



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 1.4 – Introduction

The Basis for All Our Theology

The only basis and source of all our theology is the Bible, because it is God's Word. From time to time, teachers who claim to be Christians have gone astray and have based their theology on things other than the Bible. For example, some Lutherans have made the Lutheran confessions found in the *Book of Concord* the basis for their teaching. They say that they will teach what the *Book of Concord* says, but not necessarily what the Bible says. This can lead to false teaching because the *Book of Concord* does not contain every teaching found in the Bible. For example, the *Book of Concord* does not say plainly that God created the world in six ordinary days. When Lutheran confessions were written, no one doubted this fact, so it is not mentioned in the Lutheran confessions. Those who base their teaching only on the *Book of Concord* might think that they are right to teach that God created the world by means of evolution over millions of years because the *Book of Concord* does not specifically condemn the theory of evolution. The basis for their theology has become the *Book of Concord* rather than God's Word, the Bible. We must teach everything that God has given us in the Bible, not just the teachings mentioned in the *Book of Concord*.

The Bible must be the basis for our teaching. Our teaching is based only on God's word, not on words of man, such as the teaching of a pastor, the resolution of a congregation or synod, or a decree from a church officer such as the synod president, a bishop, or the Roman Catholic pope. We cannot base our teaching on traditions, even traditions that have been held by a group of Christians for hundreds of years, because traditions may be contrary to the Bible or go beyond what the Bible says.

We also must not base our theology on human theories, such as theories on matters of science, sociology, psychology, or education. For example, many educators believe that a human being is a blank slate at birth, neither good nor bad. This cannot become a basis for our thinking, because the Bible teaches that a human being is not neutral at birth, but sinful. Some educators teach that physical or corporal punishment of a child is always wrong, but God tells us in His Word that He does not agree with that philosophy. We always need to put God's Word above every human idea, even when all the so-called experts disagree with what the Bible says.

One church teacher, John Wesley, taught that there is a four-fold basis for our theology: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. This is dangerous teaching, for tradition, reason, and experience do not always agree with Scripture. And tradition varies from place to place. Human ideas about what is reasonable change from time to time. And one man's experience differs from another's. But Scripture remains always the same. Only what God tells us in the Bible provides a solid basis for our doctrine and life.

John Calvin was a younger contemporary of Martin Luther. He was a Bible teacher who allowed reason to lead him away from what the Bible teaches in some cases. For example, he could not accept the Bible teaching that in the Lord's Supper we truly receive the Lord's body together with the bread and the Lord's blood together with the wine. Calvin taught that a human body has to occupy a certain space and therefore cannot be located in many different places in the world where the Lord's Supper is celebrated; therefore, he taught that Christians receive only bread and wine at the Lord's Supper, not the body and blood of Jesus. In his view, the body and blood of Jesus had ascended to heaven and could not be present anywhere else except in heaven. So instead of accepting God's Word as it reads, he understood it to mean something different from what the words actually say.

Others have disagreed with things the Bible says because they seem to disagree with their own experiences. What they feel in their hearts has become the basis of their theology, rather than the written words in the Bible. A popular American song from a few years ago included the words: "It can't be wrong when it feels so right." In this song, the person was apparently trying to justify her adultery because it felt good, even though God's Word condemns adultery. A number of people approach theology this way.

In the very beginning the devil tried to get Eve away from the Word of God as the basis for her thinking. Satan suggested that God did not really say what Eve knew He said. She believed the lie of the devil rather than the truth of God. In the same way, the devil tries to make us doubt God's word, the Bible, and ask, "Did God really say...?"

Questions

1. What is the basis for all the theology that we teach in our churches and schools?
2. Why is it important this basis must always remain the same for us?
3. What did John Calvin sometimes put above the Word of God?
4. What did John Wesley present as the four-fold basis for his teaching?
5. How can our feelings lead us away from the Word of God?
6. In what way does the blank slate theory disagree with God's Word?
7. How should every Christian test the teachings of his pastor or synod?
8. Explain how the devil in Genesis 3 led Eve away from the Word of God.