



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 1.5 – Introduction

The Conflict between Theology and Reason

The ability to think is a gift from God, but this ability is abused when it is used to find fault with God and what He has revealed to us in the Scriptures. When man's mind and reason submit to God and His Word, man's reason is being used in a God-pleasing way. But when man's mind and reason is put above God and His Word, then man's reason, mind, and his thinking ability have become an idol. The apostle Paul shows us the right way to use our reason and thinking ability in these words:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Many of the teachings of the Bible do not make sense to man's reasoning and logic. For example, we cannot understand how God can be one and three at the same time. Yet God's Word is clear. **"There is one God"** (1 Corinthians 8:6). At the same time, the Bible teaches us that there is a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who are distinct from each other. How then can there be one God? All we can do is proclaim the truth that the true God is the Triune God, one God in three persons, even though we cannot fully understand how this can be so. To anyone who objects to what God says about Himself, we must say with Paul: **"O man, who are you to reply against God?"** (Romans 9:20).

One of the teachings of God's Word that is often attacked by man's reason is the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. This teaching does not make sense to human reason. We eat the bread; it tastes like bread; it looks like bread; in fact, it is bread. But Jesus' Word teaches us that the bread we are eating in the Lord's Supper is, at the same time, His body, given into death for our sins. Who can understand this? Yet this is what Jesus said: **"This is My body"** (Matthew 26:26), and everything else God has revealed to us in His Word about the Lord's Supper fully agrees with this declaration of our Savior.

The Bible teaches that everyone who is saved is saved by God's grace alone, but everyone who is lost is lost through his own fault. This is another teaching that seems contrary to human reason, but there can be no doubt that this is what God teaches. Paul says: **"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God"** (Ephesians 2:8). But at the same time, Jesus said to those who rejected His teaching: **"How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!"** (Luke 13:34). Man's reason says that this doctrine does not make any sense. Man's reason says that if we are saved alone by God's grace, then it must be God's fault if we are lost. Or, if it is our fault that we are lost, then it must due to our own efforts if we are saved.

In general, those who err by human reason are divided into two camps. On the one hand, the followers of John Calvin teach that God has chosen some to be saved and God has chosen others to be lost. If we are saved, we are saved by God's grace. But if we are lost, it is because God has not chosen us, that is, God did not want us to be saved. This makes sense to the human mind, but it is contrary to what God says in many places. For example, God's word clearly tells us: **"The Lord ... is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"** (2 Peter 3:8).

On the other hand, Jacob Arminius and his followers taught correctly that it is not God's fault when men are lost – it is their own fault. But then, following human reason, they taught that if a man is saved, it is because he chose to be saved. But if that is true, then God's Word is lying when it says that we are saved by grace alone.

When we try to figure these things out in our human minds, we will find ourselves contradicting God's clear teaching in His Word. That is why we must make our thoughts and thinking obedient to God's Word even though there are times when we cannot fully understand it. God is God, and we are not.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! (Romans 11:33)

We are neither Calvinists nor Arminians. We follow a third option, which is what God's word teaches. We confessional Lutherans who simply take God at His Word, even if it contradicts our human logic.

Questions

1. What is the right way and the wrong way to use the minds God has given us?
2. Why does the teaching that God is triune cause a problem for our minds?
3. How does the teaching of the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper cause a problem for our minds?
4. What did John Calvin teach as the cause of man's salvation and damnation?
5. In what way does this teaching contradict what the Bible teaches?
6. Why is it wrong to say that we are saved because we chose to believe in Jesus?
7. In what way do confessional Lutherans differ from Calvinists and Arminians?