

2 Timothy excerpts + Hebrews 1:1-2, 4:12

October 25, 2026

2nd Helvetic Confession

Pastor Sarah Dickinson

We have the right atmosphere today in our No Fear Sunday. Welcome to Reformation Sunday. In some ways, this is the most prepared Discovery Presbyterian Church has ever been for Reformation Sunday because we have been studying three confessions that are from the Reformation era. We've been studying the Book of Confessions. We've been in the Scots Confession which I'm honoring today with my bagpipe. So there's the Scots Confession of 1560, Heidelberg of 1563, and technically Helvetic is 1561. These were confessions of the "Reformation" era. In 1517 Martin Luther nailed up his complaints against the church. So about 40 years later other thinkers came along who became known as Reformed thinkers and said, this is what I believe.

So there's a flourishing of creeds. It's a reminder, why were those creeds there? It was because of corruption. It was because of wrong. These confessions were written in order to say that is wrong and this is right. A lot got written because it was a time of oppression, a time of just wrongful use of the Bible by religious people. When you think Reformation, you think reform, and you are reforming because there is corruption. When you think of the word "Protestant", you think of protesting. So these are statements of reforming and protesting in an era of corruption. These are powerful statements, these confessions. They're not just dry history. They're tools to help us amid evil and wrong. The Scots Confession was from what country? Scotland. Do you remember what country the Heidelberg Confession was from? Germany. And the Helvetic Confession is from Switzerland. Helvetic is a Latin word for Switzerland. So each of these Reformed confessions comes from a different area. It was Europe's era of reform against corruption.

When I approached The Second Helvetic Confession this week, I was cautioned by last week. Do you remember my opinion of the Heidelberg Confession? Was it a thumbs up or a thumbs down? It was a bit of a thumbs down.

I was surprised how much I disliked the Heidelberg, really surprised, but I appreciated it in context. So when I got to the Second Helvetic Confession this week, I thought brace yourself, you're really not going to like it. Surprise, loved it. I love the Helvetic Confession. Let's learn a little bit about it. It was written by Heinrich Bullinger. Bullinger was a pastor in Zurich. He was a preacher, a teacher,

a scholar, a correspondent to other thinkers and reformers and people protesting against the corruption of the era. He kept in touch with them. He welcomed refugees into his home because they were not safe in other places. What a guy. And he also took care of people when they had the plague, even though it was at risk of his life. What do you think of Bullinger? Two thumbs up. What an awesome guy. I was so inspired. And this is just the introduction that you read about in the Book of Confessions. What an extraordinary person—this kind of person



2nd Helvetic
Confession
1561

2nd Helvetic Confession

Helvetic "Swiss"

Heinrich Bullinger Pastor Zurich

Preacher, Teacher, Scholar, Correspondent,
welcomed refugees into home, care for plague

Flexible, Nuance (NOT Heidelberg tone)

*At the same time, yet, God had friends outside
the land of Israel*

64 pages Heidelberg 22 pages

Ch 1 & 2 Scripture, Word of God, Bible

Ch 3 God

Practical prayer, singing, comforting
others

makes me say, well, what else do you believe? Because this person has staked his life on the Lord and demonstrating it in the community. Extraordinary person.

Bullinger wrote this document to be his last will and testament. But then others saw it and said we need that, because the Heidelberg Confession got people in trouble. It went a little too far. And the Helvetic was more nuanced. So it was flexible. It was nuanced, not the tone of the Heidelberg, let alone the fiery Scots Confession. I noticed it uses language like, at the same time, yet, and God had friends outside Israel. It is generous. It is open. It is nuanced. It's trying to comfort people, like, don't be afraid that you're going to hell. It'll be okay. It is 64 pages long. The Heidelberg was 22. So it's three times the size of the Heidelberg.

And get this, it blew my mind. Do you remember way back when we studied the Nicene, Apostles, Scots, Heidelberg? What was usually in chapter 1 or the first paragraph? What was the topic? It was God. God was the topic. In the Helvetic, chapter 1 is about Scripture. Scripture, the Bible, the Word of God. Isn't that amazing that this confession centers Scripture? That is how important Scripture was to this band of Reformers. Scripture was seen as a tool of anti-corruption. Scripture was seen as a tool for reform, so important that Bullinger began with Scripture. That kind of blew my mind this week. Then some other things to know about the Helvetic Confession. It's very practical. It talks about prayer. It talks about singing. It talks about art. It talks about how you comfort others. It's kind of a precursor to our other Presbyterian book called the Book of Order, which has governance, and then it has things like how do you set up a worship service. So it's very practical.

Let's take another look at the Second Helvetic. Here are some things about Holy Scripture from chapter 1. Scripture is the word of God. "We believe and confess the canonical scriptures of the Holy prophets and the apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men." So they're using Scripture to counter the corruption of people who are absconding with money, who are trying to frighten people, who are trying to divide people, who are using the Bible to beat up on people. They're saying, no, no, we're using the Bible to be centered, to help us get back to God. "For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, **and still speaks to us...**" That's the question I was going to ask at Time for Discovery. Is the Bible alive? Is it alive? This creed from nearly 500 years ago says the Bible still speaks to us. One reason I chose Hebrews is it says, "and God still speaks". Isn't that amazing? God still speaks through the Holy Scriptures. The Bible is alive. "And in this Holy Scripture, the universal Church of Christ has the most complete exposition of **all that pertains to a saving faith**, and also to the **framing of a life acceptable** to God;..."

So does it say you're supposed to use Scripture in the science classroom? Is that where you're supposed to use Scripture? **How are you supposed to use Scripture? Throughout your life.** Throughout your life. It's not meant to be wedged into things. It's a holistic life. It did not drop out of the sky as a science textbook. It is meant to give us life, a holy life, a theological life. This got me thinking. So chapter 1 says Scripture is all that. Wow. Chapter 2 doesn't just say Scripture is important. In chapter 2, you can't just have Scripture, you also need to have tools for interpretation of Scripture. It's not obvious. So, the Helvetic Confession says, "the Apostle Peter has said that the Holy Scriptures are not of private interpretation. 2 Peter 1:20" So, in this and other eras people think, well, this is what it means. No, it's public. We talk back and forth. It's public how we understand Scripture. We come to a consensus about what it means, certain things. "...and thus, we do not allow all possible interpretations...But we hold that the

interpretation of the Scripture to be orthodox and genuine which is gleaned from the Scriptures themselves (from the **nature of the language** in which they were written..." So you read the Scripture itself, in the Scripture's language. You don't immediately jump to the commentary. You don't immediately jump to who said what about Scripture. We don't care. Read the Scripture itself, which is what we do at Discovery, right? In Bible study, we read the Scripture out loud. We don't read a book about the Scripture. We don't read a commentary about the Scripture. We read the Scripture itself out loud. And "...likewise, **according to the circumstances** in which the Scripture was set down..." So you think about what was the context of how this got written. "...and **expounded in the light of like and unlike passages...**" So, you don't just take this Scripture and say, gee, that seems a little off. You say, if that seems a little off, it seems a little off because elsewhere Scripture says this, and then elsewhere Scripture says that, and elsewhere Scripture says that other thing. Then you're like, well, gosh, in four different places, it says this, and one place it says the other. And Jesus said this, versus this other thing. So we look at the preponderance of scriptural evidence. "...and of many and clearer passages) and which agree with the **rule of faith and love...**" Does this help us be faithful? Does it help with love? Those are guiding principles of Scripture..." and **contributes much to the glory of God and man's salvation.**" Does the Scripture point us to the glory of God, and does it point to human fulfillment?

This comes 500 years ago, and this is building on the wisdom of rabbis who used to talk back and forth. Jesus was a part of that tradition, talked back and forth. Is it this text or that text? I don't know why this text doesn't get lifted up more often. **Matthew 23:23.** Jesus is like, some religious teachers are talking about coming down hard, clobbering people with certain texts, when the **weight of the scripture is about justice and mercy.** Look to the weight of Scripture. You evaluate Scripture with certain things. If you come to a Bible study, you'll see this periodically when

someone's new or we launch a Bible study or we get hung up. I try to bring out these tips for scriptural interpretation. So, again, these tips didn't come along in 1982 or '83 when PC had its new formulation. It's built on the Helvetic insights about

scripture. It's built on the rabbis. Scriptural interpretation guidance. This is from our denomination. It's good stuff to have in your back pocket. I should ask, is Scripture important to you people? Yes. Okay. So, is Scripture important these days to use well? Okay. So, get ready. So, **we recognize that Jesus Christ, the redeemer, is at the Center of Scripture.** So, Jesus is at the center, not some obscure thing. Jesus is at the center. **We focus on the plain text of Scripture and deal with the text within its context.**



Scriptural Interpretation - Guidance

1 We recognize that Jesus Christ, the redeemer, is at the Center of Scripture.

The Bible is not an encyclopedia. It is a salvation (healing) story. It's God's story of love shared with people and all creation. Jesus, his life and purpose, is central.

2 We focus on the plain text of scripture & deal with the text within its context.

We are careful readers, reading again and again. We study texts within their broader contexts and story lines as well as their historic times.

3 We depend upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit in interpreting and applying God's message.

Prayerful reading helps us perceive the word of God is alive.

This is a slam against the book of Revelation and people who talk about the apocalypse and, oh, it's going to be this, and, oh, it's going to be that. Oh, good heavens, all this garbage. Millennialists. Well, it's the end times. Well, it's the... baloney! As soon as someone says end times, let the Reformation banner go across your brain and say, that is baloney. Because you read the Old Testament and people thought this is the end times. It wasn't. You read the New Testament, they thought this is the end times. It wasn't. You know, it's almost like end times is code for corruption, war, lies, a swing toward awfulness. Yeah, it feels like the end times in our times, doesn't it? You don't have to admit it out loud. It is not the end times. It is not, Reformed thinkers. Don't tire me out. Because we focus on the plain text and you look at its context. Okay, they thought it was the end times in AD 90. That's great. All this nonsense associated with prophecy—the Prophets were describing what was going on in front of their eyes, and because they told it like it was, they were persecuted, and they had to kind of disguise what they said to stay alive. Okay, onward. **We depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit in interpreting and applying God's message.** Have you been in a Bible study and you feel the Holy Spirit guiding you? It's a real thing where you're like, oh, wait a minute, now I understand this at a new level. It's not a lecture or a classroom. It's like, whoa, God's word is alive.

Let's look at some more principles of interpretation. **We are guided by the doctrinal consensus of the church, which is known as “the rule of faith”.** So we look to our tradition. How is this traditionally? It doesn't mean it's always right. You look at all 7 principles about

4 We are guided by the doctrinal consensus of the Church which is known as “the rule of faith.”

Our confessions written over the course of more than 1,000 years show how the Bible has been analyzed and interpreted across time. This sobers us to what is lasting in scripture and what also may not be as essential. We also see how God's word is saving and liberating in different contexts. The message of faithful love, justice and mercy is continuous.

5 We test interpretations to see if they are in accord with Christ's Rule of Love.

Does an interpretation show God's love?
Does it show love and respect for all people and creation?

6 We affirm that interpretation of the Bible requires earnest study.

Westminster Confession: Not all things in scripture are plain, yet matters relating to salvation are clear (6.007). Study in original languages of Hebrew and Greek and the historical and social context are important (6.008). We are not persuaded by yelling or arrogance but by patient study.

7 We seek to interpret a particular passage of the Bible in light of all of the Bible.

interpretation. **We test interpretations to see if they are in accord with Christ's Rule of Love.** Love. It's okay to say, well, I think Scripture is about love. The big commandment that Jesus pointed to was love. It's okay to use that as an anchor for interpretation of why something works or doesn't. **We affirm that the interpretation of the Bible requires earnest study.** So, it's not flim-flam. You've got to study it. **We seek to interpret a particular passage of the Bible in light of all of the Bible.** So

those are seven things that we think about.

Let's look at the Bible. I was looking at Hebrews first this week because it says, “God still speaks”. I love that line, God still speaks. But then I did a hard turn to 2 Timothy, which I thought I would hate, and I kind of liked 2 Timothy. Context of 2 Timothy. 2 Timothy acts as if it is the Apostle Paul talking to his student Timothy, and Paul is giving Timothy some counsel. I love the opening of 2 Timothy. Paul says to Timothy, it probably wasn't Paul, but it's okay, that's the way the ancient literature worked. Paul says to Timothy, boy, did your grandma Lois and your mother Eunice do a good job with you, Timothy! Those women taught you Scripture and

the faith. Wow. How about let's give thanks to all the people, all the faithful people who taught us the faith. So Paul is like, wow, kudos to them. And then Paul, or whoever is writing this, says Timothy, rekindle that. You've got to keep building on your faith, and you've got to fight the good fight. And look at my example. Paul says, even though I suffer and I'm in prison, don't be ashamed of that. Lift up the Gospel. All manner of crazy, terrible corrupt things are going on, still turn to the Bible. Keep the faith even amid corruption and wrong. And man, it looks like the end times. Yeah, it always looks like the end times when things are bad. We get that. Even though it looks like the end times and people are lovers of money and they even use the faith in a corrupt way, don't believe them. They don't know what they're talking about. Keep centered on the faith and look at scripture itself. He says, you have observed my teaching. So this is an excerpt from Timothy: my conduct, my aim in life, my patience, my love, my steadfastness. As for you, Timothy, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and **how from childhood you have known the sacred writings...** (It was women

letting Timothy know the sacred writings.) ...that are able to instruct you for salvation (not science class, but for salvation) through faith in Jesus Christ. Here's the famous text: All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **so that everyone who belongs to God may be**



2 Timothy 3:18

¹⁰Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness,...

¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it,

¹⁵and **how from childhood you have known the sacred writings** that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

¹⁶All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

¹⁷so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

proficient (know what's what) and **equipped for every good work**.

Okay, we're in Bible study. What do you think of that text? Is all scripture inspired by God? Because that's kind of a hot topic sometimes. Comments from congregation: There's one verse in particular that makes me nervous, that I wonder if it was inspired by God, and it's a verse that says that women shouldn't talk in church. Another person: The part about Lot and the angels, when the people in the town wanted to know the angels, but he offered up his daughters like that was okay. Pastor: Yeah, that's a terrible text, right? When we see abuse like that, horrible. Third person: verses that look like they were added later during an editing phase. Pastor: Yeah. So some texts seem like somebody penciled that in, because you look at the different papyrus, and some of them look like somebody wrote in the margin a little bit, or added a little bit because they were uncomfortable, or they thought I kind of like this version better. Another person: Sometimes I'm distressed by all the violence in the Old Testament. Pastor: So why is that distressing? Did Jesus tell us to try and be careful and love one another? It seems the opposite of Jesus's rule of love, doesn't it? So we're doing those scriptural interpretation things right now, aren't we? We're not just accepting this verse at face value.

A couple other things to throw out there in interpreting that verse itself. When Paul was writing this to Timothy, what was "all scripture" to Paul? It was the Old Testament. So if you're going to take this quote literally, Paul is just talking about what we call the Old Testament, not

the New Testament. Here's another thing. I glanced at my commentary which said the original Greek can be translated with the word "is" missing, as "All scripture inspired by God is useful for teaching." Without the word "is", it changes the meaning a lot. That kind of blew my mind. Then, look at the context, it's scripture that is useful for good work. That is the context of this "clobber text". (Those are what we associate with Fundamentalists, who have been around for only about 100 years.) They use clobber texts to say things like you are not allowed to speak in church and every piece of scripture is true. Yes! Scripture did not fall on plates from the sky; it passed through human hands. And we can tell that because there are two different Creation stories. We talk about algorithms these days. For example, if you talk about or search for Halloween costumes, then all of a sudden social media is feeding you all kinds of costume information. Or if you look at a particular politician, then all you hear is about that politician because of the algorithm. I think the same happens for Biblical texts. You hear a text and people press on it hard, and then it has an outsized footprint. So that's why you have to go back and reform a corrupted understanding of the Bible. So you need this interpretative toolkit to always reform distorted views of the Bible. You go back and read more and more, and we use it for good works and to draw us to the love of Christ.

So do you feel prepared to use the Bible in daily life? Do you feel prepared? Is the Bible important today? Can the Bible be used today to fight corruption? Can it be used today to fight wrong? Can it be used today to thwart a bully? Can I use the Bible against this fellow right here, who's trying to threaten me? (Pointing to a scary skeleton.) I'm not afraid of you, clown. I have no fear. I have the fear of the Lord, such reverence for the Lord. When I look at the Bible, I know I'm supposed to love this clown. It's going to be hard. But I'm not going to let that clown intimidate me or get me off the path of righteousness. I'm going to study the Bible. I'm going to be around other people. I'm going to try to focus on love. I'm going to try to be better for myself and I'm going to look out for others. Larry S said at the end of Bible study the other night, this study reminds us of why we study the Bible. The whole point is the Bible. So I invite you to study, Zoom on Wednesday or Friday in person or on your own. I bring study to church in teaching sermons because not everyone can make it to a study. But take it seriously. **Love your neighbor. Use stuff in the Bible. You've got to wield it, because God is still speaking and God needs you to be fearless.** To God be the glory on this Reformation Sunday. Amen.