



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 17.1 – The Doctrine of Holy Scriptures

God's Word Is Truth

Throughout our study of Bible teachings we have quoted what the Bible says as the final authority of what is true and what is false, what is right and what is wrong. In this section we shall examine what the Bible says about itself and thus show that God intended the Bible to be our final authority in all matters of faith and life. In His prayer to His heavenly Father on the evening of His arrest Jesus said: **“Your word is truth”** (John 17:17). God’s Word is truth. Where is God’s Word to be found? The Holy Scriptures (also known as the Bible) are God’s Word, and that Word is truth, as we shall show from the Scriptures themselves.

When we say that some statement is true, we are saying that the statement agrees with fact. It is not a lie; it is not a false statement; it conforms with reality. In determining whether someone is guilty of a wrongdoing, it is necessary to learn the truth of what actually took place. Earthly judges and juries are constantly striving to learn the truth, so that they know whether to pardon or condemn someone who has been accused of a crime. For example, we hear Moses, the leader of Israel, saying to his people: **“If you hear someone in one of your cities, which the LORD your God gives you to dwell in, saying, ‘Corrupt men have gone out from among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods’ – which you have not known – then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And if it is indeed true and certain that such an abomination was committed among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock – with the edge of the sword”** (Deuteronomy 13:12-15; see also Deuteronomy 17:2-5). Before punishment can be administered, it is important that the judgment in the case be made in accordance with the truth, i.e. with the events in the case that actually took place in real time and space.

In most earthly matters, whether in history, nature, or science, the truth is established by actual observation (eye or ear witnesses, cameras, recordings, forensic evidence). **“You shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently”** (Deuteronomy 13:14). In Old Testament law one witness was not considered as sufficient to establish the truth of a matter. **“One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established”** (Deuteronomy 19:15). Even then the witnesses may be wrong, but that is the best we can do in some cases. God Himself does not need human witnesses to establish the truth. The Lord said to His prophet Samuel: **“The LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart”** (1 Samuel 16:7).

Since God is God (and is holy, just, and righteous), God **“cannot lie”** (Titus 1:2). He is the fountain of truth. Whatever He says conforms to reality and fact. Even His promises cannot fail. **“All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth”** (Psalm 25:10). **“Your mercy reaches unto the heavens, and Your truth unto the clouds”** (Psalm 57:10). In connection with the promise of the Messiah to the family of David, the psalmist Ethan says: **“My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David”** (Psalm 89:34-35). We can depend on what God says. **“His truth shall be your shield and buckler”** (Psalm 91:4). **“The truth of the LORD endures forever”** (Psalm 117:2).

When Jesus was on trial before Pontius Pilate, Jesus explained to him that His kingdom was not worldly. He said: **“You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come**

into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37). Pilate then revealed his own philosophy when he asked: **“What is truth?”** (John 18:38). This is the same question that is being asked in our age, and the answer given by many is that there is no such thing as absolute truth, everything is relative, and nothing can be stated that is definitely true without any doubt.

In two of the above quotations, truth is linked with mercy. After God created Adam and Eve, He gave them one command: **“Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”** (Genesis 2:16-17). God was telling them the truth, and this truth was also merciful, for He was in love warning them against something that would harm them. This is not surprising, for **“God is love”** (1 John 4:8).

But then Satan appeared on the scene in the form of a serpent, and there was no truth or love in him. Jesus spoke truthfully concerning the devil when He said: **“He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it”** (John 8:44). In malice and hatred Satan created doubt in Eve’s heart concerning God’s love. Satan boldly contradicted God’s merciful truth with His malicious lie, saying to the woman: **“You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”** (Genesis 3:4-5). Satan’s lie implied that God was not good or merciful at all, but that God was trying to keep something good from them. Satan, on the other hand, was the kind and merciful one, encouraging them to enjoy what God, with evil intention, had kept from them.

Satan’s lie brought sin and death into our world. He is still lying to us today in many ways. He implies that disobeying God’s commands will not harm us. Then, when he has succeeded in getting us to sin and to sin increasingly, he accuses us of sinning and breaking God’s laws and attempts to drive us to despair. He suggests to us that we ourselves are our own saviors, convincing us that if we live a certain way or follow a certain ritual or do certain good deeds, we might be able to save ourselves. Then, when we have tried and failed to live up to our self-chosen standards, he drives us to despair. As the apostle Peter wrote, Satan is **“like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”** (1 Peter 5:8). God **“desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”** (1 Timothy 2:4), but Satan desires all men to believe his lies and end up in damnation rather than salvation. Satan’s greatest lie is the idea that man can restore himself to God’s favor by his own efforts. But God’s truth is plainly stated by the apostle Paul: **“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace”** (Galatians 5:4).

God’s merciful truth was revealed already in the Garden of Eden when, in the presence of Adam and Eve, God cursed the devil in the serpent and promised the coming of the woman’s Seed who would crush the serpent’s head. Jesus came as the woman’s Seed, the Christ, to establish the truth over against Satan’s lie. The truth is that Jesus alone is the Savior of the world. Jesus said: **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”** (John 14:6). Moreover, Jesus promised His disciples **“the Spirit of truth”** (John 14:17) who would guide them into all truth. Jesus told Pontius Pilate that His kingdom was a kingdom of truth: **“For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice”** (John 18:37).

God wants all persons everywhere to know and enjoy the truth that is in Jesus Christ. As we have already noted, God **“desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”** (1 Timothy 2:4). **“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”** (1 John 1:8). **“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth”** (1 John 1:6). All those who introduce religious teachings that are not based on God’s Word in Scripture **“have strayed concerning the truth”** (2 Timothy 2:18) like Hymenaeus and Philetus, who said the resurrection had already taken place.

Jesus is the truth. The Holy Spirit He has sent to us is the Spirit of truth. He enables us to know this truth, for Jesus said: **“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”** (John 8:31-32). Jesus’ word is the truth. Jesus is the teacher of the truth. There is only one way we become acquainted with Jesus’ teachings and God’s truth, and that is in God’s Word of truth, the truth as God has revealed it to us in the Holy Scriptures, the holy writings. God has not kept the truth from us; He has revealed it to us, beginning with His first promise in the Garden of Eden, and continuing to the last revelation He gave to His apostle John on the island of Patmos. God’s prophet David declares God’s decision to make the truth known to us. He says: **“I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness in the great assembly; indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O LORD, You Yourself know. I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great assembly”** (Psalm 40:9-10).

In the presence of His enemies Jesus called Himself **“a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God”** (John 8:40). He said: **“I tell the truth. ... And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?”** (John 8:45-46). How can we hear Jesus’ words of truth? Jesus told His apostles: **“The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”** (John 14:26). **“When the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me”** (John 15:26). **“When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you”** (John 16:13-14).

When God speaks, we can be sure that what He is telling us is the truth. After God, through the prophet Nathan, gave David the promise of an everlasting kingdom to come from his family, David said: **“O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant”** (2 Samuel 7:28). The widow whose son Elijah brought back from death said to the prophet: **“Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth”** (1 Kings 17:24). Over and over again Psalm 119 declares God’s Word to be the truth. It is **“the word of truth”** (Psalm 119:43). **“Your law is truth”** (Psalm 119:142). **“The entirety of Your word is truth”** (Psalm 119:160). The wise Solomon declared God’s words to be **“words of truth”** (Ecclesiastes 12:10).

The Lord’s New Testament apostles called the words from God **“the word of truth”** (James 1:18). Paul told Timothy that he was working with **“the word of truth”** (2 Timothy 2:15). Paul wrote to the Colossians that what they heard from Christian missionaries was **“the word of the truth of the gospel”** (Colossians 1:5). Paul told the Ephesians that they had heard **“the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation”** (Ephesians 1:13). In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul also spoke of **“the word of truth”** (2 Corinthians 6:7).

Thus, God’s Word is the word of truth. The Word reveals God’s truth. It conveys God’s truth. God’s Word is in every case identical with the truth. It is as Jesus said to His Father in His prayer on the night of His arrest: **“Your word is truth”** (John 17:17).

Questions

1. How do we ordinarily determine the truth in earthly matters?
2. How does God determine the truth?
3. What great truth has God revealed to us?
4. Where can we find this truth?
5. Why is the devil called the father of lies?
6. Why can we trust every message that comes from God?
7. Where can we find accurate information about Jesus?
8. Where can we learn the truth about God’s plan of salvation?