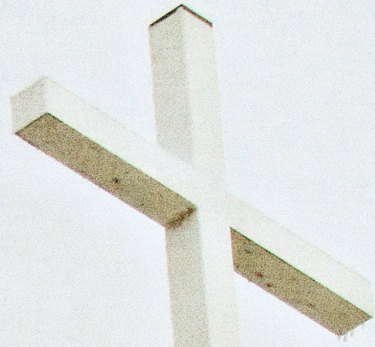


Theoacademy

**BEING PRESBYTERIAN**  
**PREPARATION FOR ORDERED MINISTRY**

Session 11: The Word in Worship



# Theocademy

A ministry of the  
Synod of Mid-America

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# Getting started

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***Before watching the video, consider the following questions.***

- How and when do you use scripture?
- Are there any parts of the Bible that you especially like? Why?
- Are there any parts of the Bible that particularly confuse or frustrate you? Why?

# During the video

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***As you watch the video, answer the following questions.***

- How does Dr. Margaret Aymer describe the relationship between the word and the Word?
- Why do we as 21<sup>st</sup>-century Christians need the biblical witness?
- In what ways does scripture “infuse” worship?
- In what ways may the word be proclaimed in worship?
- How does proclamation fuel ministry?

# Interacting with the word

In the last session, we explored *why* we worship. In this session and the next, we'll look at *how* God's Spirit works through the word and sacraments to empower us for worship.

As Dr. Aymer has noted, the Bible is incredibly important to how we as Christians understand and live out our faith. But that leaves us with a very important question: how do we go about understanding the *Bible*? Back in 1982, as the UPCUSA and the PCUS began to consolidate, theologians and scholars from both denominations got together to try and figure out how Presbyterians should understand and use the Bible. The document they published in 1983, *The Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture*,<sup>1</sup> lays out a set of guidelines for us to consider and incorporate into our Bible study. However, merely reading through the list of principles won't mean much unless you get a chance to try it out as you go. So, for the purposes of this study, let's consider the following passage:<sup>2</sup>

**"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands: <sup>2</sup> "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. <sup>3</sup> I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup> But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup> Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. <sup>6</sup> Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. <sup>7</sup> Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God. Revelation 2:1-7, NRSV**

## Biblical understanding is a gift from God.

As the *Presbyterian Understanding* states, "The work of interpretation leads to God's authoritative and convincing word for us only through the illumination of the Holy Spirit" (p. 15). In other words, no matter how much training we've had, which tools we use, or which people we talk to, true understanding of God's word can only come from God.

- Part of our worship liturgy as Presbyterians is a "prayer of illumination" that comes right before the reading of scripture. Why is that prayer important?

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<sup>1</sup> Available online at <https://www.pcusa.org/resource/presbyterian-understanding-and-use-holy-scripture/>. I've taken the liberty of combining and condensing their long lists of considerations for the purposes of this study.

<sup>2</sup> Yes, if you're wondering, I specifically chose a passage out of Revelation because it's typically the book that most intimidates Christians. You're ordained church leaders – you didn't think I'd make it easy on you, did you?

- How might you pray for the Holy Spirit's illumination about this passage?

## Biblical interpretation must be taken seriously.

Even though we're relying on the Holy Spirit to illuminate and guide our efforts, that doesn't mean we can slack off when it comes to preparing ourselves. In order to make the most of our Biblical study, we need to use the most reliable manuscripts available, defer to the original languages (Hebrew and Greek) when we're wrestling with the meaning of another translation (English, Spanish, Korean, etc.), and be informed by trusted biblical and theological scholarship.

- What words, phrases, or concepts in this passage are challenging for you to understand?
- Where might you go to find assistance in understanding this passage better? (Personal or published)

## Jesus Christ is at the center of the whole Bible.

The *Presbyterian Understanding* affirms that "all scripture is to be interpreted in light of the centrality of Christ and in relation to the salvation provided through him" (p. 11). They agree with Dr. Aymer – the word points to the Word. Even though not every individual passage may directly refer to him, the grand sweep of both the Old and New Testaments is primarily concerned with the person and work of Jesus Christ.

- In what way(s) does this passage point to Christ?
- What insights or information does this passage reveal about him?

## We should prioritize the plain sense of the text.

We Presbyterians tend to be thinkers – we like to dissect, probe, and analyze in order to get at the deeper meaning and significance of an idea. And normally that’s a good thing. But sometimes we can get ourselves so wrapped up in “searching for the deeper significance” that we overlook the clear meaning that’s right in front of us. Thus, when we try to understand a passage of scripture, the simple and straightforward meanings are usually the best ones.

- As you simply read this text, what does it seem to be saying?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How does a simple reading of the text make it easier to understand?

## Scripture is its own best interpreter.

Imagine that you’re talking with your cousin and he says something that confuses you. Now, you could seek out a university professor to ask for her input on the conversation; you could talk to another family member about the interchange; you could read a communications textbook to figure out just where the communication broke down. Or you could simply ask your cousin and get him to explain it to you in a different way. In a lot of ways, the Bible is just like that – so before going to some outside source to find clarification for our questions or concerns, we need to see what the Bible itself has to say about the issue.

- What other passages can you think of that talk about the issues raised in these verses?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How does this passage fit in with any of the great themes that run across the Bible?

## Biblical study is guided by the rule of faith.

In addition to the “plain sense” of the text and the way other scriptural passages talk about our text, we have the opportunity to learn about what our fellow believers have to say (and have said) about this idea. In other words, we were never called to be theological Lone Rangers – we are to take into account our Church’s rich history and tradition of study and reflection (including our creeds and confessions) when we interpret scripture.

- From what you know of our Church’s confessional history, does anything speak to this passage?
  
- Where might you go to find more background information (theological, historical, political, etc.) on this passage?

## Biblical study is guided by the rule of love.

When the Pharisees asked Jesus to name the greatest commandment, he told them, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment.’ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40). Properly interpreted biblical passages will help us to love God and one another better.

- How does this passage challenge us to love God better?
  
- How does this passage challenge us to love one another better?

## Putting it all together

These principles were never meant to be used in isolation from one another – they are to stand in conversation with one another, helping us to gain multiple perspectives from which we can view the passage at hand.

- What new insights have you gleaned from this passage as a result of this study?

## Personal reflection

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After the session, complete the following statements.

- These principles will help me to understand scripture better by:
  
- I can continue to be formed (and transformed) by scripture by: