

SCRIPTURE UNION – A STATEMENT OF HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

Section 1

The Scripture Union family throughout the world has made the following statements about the Bible and the way in which it is to be approached.

SU's STATEMENT of BELIEF includes '**The Scriptures: we believe that the Old and New Testament Scriptures are God-breathed, since their writers spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; hence they are fully trustworthy in all that they affirm, and are our highest authority for faith and life.**'

SU's WORKING PRINCIPLES include '**We seek to exercise the ministries God has given us, us in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ and in reliance on the Holy Spirit. We therefore aim to follow biblical principles in all that we do, and emphasise the vital importance of prayer.**'

Bible Ministries: In encouraging people to meet God through the Bible, we emphasise the significance of the Bible as a whole.

1. We encourage people to read it so that they come to repentance, faith, obedience to God and worship.
2. We prepare systematic programs and materials for children, young people and adults, appropriate to their age and situation.
3. We are committed to Bible reading which is thoughtful, prayerful and regular, and which enables the reader to respond to the message of the whole Bible rather than to isolated passages.
4. We are concerned to interpret the text in a way that enables people, in their contemporary situations, to hear for themselves the message of the Bible from its original context.

Section 2

In the light of these statements, Scripture Union has adopted the following hermeneutical principles for use by editors, writers and all who handle the Bible on behalf of the movement.

Rather than being seen as options on a menu, these principles are to be taken a whole; and taken together, are to govern our approach every time we come to Scripture. The emphasis placed on each one may vary on different occasions, but all should be informing our thinking, at least implicitly.

We believe that the Bible should be interpreted:

- a. Prayerfully, in humility and in dependence on the Holy Spirit. We come to Scripture acknowledging that only the Holy Spirit can open our blind eyes and illumine our dark hearts to what God is saying. As God's empowering presence, the Spirit will lead people to engage with the text and to face God's challenge in the here and now. The recognition that the Holy Spirit brings a sense of immediacy will draw us into an understanding, not just of the original meaning of the text, but also of its contemporary prophetic significance.
- b. Corporately rather than simply individualistically. We are the body of Christ. We stand in a line of historical interpretation that we respect, and from which we learn. As we engage with

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Scripture together, greater understanding emerges, fellowship is deepened and appropriation encouraged.

- c. As a whole. We are committed to the whole of Scripture, to allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, and to promote the understanding of the broad sweep of God's dealings with humanity from creation to new creation. In doing this we affirm that the Bible is a metanarrative; that is, it tells a story which gives meaning to all of life, and by which all of life must be judged. In terms of this metanarrative, we will emphasise interpretation both as propositional and as a response to this metanarrative, and help people to enter imaginatively into the biblical story, seeking always to lead them to live under its authority.
- d. Contextually – as it was written. The Bible contains different literary forms (genres) and the way God communicates often differs from one to another. Therefore interpretation includes recognizing and respecting the genre of each passage. The passage is then to be interpreted **according to the author's intention and in terms of its historical and canonical context.** To the criticism that, however desirable this may be, it is unattainable, we assert that, while exhaustive knowledge of these things may be impossible, adequate knowledge is not.
- e. Contextually – as it is encountered. Our presuppositions, culture, gender, age, and personal history - in short, all that is going on in our lives and communities - always colour our encounter with Scripture. Every encounter is an interpretation. Nevertheless we can know and experience scriptural truth; and while our communities exercise a significant influence on our understanding of Scripture, they are not ultimately a binding force. We need constantly to bring our understanding of Scripture back to Scripture. At the same time we need to listen to the interpretation of Scripture of others who belong to different contexts, so that our understanding may be enriched and our blind spots corrected.
- f. Contextually – as it is lived out. Encountering God through his Word will have an impact on our lives, encouraging us in worship, mission, and holiness. As we commit ourselves to obeying God's Word, our experience will help us to understand the Bible better, and deepen our faith in, and our fellowship with, God.
- g. Christologically. Jesus Christ (his birth and life on earth, his death and resurrection, his ascension and second coming) is God's key Word in his dealings with human beings; and he, therefore, is the focus of God's revelation in the Bible. Our basic aim states that meeting God through the Bible and prayer will lead to personal faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit leads us into the truth, always testifying to and glorifying Jesus. In the light of these things, in engaging with the Bible, we should consider how a passage ultimately relates to Jesus Christ.
- h. Relationally: a meeting with God. We do not read the Bible simply to collect information about God. Rather, through the stories, promises, commands, warnings and examples, we begin to understand God, meet with him and know him personally. To attempt to interpret Scripture and yet somehow to stop short of enjoying that relationship of love, is to miss the entire purpose for which God, whose nature is love, has revealed himself in the Bible. God is a relational God, his character is to build and sustain relationships. So all our interpretation of Scripture is to be rooted in the two dimensions of our relatedness to God as his children, and of the web of human relationships around us.

Fundamentally, engaging with the Bible is about a relationship with God, and this can only be achieved by dependence on the Holy Spirit.