



We refer to the Bible as the “Word of the Lord”, but we Presbyterians do not read the Bible as the *literal* word of God. Rather, we read it as the *inspired* Word. The difference reflects an important element of our Reformed theology.

Our *Book of Confessions* gives us some guidance: “The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of its witness to God’s work of reconciliation in Christ. The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless, the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the place and times at which they were written. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding.”

So, when we read “slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling”, or “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission”, we understand that such sayings reflected the times in which they were written, but do not reflect how we live now. In the same way, when we read, “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away” we understand that Jesus was using hyperbole to make a point and that he did not intend his remark to be taken literally.

In Sunday worship and in Bible Study classes we always offer a prayer for illumination before we read from the Bible. This is a reminder to us that we need God’s help through the Holy Spirit to understand God’s word to us as it comes from the Bible. In the same way God inspired men (and probably

some women) to write the bits and pieces that became the Bible, we need God’s inspirational guidance through the Spirit to understand. This is what makes the Bible a dynamic book, as fresh today as it was in King David’s time.

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament was written in Greek. Scholars often disagree on how words and passages in the ancient forms of those languages should be translated. As a result, we have many different translations available to us. As an example of the challenges a translator working with an ancient language faces, imagine archeologists working a thousand years from now uncovering an e-mail sent today that said, “What a cool concert! The band rocked!” One scholar might say the word cool referred to the temperature in the arena, while another scholar might argue that the word was a synonym for “great”, and both might wonder whether the band followed the example of Lot’s wife!

There is no “authorized” Presbyterian Bible. We use the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) because it is probably the most precise translation from the original languages. *The Message* has been a popular choice for the past few years. It is not a translation, however; Eugene Peterson, a retired Presbyterian minister spent more than 20 years paraphrasing the Bible, going through the original languages and putting sentences in his own words. It is an excellent introduction to the Bible.

We don’t always agree on interpretations of verses and passages in the Bible. But if we remember to seek God’s guidance through the Holy Spirit, and if we remember that the lens through which we should always read is the Living Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, then as we turn the pages of this extraordinary book we will hear the word of the Lord.