

Acts 17:10-12

Sec 3. “All synods or councils, since the Apostles’ times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both.”

A. **Acts 17:10f** because gives us the only absolute rule of faith & practice— God’s Holy Word. The Berean Jews were more noble-minded than the Jews in Thessalonica because **“they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”**

1. It was more commendable for believers to examine all teaching to see if it lined up with the Scriptures rather than to just accept the words of Paul the apostle & that of Silas.
2. Paul & Peter were both aware that their writings were considered holy Scripture,¹ yet both Apostles agreed that even their writings & teachings were to be in conformity with those Scriptures that came before their epistles.

B. Paul also wrote in **2 Tim 3:16-17**: **“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”**

1. The Greek word used here for **“teaching”** is rightly translated as **“doctrine”** by the NKJV & KJV.
 - a. Synods or councils often produce documents (i.e. creeds, catechisms, confessions) for the purpose of teaching or doctrine. Such teaching is to be used as a guide or help for our faith (what we are to believe) & our practice (how we are to live).
 - b. The OPC Presbyteries & General Assembly (GA) endeavor to be guided by Scripture.
 - 1) When a disagreement comes up, there is usually deliberation or debate that is guided by Scripture.
 - 2) Individual churches & entire denominations have compromised on many matters because decisions have been made outside of the protective fence of Scripture according to **2 Tim 3:16-17** (i.e. women ordination).

C. A careful reading of sec 3 calls for us to test the words of the Apostles’ Creed, Nicene Creed, Heidelberg Catechism, & Westminster Standards. You should try to see if such documents are faithful to Scripture or not; test them to see if their words err or not.

1. American Presbyterians have made modifications to the Westminster Confession of Faith— even to this chapter we are currently studying. One entire section was removed because it gave a degree of religious leadership rights to magistrates. Here is just a portion of what was removed: **“magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers, & other fit persons, to consult & advise with, about matters of religion.”**²

¹ See **2 Peter 3:15-16**.

²https://www.opc.org/documents/WCF_orig.html#:~:text=As%20magistrates%20may%20lawfully%20call,upon%20delegation%20from%20their%20Churches%2C

- a. Do you think you can trust President Biden & his advisors to call a synod of ministers?
 - b. Most Bible believing Christians would not trust those who he would pick as “fit persons to consult & advise... about matters of religion.”³
2. The OPC GA has been working on modifying portions of the outdated language of the Westminster Standards to make them more easily understood. Such modifications fall under the mandate given in this chapter.
- a. WCF 1, sec 8 says that Hebrew & Greek were “immediately inspired by God” yet “they are to be translated into the vulgar [common] language of every nation.”
 - b. For the words of synods or councils to “used as a help” in our faith & practice (WCF 31, sec 3), those standards or creeds likewise need to be in the common language of every nation. They are not well understood most Americans if some of the words are no longer in use at all.

Sec 4. “Synods & councils are to handle, or conclude nothing, but that which is ecclesiastical: & are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or, by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.”

1. In June of 1993, The GA of the OPC wrote a letter to President Clinton:

“The 60th General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church humbly petitions the President of the United States of America to stand against the sin of homosexual activity. We support this petition with the following considerations. Based on the Word of God and his creation law, homosexuality (including bisexuality and lesbianism) violates God's non-negotiable moral standard and therefore is sin.”
2. Such “humble petitions” have come about because the church could not help but speak against such sins in our nation. The petitions are in accordance with sec 4 above.
3. The WCF’s mandate for the church to make such petitions means that there is not to be an absolute separation of church and state as some would like to claim should exist. Two passages speak against absolute separation:
 - a. **Isa 49:23: “Kings will be your guardians & their princesses your nurses.”**
 - b. Turn to Ps 2.

³ This removed section was motivated by Constantine’s calling for the Council of Nicaea to meet. Some could interpret this removed section as mandating for rulers to have spiritual as advisors or counselors. The House of Representatives & the Senate both have an office of chaplain.