



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 17.2.1 – The Doctrine of Holy Scriptures

Arguments Used Against Verbal Inspiration

At various times in history Satan has used different methods to try to destroy the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit whose brings the message of Christ into the world. In the first centuries Satan used persecution; then he introduced false doctrines concerning Jesus Christ. In the Middle Ages he used the lure of power and riches to steer church leaders away from the Gospel. When the Reformation began, almost everyone involved agreed that the Bible is the Word of God. All the various parties used the Bible to establish their claims. But in the last few centuries Satan has gone back to the method he used in the Garden of Eden, trying to cast doubt on what God really said.

As part of that strategy Satan has come up with many different objections against the teaching that the written Scriptures are the very Word of God. One objection is this: How can the Holy Spirit be the Author of Scripture when it is obvious that the Bible is written in many different styles by many different human authors? It is true that the Bible contains different kinds of writing: narratives, poetry, wisdom literature, visions, etc. David wrote in his style; each of the prophets had his own style. Paul did not write in the same manner as John. Revelation does not sound at all like the Gospel of Mark.

Our response to this objection is that there is nothing to prevent the Holy Spirit, who is almighty God, from using different men with their different styles to present God's Word to mankind. God Himself was in control of the training of all these men that led them to write in the ways that they did. In the days of King Uzziah of Judah God wanted His Word to be spoken by **"Amos, who was among the sheepbreeders of Tekoa"** (Amos 1:1). When the priest of Bethel ordered Amos to stop preaching, Amos replied: **"I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I was a sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel'"** (Amos 7:14-15).

Enemies of God's Word have used the objection that there are variations in the reports of the same events given by different authors. For example, there are four different accounts of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, and each of them differs from the others. The fact is that if all four Gospels reported the events of Easter Sunday in the same way, they would be accused of collusion, that is, of agreeing together to tell the same lie in the same way. But the fact is that the four accounts are independent witnesses of the events of that day, and they do not contradict one another, but rather they supplement one another. Four people who witness the same event will not report what they saw in the same way. Each will report the details from his own perspective.

The New Testament contains several versions of Paul's conversion to Christ. In each case we find different expressions and different details. In the first account, written by Luke, we are told that Saul (Paul) **"fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' Then the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'"** (Acts 9:4-5). When Paul was at Jerusalem and recounted what had taken place, he added a detail that Luke had not mentioned, namely: **"Those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me"** (Acts 22:9). A few chapters later Paul again told the story of his conversion, this time to King Agrippa and other important officials in Caesarea. This time Paul added another detail. He said: **"When we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'"** (Acts 26:14). There are other additions and subtractions as well. Such variations certainly do not prove that

Paul was lying. In his letter to the Galatians Paul did not mention any of these details at all but said: **“When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood”** (Galatians 1:15-16).

It is true that there are a few cases when it seems as though one version contradicts another version. In most cases these alleged contradictions can be explained quite easily. In fact, in many cases there is more than one way to resolve the supposed contradiction. We may not be sure which solution is the correct one, but that fact that there are multiple solutions shows that there really is not contradiction. It is certainly not necessary on this account to call the Bible a book of lies or to say that it is full of errors of fact. There are books available that discuss these alleged contradictions and provide satisfactory explanations for anyone who is not determined to find fault with the Bible.

In times past it was claimed by many that certain prominent persons in Bible history are not mentioned in other history books, and that therefore these persons probably never existed. But over and over again it has happened that research (archaeological excavations, discoveries of historical records, deciphering of ancient languages) has upheld the accuracy of Bible history. For example, the account of Belshazzar’s feast in Daniel 5 was long considered not to be factual by many scholars, since the history books named Nabonidus as the last ruler of Babylon, not Belshazzar. But then records were unearthed that mention the name of Belshazzar and indicate that Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus and that in the last years of Nabonidus’ rule Belshazzar was a co-ruler. This new fact helped explain why Belshazzar promised Daniel that he would be the “third” ruler in the kingdom if he interpreted the handwriting on the wall. He would be third, because Belshazzar himself was only second in the kingdom.

Enemies of God’s Word, spurred on by Satan himself, have done their best to find errors in the Bible. There are some problems that we cannot explain fully, but our ignorance of a solution is hardly proof that the author is guilty of an error. There are many who claim, for example, that it is impossible for God to have created the universe and everything that is in it in only six days. Our respect for God’s Word should be such that we can respond in the words of Martin Luther: “If you cannot understand how it could have been done in six days, then grant the Holy Spirit the honor of being more learned than you. For you should deal with Scripture in such a way that you bear in mind that God Himself is saying what is recorded” (from Martin Luther’s lectures on the book of Genesis).

As we discuss the Bible, we should realize that we do not have the books of the Bible in their original form. What we have are copies – in most cases copies of copies. But the believers in Christ who copied the originals were very careful to copy accurately. Since we have so many copies of the Bible, both in Hebrew and Greek, as well as copies of early translations of the Bible into other languages and writings of the church fathers who quoted from the Bible, almost all of the words of our present Hebrew and Greek Bibles are without a doubt the exact original words that were written down by the prophets and apostles. In a few cases we cannot be absolutely sure of the original wording, but the variations in question are generally minor, such as differences in spelling. God has preserved His Word for us in such a way that no Bible doctrines are affected in any way through the very few variations that remain where we can’t be sure of the original wording. It remains true what the prophet Isaiah wrote many years ago: **“The word of our God stands forever”** (Isaiah 40:8).

Translations of the Bible are also the Word of God to the extent that the translations are faithful to the original text. Some translations are better than others. Those who know the Bible languages as well as their native languages should use their gifts to transmit the Word of God to those who use these native languages.

Questions

1. Why is Satan attacking the verbal inspiration of the Bible?
2. Have you heard any of these arguments against verbal inspiration? If so, which ones?
3. Why do differences in various accounts of the same event not prove that the event did not happen?
4. Read what happened on Easter Sunday in all four Gospels. List some of the differences in these accounts.
5. If there are any differences in these accounts that you cannot explain, please list them, and we shall study them further.
6. Why can we be sure that we still have the Word of God today?