



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Chapter 17 The Doctrine of Holy Scriptures



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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?



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A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 17.1.1 – The Doctrine of Holy Scriptures

The Old Testament Is God's Word

The Bible, as we know it today, is made up of two parts: the Old Testament, written in the Hebrew language in the years before Jesus was born (with a few passages in Aramaic); and the New Testament, written in the Greek language after Jesus was born.

For many years of world history there was no written Word of God; there was no Bible. God spoke either directly or through prophets, and this Word was passed down orally from generation to generation. The first one to put God's Word into written words was Moses, the prophet God chose to lead the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. God guided Moses in the writing of the first five books of the Old Testament. These books are known as the Pentateuch. As the years passed, God sent other prophets to reveal His Word in writing to His people. The last prophet God sent was Malachi, and after him there was no written revelation from God until after Jesus was born.

Jesus Himself testified that Moses was the man God chose to begin the writing of Holy Scripture. He said to His enemies: **"There is one who accuses you – Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"** (John 5:45-47).

The Bible that Jesus knew was this Hebrew Old Testament (and a Greek translation) with its three divisions. After His resurrection Jesus said to His followers: **"These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me"** (Luke 24:44). The three divisions were the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. The Bible that Jesus accepted and approved of was this book of three divisions, which is our present Old Testament. In this book God made many promises. Jesus said that all the things foretold about Him in the Old Testament will be fulfilled. He mentioned two things in particular: **"Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day"** (Luke 24:46). Jesus' death and resurrection were already foretold in the Old Testament.

The Gospels of the New Testament, written by Jesus' apostles and their associates, point out in numerous places that what Jesus was saying and doing was fulfilling the Old Testament Scriptures. The first such mention is typical of the many others. We read in the Gospel of Matthew, in connection with the birth of Jesus to the virgin Mary: **"All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel'"** (Matthew 1:22-23). Notice the claim that is made here, that it was the Lord Himself who spoke the prophecy of Jesus' virgin birth; the Lord spoke these words through the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14).

In His teaching Jesus often referred to the Old Testament as the Word of God and as the final authority in all matters of which it spoke. For example, when the Pharisees asked Him a question about marriage and divorce, Jesus responded by saying: **"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female?"** (Matthew 19:4). Jesus was referring to the first book of the five books of Moses, the book of Genesis. It is of interest that in His teaching Jesus referred to many miraculous incidents that many Bible readers today dismiss as untrustworthy. Jesus accepted the accounts of

creation, the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the bronze serpent on a pole, the healing of the leper Naaman, and the account of Jonah in the belly of a great fish. Jesus accepted all the Old Testament accounts as factual and true, and we should accept them as true also. In fact, in His parable of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), Jesus pointed out that there is no testimony more powerful than God's Word in its ability to bring people to faith in God's plan of salvation. He said: **"They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them"** (Luke 16:29), and then added: **"If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead"** (Luke 16:31).

In His arguments with the Jewish leaders Jesus often appealed to the Old Testament. For example, in one such argument Jesus quoted Psalm 82:6 and then said: **"And the Scripture cannot be broken"** (John 10:35). What God says in His Word stands impregnable, and it cannot be altered in any way. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, He withstood Satan's attacks by saying over and over again: **"It is written ..."** (Luke 4:4). There can be no doubt that Jesus considered the Old Testament to be the Word of God.

Jesus' apostles followed their Master in accepting the Old Testament as the Word of God. In the early days of the church in Jerusalem, the believers prayed: **"Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said"** a verse from Psalm 2 (Acts 4:24-25). Notice that they regarded a psalm written by David as an utterance of their Lord and God. The apostle Paul quoted a passage from the book of Isaiah when he was in Rome and told his listeners: **"The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers"** (Acts 28:25).

In his letter to the Romans Paul said: **"God ... promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord"** (Romans 1:2-3). The prophets spoke and wrote the words, but it was God Himself speaking through them. Paul pointed out the special advantage given to the Jewish people, saying: **"What advantage then has the Jew? ... Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God"** (Romans 3:1-2). The letter to the Hebrews begins with this assertion: **"God, who at various times and in various way spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son"** (Hebrews 1:1-2). Later the same writer attributes Psalm 95 to the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 3:7: **"The Holy Spirit says"**).

There are two New Testament passages in particular that ascribe not only individual sayings to the Holy Spirit, but the entire Old Testament Scriptures. The apostle Peter wrote: **"Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"** (2 Peter 1:21). The prophetic Word is sure because it is the Word of God Himself. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: **"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"** (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The word translated "given by inspiration" could more literally be translated "God-breathed". The thought is that the words of Scripture came out from God; He is their true Author. The prophets were the Lord's mouthpieces. Notice that he says **"all Scripture"**, not just certain parts of it.

Questions

1. What are the two main divisions of the Bible?
2. In what languages were they originally written?
3. How did God speak to His people before the first Bible book was written?
4. Who was the first prophet to write down the words God gave him?
5. What are the three divisions of the Old Testament listed by Jesus?
6. How did Jesus show He accepted the Old Testament as God's Word?
7. How did Jesus' apostles show they accepted the Old Testament as God's Word?
8. What special advantage did the Jewish people have over other peoples?
9. What do we mean when we speak of the inspiration of the Old Testament?



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A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 17.1.2 – The Doctrine of Holy Scriptures

The New Testament Is God's Word

The apostle Peter clearly taught that the Old Testament writers were moved (carried along) by the Holy Spirit so that what they wrote down in their writings was in truth the Word of God. What about the New Testament, which was written in the Greek language by Jesus' apostles and their companions? Is the New Testament also the Word of God? Is the New Testament also the work of the Holy Spirit speaking through the apostles as He spoke through the Old Testament prophets? Let us look at the record.

Jesus Himself did not write any books. There is only one passage that speaks of Jesus writing anything, and that passage does not tell us what He wrote. When the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus what should be done to a woman caught in the act of adultery, **"Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger"** (John 8:6). After He responded to their question, **"again He stooped down and wrote on the ground"** (John 8:8).

Nevertheless, we have a written record of what Jesus said, for Jesus said to His apostles: **"He who hears you hears Me"** (Luke 10:16). On the night of His arrest Jesus assured His apostles: **"These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But 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 14:25-26). The same Holy Spirit who spoke through the Old Testament prophets would give them Jesus' words and teachings to write down. Jesus said on that same night: **"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, 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 16:12-14). The words of truth that the Holy Spirit would give Jesus' apostles would be words not coming from the Holy Spirit alone, but from the Father and the Son as well. In other words, the apostles would be speaking and writing the very Word of God, as given to them by the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul claimed that his teaching was the Word of God, for he wrote to the Corinthians: **"We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches"** (1 Corinthians 2:12-13). The very words used by Paul in his teaching and writing were given to him by the Holy Spirit. For this reason he was able to say: **"The things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord"** (1 Corinthians 14:37). Paul did not manufacture the Gospel of Christ out of his own mind. He said: **"I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the (Old Testament) Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the (Old Testament) Scriptures"** (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Paul received his teaching from God, and he passed it on to others exactly as he had received it.

In His prayer to His heavenly Father on the night of His arrest, Jesus referred to the words that God gave to Him, saying: **"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. ... They have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them"** (John 17:6-8). Jesus' words are the words of God, and these same words from God were given to Jesus' apostles. Again Jesus

prayed to His Father: **"I have given them Your word. ... Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ... I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word"** (John 17:14-20). Jesus gave the words of God to His apostles. These apostles would speak these words in the world, and people would come to believe in Jesus through these same words. What words did the apostles speak, and what words did the apostles write? Jesus gave them these words, and these words are the words the Father gave to Jesus. They are the words of God.

That is why the apostle Paul told the Ephesians that Christ's Church was **"built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone"** (Ephesians 2:20). Notice that the apostles are given the same standing as the prophets, since both prophets and apostles were used by God to bring the Word of God into the world. Christ's believers, His Church, is sustained by the Word of God transmitted to them by God's prophets and Jesus' apostles.

In his first letter the apostle Peter says it was the Holy Spirit who worked through Jesus' apostles as well as through the prophets of old: **"Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven"** (1 Peter 1:10-12). The Old Testament prophets gave true prophecies because the Holy Spirit was in them. So also the apostles who brought the Gospel of Christ to Peter's readers were impelled by the same Holy Spirit.

By the time Peter wrote his second letter the apostle Paul had probably written most of his New Testament letters. Notice that Peter called these letters of Paul "Scripture" and considered them equal to the Old Testament Scriptures: **"Consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation – as also 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). Peter regarded the letters of Paul as Scriptures.

The apostle Paul quoted the words of his fellow-worker Luke as Scripture. In his first letter to Timothy Paul wrote: **"For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages'"** (1 Timothy 5:18). The first passage quoted by Paul is from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 25:4). But the second quotation is not from the Old Testament Scriptures at all but from the New Testament Gospel of Luke (Luke 10:7). To Paul Scripture includes both Old Testament books and what the Holy Spirit was giving the apostles and their associates in the New Testament. Thus, the New Testament is also Scripture – the very Word of God.

Questions

1. What did Jesus Himself write?
2. What promise did Jesus give to His apostles?
3. What did the apostle Paul claim for the words he spoke and wrote?
4. How did Jesus manifest the name of God to His apostles?
5. How would the Holy Spirit use the word taught by Jesus' apostles?
6. What is meant by the foundation of the apostles and prophets?
7. Show that the Holy Spirit was at work in writing both Old and New Testaments.
8. What did Peter think of the letters of Paul?
9. What did Paul think of the Gospel of Luke?
10. Why is the New Testament just as much the Word of God as the Old Testament?



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A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 17.2 – The Doctrine of Holy Scriptures

The Verbal Inspiration of the Scriptures

The men who wrote the books of the Bible (Old Testament and New Testament) did not decide on their own to write the books they wrote. God chose them and God called them to their tasks of revealing God's truth in human words. Moses was the author of the first five books of the Old Testament. Not only did God call Moses to lead His people out of their slavery in Egypt, but **"the LORD said to Moses, 'Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua'"** (Exodus 17:14). **"The LORD said to Moses, 'Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel'"** (Exodus 34:27).

The prophet Jeremiah received a similar order from the Lord. **"Thus speaks the LORD God of Israel, saying: 'Write in a book for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you'"** (Jeremiah 30:2). So also **"the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest"** (Ezekiel 1:3). Many times the prophets introduced their messages by saying: **"Thus says the LORD"** (Isaiah 66:12; Jeremiah 4:27; Ezekiel 12:10; Amos 2:1; many other places). The apostle Peter maintained that all the writers of the Old Testament **"spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"** (2 Peter 1:21). The word translated "moved" means to be carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus personally chose twelve disciples to be His apostles: **"When it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles"** (Luke 6:13). To these same apostles Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth and give them the words that they were to speak and write (John 14-16). The apostle Paul insisted that he also was **"called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God"** (Romans 1:1), **"called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God"** (1 Corinthians 1:1). Speaking for himself and his fellow-workers, Paul said: **"God ... has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us"** (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). Jesus appeared to His apostle John when he was in exile on the island of Patmos and told him: **"What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches"** (Revelation 1:11). The Lord also stopped John from writing down certain things John had seen. At one point John writes: **"I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them'"** (Revelation 10:4).

The writers of Holy Scripture wrote the words that God wanted them to write. This does not mean that they themselves were not involved in what they wrote. They were not simply secretaries taking dictation. No, they themselves thought about what they were going to write. They did research, they conducted interviews with eyewitnesses at times, they quoted earlier prophets, they gathered information from various sources, they meditated on what they were writing as they were writing it – all of this under the guidance and control of the Holy Spirit. The result is that the Bible has human authors who were involved in what they wrote, but at the same time the very words they wrote were given to them by the Holy Spirit, so that we can say that the Bible as a whole and in all of its parts is the book of the Holy Spirit. God is the true author of Holy Scripture.

The psalmists were undergoing intense experiences as they wrote their psalms, and yet the Holy Spirit guided their words also, so that we can call the book of psalms a prayer book written by the Holy Spirit Himself. In his last words David said: **"The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue"** (2 Samuel 23:2). In the book of Ecclesiastes Solomon wrote about his experiences and his

growth in understanding. He said: **"I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all"** (Ecclesiastes 9:1). Of his own writing he said: **"The Preacher sought to find acceptable words: and what was written was upright – words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd"** (Ecclesiastes 12:10-11). The Shepherd is God Himself.

The prophet Daniel in Babylon studied the prophecies of the prophet Jeremiah in Jerusalem, and this led him to pray the great prayer of repentance recorded in Daniel 9. For he writes: **"In the first year of his reign (the reign of Darius of the Medes), I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem"** (Daniel 9:2). Jeremiah prophesied that the Babylonian captivity would last for 70 years, and based on that prophecy Daniel prayed that God would bring the captivity to an end in accordance with His promise. At a later time the prophet Zechariah referred to earlier prophets when he wrote: **"They (the Israelites) made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets"** (Zechariah 7:12). The source of these prophecies was the Lord God Himself. The Holy Spirit used the prophets as His spokesmen. As Peter said to the 120 believers waiting for the Holy Spirit, **"This Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas"** (Acts 1:16). Peter was referring to Psalms 69 and 109. Notice that it was David's mouth that spoke these psalms, but at the same time it was the Holy Spirit speaking through David. Thus, the Bible has human authors, but at the same time it has a divine Author.

The fact that the Holy Spirit gave the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles the very words they used in the writing of the Holy Scriptures is called verbal inspiration, or word-for-word inspiration. The term "verbal inspiration" stresses the point that God did not just choose the writers of Scripture and let them use whatever words they wanted. God did not just give the writers of Scripture the general content of their message. God gave them the very words in Hebrew and Greek that they wrote down and that have been transmitted to us even to this very day.

The term "inspiration" comes to us from the usual translation of Paul's words 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. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"** (2 Timothy 3:15-17). The word "inspiration" is not the most accurate translation of the Greek word *theopneustos* θεόπνευστος. A more accurate translation would be this: **"All Scripture is God-breathed"**, that is, breathed out by God. Inspiration implies that God breathed into the writers the words that they wrote, but "God-breathed" means that God breathed out the words that were used. The Bible is the breath of God. The words of the Bible came out from God.

Since every word comes from God, we do not dare to alter or change any word that God has given us, nor should we change any letter of any word. Jesus said: **"Assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled"** (Matthew 5:18). Jots (iotas) are the smallest letters and tittles (dots) are not even whole letters but only parts of letters, and yet they must all stand unchanged as long as this earth remains. The apostle Paul made the same point in his letter to the Galatians when he stressed the fact that God used the singular **"Seed"** rather than the plural seeds when He gave the promise of the Savior to Abraham. **"He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ"** (Galatians 3:16).

In one of His arguments with the Jewish leaders Jesus quoted one verse from Psalm 82 and referred to one word in this verse to make His point. They were accusing Him of blasphemy because He implied that He was the Son of God. This is the unusual way in which Jesus responded to their charge: **"Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, 'I said, 'You are gods''? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of**

God”?” (John 10:34-36). Jesus’ defense centers on that one word **“gods”** that occurs in Psalm 82:6. Jesus was saying that the Bible applies the word **“gods”** to persons to whom the word of God came. How, then, can He be guilty of blasphemy if He applies the word **“God”** to Himself, since He is much more God than those persons to whom the word of God came, since He is the One whom God sent into the world? Notice that Jesus was using just one word from Psalm 82 as the basis for His argument, and of that one word He said: **“The Scripture cannot be broken.”** In other words, that word from the Bible must stand, since it is Scripture that cannot be altered, changed, or corrected. That word stands as the impregnable and indestructible word of God.

In his first letter to the Corinthians the apostle Paul assured his readers that the words that he spoke (and wrote) were not his own words but the words of the Holy Spirit: **“The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches”** (1 Corinthians 2:10-13). We cannot know what other people are thinking in their hearts unless they tell us. So also we cannot know what God is thinking unless He tells us. The Holy Spirit knows what God is thinking because He is God. Paul got his teaching about God from the Holy Spirit, and this is what he was teaching. Notice that the very words Paul used in his teaching came from the Holy Spirit. This is why we call it verbal inspiration, that is, word-for-word breathed out by God.

We who are Christians are brought to faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin by the Holy Spirit working through the Scriptures. After the Holy Spirit has brought us to faith in Christ through the Scriptures, He uses those same Scriptures to convince us that these Scriptures are the very Word of God, breathed out by God and completely trustworthy in everything that they tell us.

This is the way it was for the Thessalonian Christians. Paul wrote to them afterwards: **“Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance”** (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Paul and Silas preached the Gospel of Christ, and the Holy Spirit worked through that Gospel to bring the Thessalonians to faith in Christ. The Gospel proved that it was not just a powerless word, but the Holy Spirit’s Word of power that converted them. At the same time the Thessalonians became convinced that the Word that was brought to them was not a merely human word but the very Word of God. Paul wrote to them: **“We also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe”** (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The Bible proves that it is the Word of God by what it accomplishes in the hearts of men.

The entire 119th Psalm is devoted to the Word of God – what it is and what it accomplishes. Listen to these few verses from this psalm. **“Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth”** (Psalm 119:43). **“My soul faints for Your salvation, but I hope in Your word”** (Psalm 119:81). **“I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life”** (Psalm 119:93). **“How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”** (Psalm 119:103-105).

After the Holy Spirit has convinced us that the Bible is God’s Word, we find that there are other facts that corroborate this conviction. The Bible has proved itself accurate in matters of history, geography, and chronology. Many times doubters and detractors of the Bible have been proved wrong by archaeological discoveries. One of the most amazing things about the Bible are its prophecies of future events which have been fulfilled later, sometimes almost immediately and sometimes many hundreds of years later, as is the case with the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus, the Christ. Besides that, the Bible has wielded a greater influence for good than any other book, and it has changed the lives of many persons from countries in every part of the world.

We need to remember that God chose to give us the Holy Scriptures in written form, using two ancient languages: Hebrew for the Old Testament and Greek for the New Testament. It is important for the understanding and teaching of Scripture that some Christians in every group of Christians become familiar with these Bible languages so that they can read the Holy Scriptures in the original languages in which they were written. Only those who know the original languages should attempt to translate the Bible into other languages to ensure that the translation is as accurate as possible.

Nevertheless, good translations are also the Word of God, and we should accept such a translation as the Word of God. But if there is a question about the meaning of some word or phrase, we must always go back to the original language as the authority to determine what God actually said. Pastors and teachers of God's Word should try to become as familiar as they can with the original languages so that they can be confident that they are correctly teaching the very Word of God.

God's Word will endure forever. It is written: **"Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven"** (Psalm 119:89). Jesus Himself said: **"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away"** (Matthew 24:35). This echoes the words of the prophet Isaiah: **"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever"** (Isaiah 40:8). From time to time God's enemies have attempted to get rid of the writings of the Bible, but they have never managed to succeed. Those who have accepted the Bible as God's Word have continued to make copies of it, at first by hand and in our time with printing presses and copy machines of all kinds. When King Jehoiakim of Judah tossed the writings of the prophet Jeremiah into the fire, God saw to it that Jeremiah's secretary Baruch would be able to write them down again (Jeremiah 36:27-28). The apostle Peter wrote that we who believe in Jesus have **"been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever"** (1 Peter 1:23).

Questions

1. Name some of the persons God chose to write the books of the Bible.
2. Why do we say that the writers of the Bible were not simply secretaries taking dictation from God?
3. Why do we say that the Holy Spirit is the true author of the Holy Scriptures?
4. What is meant by the term "verbal inspiration"?
5. What is the meaning of the Greek word *"theopneustos"*?
6. How did Jesus show He accepted the Old Testament as God's Word?
7. What did the apostle Paul claim for the words he spoke and wrote?
8. How did the Thessalonians receive the teaching of the apostles?
9. What makes the Bible different from every other book in the world?
10. How has archaeology corroborated the teachings of the Bible?
11. How has prophecy shown that God is the true author of Holy Scripture?
12. Why is it important for church leaders to learn Hebrew and Greek?
13. When can we regard Bible translations as the Word of God?



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?



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A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 17.3 – The Doctrine of Holy Scriptures

The Authority of the Scriptures

Since there is no higher authority than God, and it is God who breathed out the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16), which are therefore **“the oracles of God”** (Romans 3:2), the Scriptures are the final authority on all matters of which they speak. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: **“If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing”** (1 Timothy 6:3-4). Those who insist on the authority of the Scriptures are sometimes considered stubborn, proud, and arrogant, but the truth is just the opposite. Those who contradict the Scriptures are the ones who are proud and stubbornly ignorant.

Since **“all Scripture”** (2 Timothy 3:16) has been breathed out by God, the apostle Paul assured the Christians in Rome: **“Whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”** (Romans 15:4). When the Jews in Berea were confronted with the teaching of the traveling missionary Paul in their town, they verified his teaching on the basis of the highest authority they knew: they **“searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so”** (Acts 17:11), and for this reason Luke commends them for being **“fair-minded”**.

Moses in his day insisted that the Word of God revealed to him should not be put on the same level as other words or other writings but should be considered the unalterable Word of God. **“You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you”** (Deuteronomy 4:2). Those who claimed to be prophets but did not adhere to the authority of God’s Word were not to be listened to. Moses said, **“You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams”** (Deuteronomy 13:3). **“You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him”** (Deuteronomy 13:4). The prophet Isaiah recognized the authority of the Scriptures, saying: **“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them”** (Isaiah 8:20).

Jesus Himself considered the Bible the final authority, for in disputing with the Jewish leaders He quoted Psalm 82:6 and then said: **“And the Scripture cannot be broken”** (John 10:35). There is no higher authority than Scripture. When the Scripture answers a question, the case is closed. No further inquiry is necessary. If anyone argues against clear Scripture, he is arguing against God, and that can never be right or good. Since Holy Scripture is the infallible (inerrant) Word of God, it has divine authority to teach us and to stand in judgment over all other teachings. All the words in Scripture are God’s words. Therefore to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve and disobey God Himself.

Many students and readers of the Bible in our day make the mistake of judging Scripture and what it says on the basis of some other authority they consider higher than the Bible. For example, scientific theories of evolution are considered more trustworthy than Scripture, and so Scripture is interpreted in the light of evolution, rather than the other way around. Theories of evolution must be judged by Scripture, which is a higher authority, and when they are judged by Scripture, they must be declared false. In the same way archaeological findings need to be judged by the Scriptures and interpreted in the light of Scripture. We dare not alter (change) Scripture on the basis of findings outside of Scripture.

The Holy Spirit must have the last word, the final word. **“It is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth”** (1 John 5:6). **“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. ... He who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son”** (1 John 5:9-10).

The Roman Catholic Church claims that their Church, guided by the pope, is a higher authority than the Scriptures. In fact, the official Roman Catholic teaching is that the pope is infallible in his teaching, and he is the final authority on how Scripture must be understood. Similarly, most geologists interpret Genesis 1 in the light of their science. Marxists interpret Scripture in the light of their philosophy, feminists in the light of their presuppositions, and in all such cases the tenets of their group become a higher authority than Scripture.

But since there is no higher authority than God Himself, who speaks to us through the Scriptures, the only proper interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself. Passages that are hard to understand need to be interpreted based on clear passages. Parables, visions, dreams, and prophecies must be interpreted and understood in the light of clear passages of Scriptures. For example, the visions and dreams of books like Daniel and Revelation are not to be the basis for our understanding of the rest of the Scriptures. But rather we must interpret these visions and dreams in the light of plain, straightforward passages.

For example, Revelation 20:5 speaks of **“the first resurrection”**. Based on this statement some Bible teachers claim that there are two bodily resurrections from the dead, separated by a thousand years. But this understanding of Revelation must be false because Jesus plainly said: **“The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth”** (John 5:28-29). According to Jesus, there will be only one final bodily resurrection, and the passage in Revelation 20 must not be understood in a way that contradicts this plain teaching of Scripture. This is the way that Scripture interprets Scripture.

Many early Christian leaders and teachers introduced faulty ways of studying Scriptures. Instead of accepting the plain meaning of Scripture, according to the actual words and the grammar, they taught that there is a four-fold way of understanding the Bible: literal, allegorical, moral, and analogical. Thus, each passage had four separate meanings. In his early years as a Bible teacher Martin Luther also followed this four-fold way of teaching. But later he realized that by this method the Scripture could be twisted to mean almost anything. He then insisted that each Scripture passage has only one intended meaning, not many different possible meanings. Otherwise it could not be **“a light that shines in a dark place”** (2 Peter 1:19).

Some Christians, in trying to determine what God wants them to do, misuse the Bible by opening up the Bible at random, blindly putting their finger on some passage on that page, and then claiming that that particular passage is God’s specific word to them for that day. To see how foolish and dangerous this method is, imagine someone pointing his finger on Matthew 27:5, where we read that Judas Iscariot **“departed, and went and hanged himself.”** Imagine that same person in his next search for guidance opening his Bible at the Gospel of Luke and finding his finger on Luke 10:37: **“Go and do likewise.”** Would such a person be obeying God’s command by committing suicide? Of course not! The Bible must not be read as though it were a book of magic. The Bible is to be understood according to its context.

Questions

1. Why can we call the Bible the highest authority?
2. What good example did the Jews in Berea set when Paul came?
3. How did Jesus show that He accepted the authority of Scripture?
4. What is the highest authority in the Roman Catholic Church?
5. What is meant by the statement: "Scripture interprets itself"?
6. If you are aware of misuses of the Bible in your locale, mention them.
7. How are scientists tempted to understand the Scripture teachings?



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A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 17.4 – The Doctrine of Holy Scriptures

The Sufficiency of the Scriptures

Our gracious God wants all people to be saved. That is why He sent His Son into the world to atone for the sins of all. That is why He sent the Holy Spirit to Jesus' disciples. That is why He revealed the plan of salvation to the world through the Holy Scriptures. The Holy Spirit does His work in the world through the means of grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Nothing more is needed beyond what God has already given to us in the Scriptures.

In Jesus' parable of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus, the rich man in hell thought that having Lazarus come back from the dead and talk to his five living brothers would be the best way to save them from hell. But in the parable Abraham said to the rich man: **"They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them"** (Luke 16:29). When the rich man suggested that a man coming back from the dead would be more effective, Abraham replied: **"If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead"** (Luke 16:31).

What God has provided for us in the Old Testament and New Testament is sufficient for accomplishing what God wants to accomplish. Nothing needs to be changed; nothing needs to be added; nothing needs to be subtracted. We do not need additional Scriptures; we do not need additional visions or dreams; we do not need additional apostles or prophets to give us more than we already have. 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. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"** (2 Timothy 3:15-17). Notice that since Scripture is the Word of God, it is able to give us the wisdom we need for salvation. Since Scripture is the Word of God, it is profitable (useful) in many areas of our spiritual life. Since Scripture is the Word of God, those who have the Scriptures are thoroughly equipped for their Christian testimony and life. Having the Scriptures, we are complete and have no need for anything more.

As the last Gospel writer, John explained that much more could be said about Jesus than what is found in the Scriptures: **"There are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written"** (John 21:25). But John wrote what he did for this reason: **"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name"** (John 20:31). What we have is sufficient for this purpose. Paul wrote: **"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek"** (Romans 1:16).

From time to time God warned His people not to tamper with His revelation. Moses told the nation of Israel: **"You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you"** (Deuteronomy 4:2). Many years later the wise man Agur wrote: **"Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar"** (Proverbs 30:5-6).

The apostle Paul even pronounced a curse on anyone who dared to change the message he had been given, for he was **"an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the**

Father who raised Him from the dead)” (Galatians 1:1). These are Paul’s solemn words: “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ... If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8-9).

The last chapter of the last book in the New Testament gives us this very serious warning: **“If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life” (Revelation 22:18-19).**

What terrible damage has been done in the world by those who have ignored these solemn warnings! Through the years the Roman Catholic Church has added many teachings and has put them on the same level as Holy Scripture, even though many of these teachings clearly contradict what the Holy Spirit has written in the Scriptures. The Roman Catholic *Council of Trent* declared: “It receives and venerates with equal devotion and reverence all the books both of the Old and of the New Testament ... and also said traditions, both those pertaining to faith and those pertaining to morals, as dictated either orally by Christ or by the Holy Spirit and preserved by a continuous succession in the Catholic Church” (Fourth Session, First Decree). The Roman Catholic pope regards himself as an infallible teacher of the Church, and he has dared to declare as doctrines that must be believed the immaculate conception of Mary and her bodily assumption into heaven, although Holy Scripture does not even hint anywhere that such doctrines might be true.

Think of what damage has been done in the world by religious teachers such as Muhammad, who claimed that he received a revelation from the angel Gabriel, or Joseph Smith, who also claimed to be visited by an angel. In our age the charismatic movement has become strong throughout the world, and many of its leaders claim to be prophets who are receiving messages from God that deceive them and those who listen to them. It is necessary for us to repeat the words of Isaiah: **“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them”** (Isaiah 8:20). Many are the cult leaders who claim a revelation from God for their lies, and many are those who are deceived by them.

Questions

1. What is meant by the sufficiency of the Scriptures?
2. What did the rich man in Jesus' parable think would be more effective than the Scriptures?
3. For what purpose are the Scriptures sufficient?
4. Why did the apostle John write his Gospel?
5. What kind of persons did Paul curse in Galatians, chapter 1?
6. What does the Roman Catholic Church teach about their traditions?
7. Where did Mohammed and Joseph Smith claim to get their messages?
8. Where did their messages actually come from?
9. In what ways is the charismatic movement a threat to true Christianity?
10. If there are charismatic groups in your locale, what do they claim?



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?



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?

