



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 1.3 – Introduction

The Various Kinds of Doctrines in the Bible

The two main teachings of the Bible are the Law and the Gospel. It is especially important that we know these two teachings and the differences between them.

Our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious...how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory (2 Corinthians 3:5-9).

In this passage, the Law of God is given different names:

- “the letter,”
- “the ministry of death”
- “written and engraved on stones,”
- “the ministry of condemnation.”

The Gospel, on the other hand, is called:

- “the new covenant,”
- “the Spirit”
- “the ministry of the Spirit”
- “the ministry of righteousness”

The Law refers to the commands God has given to all human beings. These are summarized in the Ten Commandments given to Moses on two stone tablets. The Law comes from God and therefore it is good. The Law would be a way of salvation if we could keep it. But because of our sinful nature, no one has been able to keep the Law perfectly. Therefore, the Law kills us. It is the ministry of condemnation and of death. Since we cannot keep the Law, the Law condemns us to the punishment of death. This is the ministry of condemnation and death

The Gospel, on the other hand, refers to those things God has done for us, specifically the things He has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. We, who are disobedient, are saved by Jesus’ perfect obedience in our place. The Spirit works through this Gospel of Jesus and leads us to trust in it for our salvation. The Gospel gives us the perfect righteousness of Christ and the Spirit leads us to trust in Jesus’ righteousness for salvation rather than in anything that we can do.

Because the distinction between Law and Gospel is so important, we will explain it more thoroughly in a future lesson.

Everything the Bible teaches is a doctrine of God. We should accept every teaching that God gives us. But some teachings are more important than others. For example, it is more important to know that Jesus rose from the dead than that Noah had three sons. Both teachings are true because they are given to us by the Holy Spirit in the Bible. But the knowledge of Jesus’ resurrection is more important for our salvation. For this reason, we distinguish between fundamental doctrines, non-fundamental doctrines, and open questions.

Fundamental doctrines are doctrines we need to know and believe in order to be saved. For example, is fundamental that we know and believe that:

1. we are sinners who deserve death
2. Jesus saved us by living a perfect life for us, dying for our sins, and rising again from the dead.

Anyone who denies or rejects these teachings is lost.

On the other hand, knowing the names of the two angels mentioned by name in Scripture (Gabriel and Michael) is not a fundamental teaching of the Bible that we must know in order to be saved. We call such a teaching a non-fundamental doctrine, that is, a true teaching of God's Word but not something that we must know and trust in in order to be saved.

An open question is a question that God does not answer in the Bible or anywhere else. Since God does not answer such questions, we should not try to answer them ourselves. We may have an opinion about them, but we cannot insist that our opinion is correct. For example, we know from the Bible that there are vast numbers of angels, but we do not know exactly how many angels there are. Therefore, we have to consider the number of angels as an open question that we cannot answer.

Questions

1. What are the two main teachings of the Bible?
2. What is the main difference between these two teachings?
3. What are these two teachings called in 2 Corinthians?
4. What is the main purpose of these two teachings?
5. Why is it especially important to know the fundamental teachings of the Bible?
6. What is the difference between a fundamental teaching and a non-fundamental teaching?
7. Why is it still important to teach non-fundamental doctrines correctly?
8. What is the difference between an open question and a non-fundamental doctrine?
9. Give an example of each of these three things: a fundamental doctrine, a non-fundamental doctrine, and an open question.