



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 17.6 – The Doctrine of Holy Scriptures

The Working of the Scriptures

The Holy Spirit is at work whenever the Holy Scriptures are read, spoken, or discussed. The words of Holy Scripture work on man's heart, intellect, and will just like ordinary speech, but at the same time the Holy Spirit is working, where and when He wills, with a supernatural power to accomplish what only God can do: the creation and strengthening of faith in Jesus Christ. Paul says that through "**the word of faith which we preach**" the human heart is moved to believe in Jesus Christ "**unto righteousness**" (Romans 10:8-10). When the human heart hears about God's love that sent His Son into the world so that we may not perish (John 3:16), the Holy Spirit uses that message to bring about faith in the hearer.

But it is also possible for the human heart to resist the attempts of the Holy Spirit to create faith in Jesus through the use of Holy Scripture. The apostle Paul recognized that some would resist the Gospel he preached, even though his aim was to save (or win) all persons to whom he spoke. He told the Corinthians: "**I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some**" (1 Corinthians 9:22). "**Some**", he says, not all. The letter to the Hebrews says: "**The gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it**" (Hebrews 4:2). Paul also wrote about those that "**did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved**" (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

But in every case where a person does come to faith in Jesus Christ, it is the Holy Spirit who has worked this miracle through the Word of God, that is, the Holy Scriptures. The author of Psalm 119 extols the power of the Word to affect the human heart. Here are some examples: "**I will run the course of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart**" (Psalm 119:32). "**The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver**" (Psalm 119:72). Is it not a miracle that the human heart can become more attached to God's Word than to money and the things that money can buy? "**How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!**" (Psalm 119:103). "**The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart**" (Psalm 19:8).

The Holy Spirit through Holy Scriptures also goes to work on the human intellect (or reasoning power). Before the working of the Holy Spirit the Gospel is foolishness to the natural man, but then God's Word is "**as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts**" (2 Peter 1:19). The Holy Spirit through Scripture makes us "**wise for salvation**" (2 Timothy 3:15). We begin to agree with God's wisdom, so that we accept His "**doctrine**", His "**reproof**", His "**correction**", and His "**instruction in righteousness**" (2 Timothy 3:16).

"**The god of this age (the devil) has blinded**" the "**minds**" of those "**who do not believe**", but the Holy Spirit works through the light of Holy Scripture to bring about an understanding of a new kind of knowledge. "**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 4:4-6). It is the desire of the Holy Spirit to strengthen our faith through the Holy Scriptures so that we may "**be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge**" (Ephesians 3:16-19). The Holy Spirit is at work through the Scriptures to bring it about that we "**may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding: ... increasing in the knowledge of God**" (Colossians 1:9-10).

The risen Christ Himself worked on His disciples with “**the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms**” on Easter Sunday evening and the forty days that followed. “**He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures**” (Luke 24:44-45). The psalmist confessed: “**Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way**” (Psalm 119:104). He said: “**The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple**” (Psalm 119:130).

The Holy Spirit through Scripture also changes the human will, so that we begin to want to do things we did not want to do before. After describing in full detail “**the mercies of God**” in the first eleven chapters of his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul begins chapter twelve with an appeal to do things differently now based on these mercies of God. “**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God**” (Romans 12:1-2). In our natural state we are worldly, and we conform to the world, but the Holy Spirit through the Scriptural presentation of the mercies of God changes all that. He changes our emotions through the Gospel so that we love Him who first loved us. He changes our minds so that our thinking about God and the world and our place in it is totally altered, and by changing our hearts and our minds, He begins to change our wills, so that we begin to want to please Him by doing those things that agree with His will. The Holy Spirit accomplishes all of this through the Holy Scriptures.

One way in which we are changed is that the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures convinces us that we want to bring the Gospel that has changed us to others so that they also may be changed. We become “**ambassadors for Christ**”, pleading for others to accept God’s reconciliation through Christ. We want to become “**workers together with Him**” and plead with others “**not to receive the grace of God in vain**” (2 Corinthians 5:20 – 6:1). We also begin to realize that we need “**to walk worthy of the calling**” with which we were called (Ephesians 4:1).

The fact is that “**the word of God ... effectively works**” in those whom the Holy Spirit has brought to faith through the Scriptures (1 Thessalonians 2:13). This means that as believers in Christ we are now concerned about how we “**ought to walk and to please God**.” We begin to act differently now because we know that “**this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality**” (1 Thessalonians 4:1-3). And we “**are taught by God to love one another**” (1 Thessalonians 4:9).

No human word could create the changes that are worked by the Holy Spirit through the Holy Scriptures. Those who believe in Jesus are born (reborn) “**not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God**” (John 1:13). “**The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God**”, but after the Holy Spirit works in us through the Scriptures, “**we have the mind of Christ**” (1 Corinthians 2:14-16). In fact “**no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit**” (1 Corinthians 12:3). The apostle John tells us that “**whatever is born of God overcomes the world**” (1 John 5:4), which would certainly be impossible by our own efforts.

Thus, the Word of God in Holy Scripture is God’s power and the instrument of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: “**It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life**” (John 6:63). The Spirit gives life through words, namely God’s words, the words of Holy Scripture. “**The gospel of Christ ... is the power of God to salvation**” (Romans 1:16). “**It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe**” (1 Corinthians 1:21). In our continuing struggles against the forces of evil, we need to “**take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**” (Ephesians 6:17). “**The word of God is living and powerful**” (Hebrews 4:12). “**Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth**” (James 1:18). “**The implanted word ... is able to save your souls**” (James 1:21).

As the apostle Paul went to various cities with the Gospel of Christ, and people saw how this Gospel of Jesus attracted followers and was accompanied by powerful miracles, there were some unbelievers

who thought that the name of Jesus was some kind of magic charm that they could use to do miracles also. The book of Acts tells us what happened in the case of seven men who attempted this. We read: **“Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.’ Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?’ Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded”** (Acts 19:13-16). The power of the Gospel is not magical, but it is the power of the divine truth. We cannot make it do what we want it to do, for our own purposes. But the Holy Spirit will work with it and through it to accomplish His purposes, when and where He wills.

There are those who believe and teach that since the Holy Spirit is God, He does not need the Gospel to accomplish His purposes. But the fact is that the Holy Spirit has chosen to do His work through the Gospel, and we should not expect Him to work in any other way. **“It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”** (1 Corinthians 1:21). **“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17). **“My Word ... shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it”** (Isaiah 55:11). **“Is not My word like a fire, ... and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”** (Jeremiah 23:29). **“The word of God is living and powerful”** (Hebrews 4:12).

Questions

1. How does the Holy Spirit work through the Word to change our hearts?
2. How does the Holy Spirit work through the Word to change our minds?
3. How does the Holy Spirit work through the Word to change our wills?
4. Why do those who come to faith in Christ bring God's Word to others?
5. What changes in our lives are brought about by the Gospel of Christ?
6. Why is the work of the Holy Spirit absolutely necessary in our lives?
7. What does the incident recorded in Acts 19:13-16 teach us about God?
8. How has the Holy Spirit chosen to do His work?
9. What should we do so that the Holy Spirit can use us in His work?