



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 17.5 – The Doctrine of Holy Scriptures

The Clarity of the Scriptures

The Holy Spirit uses the Scripture to clearly present the one and only way to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: **“From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”** (2 Timothy 3:15). The Scriptures have the ability to make us wise with respect to eternal salvation. The apostle Peter called **“the prophetic word ... a light that shines in a dark place”** (2 Peter 1:19). **“His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness”** (2 Peter 1:3).

David wrote in Psalm 19: **“The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; ... the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes”** (Psalm 19:7-8). The source of this light is God Himself, and God speaks to us in such a way in Holy Scriptures that we are enlightened; we are made wise in the things that God wants us to know. In this sense we speak of the clarity or perspicuity of Scripture. God’s Word is not vague or ambiguous about the way of salvation. The psalmist says: **“Through Your precepts I get understanding; ... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. ... The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple”** (Psalm 119:104-105, 130).

Since by nature we are flesh born of flesh (Ephesians 2:1-10), we cannot understand what God is telling us in the Scriptures until God opens our eyes. But it is the Scripture that God uses to enlighten us. After we are brought to faith in Christ, we need to keep on praying with the psalmist: **“Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law”** (Psalm 119:18). The natural man cannot understand God’s teachings; they are foolishness to him, as Paul says: **“The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”** (1 Corinthians 2:14). The flesh in us continues to resist the words of God, but the only way this resistance can be broken and kept in check is by the Holy Spirit’s Word. Jesus said to the Sadducees, who denied the teaching of bodily resurrection: **“You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God”** (Matthew 22:29). Even disciples of Jesus like Cleopas and his friend heard this rebuke from Jesus: **“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!”** (Luke 24:25). But Jesus then proceeded to enlighten them through a study of Scriptures. **“Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself”** (Luke 24:27).

When we speak of the clarity of Scriptures, we do not mean that all passages in Scripture are equally clear. The apostle Peter told his readers that there were some things in the letters of the apostle Paul that were **“hard to understand”**. These are Peter’s words: **“Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures”** (2 Peter 3:15-16).

The man from Ethiopia on the road from Jerusalem did not understand the meaning of Isaiah 53. **“Sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.”** By the Spirit’s direction, **“Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’”** (Acts 8:28-31). **“Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him”** (Acts 8:35). To this day God provides teachers

and evangelists like Philip to explain what the Bible means. Lydia, the seller of purple dye, listened to Paul by a riverside in Philippi, and **“The LORD opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul”** (Acts 16:14). But no doubt there are times when the Holy Spirit uses the written Scripture to enlighten its readers even without a human guide. **“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”** (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Conversion takes place in an instant. But from that instant, growth in understanding and spiritual knowledge are to continue until our dying day. The apostle Peter encourages us: **“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”** (2 Peter 3:18). Peter also tells us how we grow. He says: **“As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby”** (1 Peter 2:2). Even as there is an increasing clarity in God’s revelations throughout the Old Testament and from the Old Testament to the New Testament, even so as individual Christians we grow in our understanding of Scripture by continued use and application of what God has revealed to us. The Bible passages that once were obscure to us become clearer as we compare these difficult passages with others that are clearer. Martin Luther once said: “Some passages in Scripture are obscure but they teach nothing else than what in other places is set forth in clear and lucid passages” (St. Louis Edition, V, p. 334). For example, the visions in Revelation and Daniel become clearer and more meaningful as we become better acquainted with the rest of the teachings of the Bible. Our Lord wants us to follow the example of the Berean Jews, who **“searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so”** (Acts 17:11).

Total clarity will not come in this life, for now **“we walk by faith, not by sight”** (2 Corinthians 5:7). **“Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known”** (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Questions

1. What is meant by the clarity of Scripture?
2. Who works through the Scriptures to give us light?
3. Which persons remain in the dark when they read the Bible?
4. Are there some Bible passages that are clearer than others? Explain your answer.
5. What did the apostle Peter say about the letters of Paul?
6. How is it that we can grow in our understanding of Scripture?
7. What kind of clarity will we enjoy in heaven?