

## The Gospel as the Basis for the Authority of the Bible

*For this much is beyond question,  
that all the Scriptures point to Christ alone.*

*It is not enough simply to look and see whether this is God's Word, whether God has said it; rather we must look and see to whom it has been spoken, whether it fits us. ... Thus what God said to Moses by way of the commandment is for the Jews only. But the gospel goes through the whole world in its entirety; it is offered to all creatures without exception. Therefore all the world should accept it, and accept it as if it had been offered to each person individually.*

*All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach and inculcate Christ. And that is the true test by which to judge all books, when we see whether or not they inculcate Christ. For all the Scriptures show us Christ, Romans 3:21; and St Paul will know nothing but Christ, 1 Corinthians 2:2. Whatever does not teach Christ is not yet apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it.*

*Martin Luther*

## Introduction

There is agreement on the handful of texts in the Bible which address same-sex sexual intercourse.

- Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13
- 1 Corinthians 6:9
- 1 Timothy 1:10
- Romans 1:18-32

All of these passages....are negative.

The Bible opposes sexual intercourse between two males.

ELCA "Confession of Faith" state:

*This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.*

**Discussion note:** What are minor concerns and major concerns of the Bible

## Introduction

1. No amount of interpretation can demonstrate that the passages do not really say what they seem to say.
2. The passages may even reflect our present understanding of homosexual orientation.

### **But...**

The Lutheran confessional documents will raise prior questions that will put these passages into an appropriate context and perspective.

- **How the Bible has authority at all?**
- **What kind of authority does it have?**

**ELCA** says: *the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*” are the *inspired Word of God.*”

**What does inspired mean?**

**On what basis do we claim inspiration for these documents?**

**How do these documents address us as “Word of God?”**

## No Confessional Doctrine of the Bible

The last of the Lutheran confessional writings asserts the authority of the Bible.

First we confess our adherence to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments, as to the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which alone is the one true guiding principle, according to which all teachers and teaching are to be judged and evaluated.

2 Timothy 3:16 is quoted twice – but only in regard to “all scripture is inspired by God.”

There is no article about the Bible in these confessions

There is no doctrine of the Bible.

Lutheran writings address the authority of the Bible in a discussion on the distinction between the law and the gospel.

Other traditions have quite specific articles on the Bible in their doctrinal documents from the days of the Reformation.

Roman Catholic – Reformed - Anglican

**No Confessional Doctrine of the Bible** (continued)

Martin Luther wrote prefaces to the apocryphal writings and included them in the 1534 German Bible.

Luther moves Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation to the end of the N.T.  
*Up to this point we have had the true and certain chief books of the N.T.*

**THE POINT IS FOR LUTHER...**

**The Bible has a center, the gospel about Jesus Christ.**

**The boundaries of the Bible are fluid.**

The Distinction Between the Law and the Gospel

**Article IV of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession** has the principle confessional statement on the Bible.

**It occurs in the defense of the article on justification.**

*All Scripture should be divided into these two main topics: the law and the promises. In some places it communicates the law. In other places it communicates the promise concerning Christ...and on account of him offers the forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life. ... Now when we refer to the "law" in this discussion we mean the commandments of the Decalogue, wherever they appear in the Scriptures.*

**The understanding of the Bible - has to do with justification.**

We are justified by faith in Christ and his promises, not by the works of the law.

**This means:**

We are to trust one Word of God, the promises, against the other Word of God, the law. Both the law and the promises cannot be trusted simultaneously – one has final authority.

One is a Christian because one trusts the promises against the law.

## The Distinction Between the Law and the Gospel (continued)

Initially, "law" can be defined as:

**Whatever imposes itself upon us through coercive power.**

So...the law as legislation functions through the coercive power of human government – by which behavior is controlled.

**It does not need the Bible to fulfill this function.**

The law as

**our encounter with mortality:**

Drives us to seek justification for our existence

**It does not need the Bible to fulfill this function.**

**BUT...**THE GOOD NEWS

(Jesus is the Messiah, the final judge, risen & beyond death, alone justifies us)

**Cannot be imagined without Biblical access to the historical events that constitute the "good news" of the Church.**

## The Distinction Between the Law and the Gospel (continued)

- Romans 4:25 Paul says Jesus was:
  - *"Handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification."*
  - A connection between our justification and the resurrection of Jesus.
  - *Have I any justification for Existence?* Mortality forces this question upon us.
- With death behind him, Jesus alone can justify us unconditionally ...Jesus' promises are not bound by death.
- The bible is the only documents that give us this trustworthy access to the history of Jesus and his resurrection – **source of the gospel & the church's confession of faith.**
- *The bible serves as the standard by which the church's proclamation of the gospel is judged – **norm of the gospel & of the churches confession of faith.***
  - **So,,the Lutheran approach to the authority of the Bible is characterized here:**
    - Only the gospel gives the Bible its true authority.
    - Only the Bible gives the gospel its normative content.

### The Word of God Has To Do With Jesus

- God
  - whatever we encounter as absolute, final, whatever has the last word
- Christian thinking about God and the Word of God
  - Begins with and is grounded in Jesus.
  - Jesus is the “absolute,” the “rock” on which our faith can be built (Matt. 7:24f)
  - The risen Jesus alone determines the way we must now think about God.
  - Jesus alone determines how we must receive and understand the Bible.
- The Christian “gospel”
  - **Jesus is the Messiah of Israel and the world, that Jesus is the crucified and risen Savior (Rom. 4:25), that Jesus’ cross and resurrection the Reign of God has come.**
    - This is the absolute Word of God on which Christian faith rests.
    - There is **no other absolute Word of God** –
      - NOT EVEN THE LAW OF GOD

### The Word of God Has To Do With Jesus (continued)

- Apart from Jesus, we who are Gentiles would accept neither the Jewish God nor the Jewish Scriptures.
- Because Jesus is the Messiah of Israel
  - The Scriptures of Israel were and are received as Word of God by the church
  - ...and they are always refracted and interpreted through Jesus (2 Cor. 12:3-16)
- The vision of the prophets is ultimately embodied in Jesus.
  - Religion and government sought to end his vision, but his resurrection confirmed it.
  - He is the final answer to evil (Rom. 12:21) the definitive refusal to seek vengeance (Rom. 12:17-20)
- Jesus is the heart of the Scriptures – the way in which the Scriptures are to be received and understood.
  - This is the witness of the Lutheran Confessions.
    - The Confessions are a normed norm dependent on Scriptures as the norming norm.

### The Word of God Has To Do With Jesus (continued)

- The distinction between the law and the gospel is made for the sake of the gospel.
- The Formula of Concord states:
  - *The distinction between the law and gospel is a particularly glorious light. It serves to divide God's Word properly (1 Tim. 2:15) and to explain correctly and make understandable the writings of the holy prophets and apostles. Therefore, we must diligently preserve this distinction, so as not to mix these two teachings together and make the gospel into a law. For this obscures the merit of Christ and robs troubled consciences of the comfort that they otherwise have in the holy gospel when it is preached clearly and purely. With the help of this distinction these consciences can sustain themselves in their greatest spiritual struggles against the terror of the law.*
  - This is the Scriptural principle on the basis of which the Lutheran confessions confess and teach
    - what has priority as Word of God,
    - how it is to be heard,
    - how it is to be applied,
    - and whom it "fits" (Luther)

### The Word of God Has To Do With Jesus (continued)

- By way of contrast, many Christians understand the basis for the authority of the Bible to be its ***divine inspiration***.
  - what makes the Bible the "Word of God" for them
    - Bible is distinguished from all other writings – regarded as human words.
    - 2 Timothy 3:16 is cited most frequently.
      - *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*
- First and foremost problem:
  - Timothy was supposed to know these scriptures from childhood (2 Tim. 3:15)
  - But 20 -30 years prior to this writing, there would have been no single document of our present New Testament.
  - This must refer, at best, to the Hebrew scriptures.
- Our present canon of the N.T. comes to us through conflict with the Gnostics & the argument over what constituted the authentic Christian Gospel.
  - Bishops, like Irenaeus (130-200 AD) started circulating lists of writings that could be traditionally said to be apostolic.

## The Word of God Has To Do With Jesus (continued)

- **Augustine** (d. 430 AD) introduced the **pagan Greek notion of inspiration**
  - **A divine being speaking through a human oracle**
  - **Putting thoughts into the minds of a human writer.**
  - So...the Bible came to be regarded as God's inspired Word in contrast to all human words.
  - Council of Trent – used dictation to refer to inspiration of the Bible
  - Scholasticism (1575-1725) and the confessional Lutheran movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also understood it this way
- Two Problems with Augustine's way of viewing the Bible
  - This results in removing the Bible from its place in history and its actual historical development.
  - When the Bible is located outside of history its **authority** is no longer the authority of the Gospel, the good news that the crucified Jesus is risen as Lord and Savior.

## The Word of God Has To Do With Jesus (continued)

- **AUTHORITY** = that the Gospel has the intrinsic power to draw us to Christ (John 12:32).
- **THIS** is the power of the humiliated Christ.
- **Apart from such authority** the Bible is used in an "*authoritarian*" way, that is, with coercive power, the power of the law.
- **SO...** instead of believing the Bible because of Christ – we are told to believe Christ because of the Bible.
  - Then, our primary trust is directed toward the Bible
    - Instead of towards the Christ to whom the Bible bears witness
  - That makes the Bible an idol
    - Instead of "the cradle and swaddling clothes of Christ" - Martin Luther
- The Function of creeds and confessions is to identify what is central to the Holy Scriptures – what is essential to the being & witness of the church.
- **Heresy** – is not that which opposes the Bible, but
  - *That which undermines, negates, or attacks the church's gospel because the gospel alone is constitutive of the church itself.*

### **The Word of God Has To Do With Jesus** (continued)

- The confessional understanding of the gospel as the basis for the authority of the Bible is grounded in Jesus' own authority.
  - “they were astounded at his teaching ...as one having authority...”
- Scribes had authority to make binding decisions – but that was the authority of the law...they did what all scholars of the law do
  - Look to the past for precedents
  - Adapt the law gradually to present circumstances
- Jesus has the authority of promise – authority of what will be...the future.
  - The authority to forgive sins anticipating the eschatological verdict of God.
- Jesus gives **this authority** to his disciples
  - That is why Lutherans believe that their confession of Christ, their confession of the gospel, is the way to read and understand the Scriptures appropriately.
  - Remember...the “sinful self” distorts everything, also the authority of the Bible because it is engaged in self-justification.
  - **Only the gospel gives the Bible its proper authority.**
    - Everything else, even the “Law” as “Word of God” is subordinate to the gospel.

### **For Next Week – The Law of God**

- Serious Questions
  - Does this mean that whatever else the Bible says besides the Christian gospel is irrelevant and can be ignored?
  - Does this mean that the Bible has nothing to say about Christian conduct, about good works?
  - Does this mean that Christians can dispense with the documents and the narrative of Israel, with the “canon” which Christians and Jews have in common?
  
- STAY TUNED.