly established in Scripture and specifically explicated in Scripture (i.e. Hebrews).

WE DENY that God withheld from the church the proper hermeneutic or method of interpretation until the ministry of a particular person or group of persons who lived after the period of enscripturation.

Article 11

The Objective Text as Standard

WE AFFIRM that the standard by which our unchanging God manifests His holy requirements and guides the lifestyle of His people is set down in the text of His written word.

WE AFFIRM that the teaching and norm of the written text remains fully and solely the authority for God's people whether they are historically closer to man's fall from original purity, or to the accomplishment of redemption at Christ's first advent, or to redemption's consummation at Christ's final coming.

WE AFFIRM that the churches have authority and duty to apply the objective text as a standard in matters of discipline and doctrine.

WE DENY that God intends His people to live by their maturing ethical consciousness or by some gradually evolving moral standard which goes beyond, or even against, the Scriptural text, the divinely intended control factor for theology and ethics.

WE DENY that since the closing of the Scriptural canon, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever, now guides His church as it approaches the consummation of history to tolerate or commend practices which were previously forbidden by Him in the inspired text of the New Testament or the Old Testament (as interpreted and modified by the New).

Article 12

The Holy Spirit's Role in Our Proper Handling of Scripture

WE AFFIRM that, although unbelievers can understand the literary sense of the Scriptural text, the saving discernment, acceptance, and application of God's word requires the Holy Spirit's work of enlightenment, regeneration, bestowal of faith, nurture and sanctification.

WE DENY that a holy and righteous handling, summarizing, teaching, proclamation and application of Scripture can be performed by unregenerate men, even though there may be limited value in their discussions of the Scriptures.

WE DENY that the Holy Spirit's guidance ensures that all believers agree with one another in all things in this life.

WE DENY that the Holy Spirit ever teaches men to believe or leads men to do what is contrary to Scripture.