



Community of Christ

Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs

Lesson 9 - Scripture in Community of Christ

This lesson is based on 'Sharing in Community of Christ' pages 63-67.

Guide Times

- Introduction to Scripture – 20 minutes
- Living Word/Library of Books – 15 minutes
- Reading and Using Scripture – 20 minutes
- The Bible, Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants - 15 minutes

Have a selection of Bibles available and also some copies of the Doctrine and Covenants and the Book of Mormon.

Favourite Scriptures (10 minutes)

Invite those in the class to share a scripture verse or Bible story that is particularly meaningful to them and to briefly explain why.

Scripture in Community of Christ – Introduction (10 minutes)

The English word scripture comes from the Latin word scriptura, which means “something written.” Scriptures are writings that, over time, are given authority by or become sacred to a particular group.

In Community of Christ, we affirm the *Bible* as the foundational scripture. The word *Bible* comes from the ancient Greek word *biblia*, which means “books” or a collection of “little books.” It is important to remember that the Bible is a library of books written by many authors, not a single book written by one author.

The set of affirmations found on pages 63 to 65 were first presented to the church in 2003 to provide the context for the church’s continuing quest to become more knowledgeable about our three books of scripture. The focus is on how we understand scripture and its role in the life of the church.

Not all of the affirmations will be discussed in this class. This is because of time available rather than any implication that some affirmations are more important than others. Class members should be encouraged to read and reflect on all of the affirmations in their own time.

Preamble - Scripture provides divine guidance and inspired insight for life when responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied. Scripture helps us believe in Jesus Christ.

Its witness guides us to eternal life and enables us to grow spiritually, to transform our lives, and to participate actively in the life and ministry of the church.

- What do you understand by the phrases “responsibly interpreted” and “faithfully applied”? How can our approach to scripture be more in keeping with these criteria?

Living Word (5 minutes)

Affirmations 1 and 2 - *We declare that Jesus Christ—who lived, was crucified, was raised from the dead, and comes again—is the Living Word of God. It is to Christ that scripture points. It is through Christ that we have life (John 5:39–40). It is Christ whom we must hear (Mark 9:7).*

We find the Living Word in and through scripture. Scripture is the indispensable witness of the saving, transforming message that God has entrusted to the church. The church formed the canon of scripture so that it might always have a way to hear the good news, nurture its faith, measure its life, test its experience, and remember its identity.

These affirmations distinguish between the Living Word (Christ) and the written word (scripture).

- What do you understand to be the difference between the Living Word and the written word? How do these two tend to become confused in the life of the church and what problems can this cause?

A Library of Books (10 minutes)

Affirmation 3 - *Scripture is a library of books that speaks in many voices. These books were written in diverse times and places, and reflect the languages, cultures, and conditions under which they were written. God’s revelation through scripture does not come to us apart from the humanity of the writers, but in and through that humanity. In the earthen vessels of scripture we have been given the treasure of divine love and grace (2 Corinthians 4:7).*

The library of writings we call scripture comes to us from many times, many authors, and many circumstances different from our own. How a passage was written tells us much about how we should read and understand it.

- What are the dangers of treating the Bible as if it is one book written by one author?
- What do we benefit from viewing the Bible as a library of books?
- How does recognition of the role of the human writer affect how you view scripture?

True but Not Inerrant (5 minutes)

Affirmation 5 - *Scripture is vital and essential to the church, but not because it is inerrant (in the sense that every detail is historically or scientifically correct). Scripture makes no such claim for itself. Rather, generations of Christians have found scripture simply to be trustworthy in keeping them anchored in revelation, in promoting faith in Christ, and in nurturing the life of discipleship. For these purposes, scripture is unfailingly reliable (2 Timothy 3:16–17).*

- How is it possible to believe that scripture is “true” yet not inerrant? Would you agree that scripture is “trustworthy” and “unfailingly reliable”? Explain why or why not.

Faith, Experience, Tradition and Scholarship (5 minutes)

Affirmation 6 - *Faith, experience, tradition, and scholarship each have something to contribute to our understanding of scripture. In wrestling to hear and respond to the witness of scripture, the church must value the light that each of these sources may offer. Faith, experience, tradition, and scholarship. What do you understand by these terms?*

- Which of these lenses or methods do you find easiest or most natural to turn to when trying to understand scripture?

Discipleship and Scripture (10 minutes)

Affirmation 8 suggests that disciples should grow in their knowledge and understanding of the scriptures so that they may:

- Increase in love for God, neighbour and self,
 - Uphold the dignity and worth of all persons
 - Faithfully follow the way of Jesus Christ
- Share of a time when scripture has helped you to do one of these things.
 - Can you suggest other reasons for reading and seeking to understand scripture?

Bible, Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants (10 minutes)

Affirmation 9 states that, with other Christians, we affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church.

- Do you agree with that statement?
- What do you think it means for the Bible to be foundational?

Which Bible? - Many Bible translations are available and Community of Christ acknowledges that consulting various translations can be helpful. An article on the Community of Christ website provides information on why use of the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition is recommended.

Community of Christ uses the most responsible biblical scholarship available in the public use and interpretation of scripture. Earlier translations like the King James Version (KJV, published in 1611) were valuable in their time but had limited Greek and Hebrew manuscripts to reference. The Inspired Version (IV, published in 1867) is not a translation from the original languages. It is the KJV with about 5 percent changed or added by Joseph Smith, representing his insights and experiences. While the IV helps us better understand Smith's developing theology, it does not get us closer to the original texts of the Bible, and it has many limitations of the KJV on which it is based.

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV, published in 1989) has been used by Community of Christ as the most reliable version of the Bible available in English because it was based on thousands of manuscripts discovered since the 17th century as well as improved knowledge of the original languages. As of September 2024, Community of Christ has moved to the Updated Edition of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSVue) as the main reference for English resources.

Consulting various translations can be helpful in Bible study and sermon preparation. However, for public ministry it is important to work with a translation consistent with Community of Christ's understanding of what scripture is and how it should be used. (Extracts from <https://cofchrist.org/use-of-the-new-revised-standard-version-updated-edition/>)

Affirmation 9 continues *"In addition [to the Bible], Community of Christ uses the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants as scripture. We do not use these sacred writings to replace the witness of the Bible or improve upon it, but because they confirm its message that Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God."*

- When has scripture found in the Doctrine and Covenants or the Book of Mormon has be particularly meaningful to you?

Conclusion – An Indispensable Witness (5 minutes)

We will finish by listening to divine counsel presented to the church by President Stephen M. Veazey in 2007 and canonised as Section 163 of Doctrine and Covenants

Scripture is an indispensable witness to the Eternal Source of light and truth, which cannot be fully contained in any finite vessel or language....Scripture, prophetic guidance, knowledge, and discernment in the faith community must walk hand in hand to reveal the true will of God. Follow this pathway, which is the way of the Living Christ, and you will discover more than sufficient light for the journey ahead. (D&C 163: 7a,d)

* For a more in depth study of scripture and how it might be used responsibly in the life of the church you are recommended to take the Temple School course "Introduction to Scripture".