

The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference



The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century

Article I.

Holy Scripture

THE ETERNAL WORD: A LUTHERAN CONFESSION FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

ARTICLE I

HOLY SCRIPTURE

I. INTRODUCTION

Apart from his Son, God's most precious gift to the world is his holy Word. With the psalmist we say, "Oh, how I love your law! . . . How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps 119:97,103). David declares, "They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold" (Ps 19:10). What an incomparable treasure the Bible is! It is an eternal, unchanging Word, as Isaiah assures us, "The word of our God stands forever" (Isa 40:8). Centuries come, and centuries go. Yes, Jesus asserts, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Mt 24:35). For that reason, God helping us, we intend to hold to the Holy Scriptures unswervingly and without apology.

The Lutheran Confessions do not deal specifically, nor in detail, with the inspiration of Scripture, because the doctrine was not in controversy at the time they were written.

We reaffirm our wholehearted commitment to the confessions incorporated in the *Book of Concord* of 1580, namely, the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, the unaltered Augsburg Confession and its Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, The Small Catechism, The Large Catechism, and The Formula of Concord. We accept them not in so far as (*quatenus*) but because (*quia*) they correctly present the teachings of God's Word.

There is need for a statement on Scripture as we enter into the twenty-first century. In the first place, there is no comprehensive statement on Scripture in the Lutheran Confessions. The inspiration of Scripture was not in controversy at the time of the Reformation. The Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Reformed alike accepted the Bible as the inspired and inerrant Word of God. The Lutheran Confessions addressed those doctrines in controversy at that time.

Rome taught that the justification of the sinner involved the sinner's own works. The Lutheran Confessions asserted the biblical truth that sinners are justified by God's grace alone through faith. The Reformed denied the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. The Lutheran Confessions proclaimed the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament, as taught by Scripture. Rome placed tradition as an authority over God's Word, and the Reformed taught that no doctrine of Scripture was contrary to

reason. The confessors followed Scripture alone, took their reason captive to faith, and allowed the mysteries of Scripture to stand. Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and the Reformed did not debate, however, whether the Bible was God's Word.

The Lutheran Confessions also testified to the world that the Lutherans had not abandoned the fundamental teachings of the Bible. This testimony was necessary because of the slanderous attacks of some, such as Dr. Eck, on Martin Luther's teachings. Since Eck charged Luther with pagan errors, the Lutheran Confessions responded by confessing the fundamental truths of the Christian faith.

The Lutheran Confessions were written with the conviction that the Bible is the Word of God.

We should note, though the Lutheran Confessions do not treat the doctrine of Scripture in a detailed way, they operate with the conviction that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God. The Confessions assert that the Bible is the only source from which all teachings of the church may be taken. They state that the Bible alone is the standard by which all teachings and their teachers are to be judged. Martin Luther wrote, "The Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel" (SA II, II:15). The Formula of Concord begins with the assertion, "We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged" (FC Ep.Introduction:1).

The historical-critical method of biblical interpretation has undermined the belief that the Bible is God's Word.

The situation has changed since the days of the Lutheran Confessions. Most churches today do not accept the Bible as God's inerrant Word. The historical-critical method of biblical interpretation has undermined acceptance of the Bible as the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God. Most theological seminaries today do not accept the Bible as the only source for their teachings and the standard by which their teachers are judged. In addition, there are Lutherans who treat the inspiration of Scripture as a matter on which people may agree to disagree. Since the Lutheran Confessions do not specifically treat the inspiration of Scripture, these Lutherans say, they are not bound to believe the Bible is God's inspired Word.

There is a need to give clear testimony to the world that the Bible is God's Word.

A statement on Scripture will fill a great need at this time. It will clearly present to the world what God tells us about his Word. This confession will be useful in fortifying people to stand against the lies Satan is spreading about the Bible. It will help identify and refute the errors by which the devil attempts to undermine faith.

The Lutheran confessors did not envision that their confessions would be the last ones needed by the church (FC SD Introduction:5). It is vital that the church clearly confesses the teachings of the Christian faith when they are under assault. Therefore we, as members of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, present *The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession For the Twenty-First Century*, Article I, to confess before the world our God-given conviction that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God, which the Bible clearly teaches.

II. THE REVELATION OF GOD

All people have a natural knowledge of God.

All people know there is a God. This revelation is so clear only a fool would deny it. The psalmist David wrote, "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God"" (Ps 14:1). Atheists and agnostics deny or question the existence of God, but they do so in the face of clear testimony to God's existence. The created world and a person's conscience testify to the fact that God exists (Ro 1:20-23; 2:14-15; Ps 19:1-2). The world tells us God exists and that he is powerful, eternal, and good. The conscience tells a person he is accountable to his Creator. On Judgment Day, people will not be able to tell God, "I did not know you existed." God's existence is clear to all.

The natural knowledge of God is not sufficient to save anyone.

Although all people know there is a God, this knowledge of God from creation and conscience is not enough to save people from their sins. Though it tells people there is a God, it does not tell them who he is or that his Son came to save the world. Though it tells people they are accountable to God, it does not tell them how they may stand justified before him (Ro 1:20-32). Though it tells people God is angry with them, it does not tell them how they may be saved (Eph 2:12).

Human nature is corrupt because of sin. Therefore, people pervert their natural knowledge of God. Paul wrote, "They . . . exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (Ro 1:23). People come into this world spiritually blind, thinking they can justify themselves before God (1 Co 2:14). They are spiritually dead, unable to do anything to save themselves (Eph 2:1-5). By nature all are enemies of God, hostile to his will (Ro 8:7). If God left humanity in this wretched state, we would perish forever.

God reveals himself to us, primarily, through his incarnate Son, whom he presents to us through Scripture.

We praise God that he has rescued us from the darkness of unbelief. He sent his only Son into this world to save us. Jesus led the life we cannot lead. He died the death we deserve to die. He paid for our sins in full. God has declared us righteous in his sight, for his Son's sake. He has forgiven us all our sins. He has revealed this to us in his Word, the Bible. God gave us the Bible to tell us of Jesus. More than this, God uses the means of grace, the gospel and the sacraments, to give us the benefit of what Jesus has done for us. These instruments not only make us aware of what God has done for us, they are the very means God uses to give us forgiveness and eternal life.

The Bible's purpose, then, is to proclaim Jesus as the Savior of sinners. As Jesus himself said, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (Jn 5:39; see also 5:

46). Peter said, “All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Ac 10: 43). Every word of the Bible is part of its unified proclamation that Jesus is the God-sent Savior from sin. John wrote, “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (Jn 20:30-31).

God’s revelation to us in the Bible is propositional.

God gave us the Bible in a form we can understand. He spoke to us in the grammar and words of human language. His revelation to us is propositional. God gave us information about himself in the words of the Bible written by his impulse and under his direction. These words convey a specific meaning for all ages. Some claim that the Bible is merely a subjective record of people’s reactions to what they observed God doing in history, subject to reinterpretation by every new age. If that were the case, we never would have any certainty concerning the meaning and significance of what Jesus did. One person’s opinion would be just as good as another’s. It is true that the Bible does record the reactions of some people to God’s mighty acts, as in the Psalms, the song of Moses at the Red Sea, the Magnificat of Mary, the Benedictus of Zechariah, and many other examples. However, since “all Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Ti 3:16), the Bible is God’s revelation to us, not a record of human speculation about God.

Therefore, God did not leave us in doubt as to what he did for us in his Son. The Lord has spoken to us in the words of the Bible, words that are inspired, inerrant, and infallible. In the words of the law, recorded in the Bible, God gives us his commandments. Through the law he shows us our sin and need for a Savior. In the words of the gospel recorded in the Bible, God tells us what he has done to save us. Through the gospel, he gives us the benefit of all Jesus did to save us. Without the clear, certain words of the Bible, the meaning and significance of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection would be lost to us. The Bible, however, was given by inspiration of God. Its words give us a clear revelation of our sin, our Savior Jesus Christ, and the salvation he won for us.

We reject the following errors:

We must reject the following errors as contrary to God’s Word. In condemning these errors, we do not condemn hearts. Only God can search the heart. We must, however, condemn whatever is contrary to the Bible’s teaching, for all error undermines Christ, the foundation of faith.

1. We reject tradition as a source of revelation (Mt 15:3-6; Col 2:8). Whether it is the tradition of Rome with a belief in the authority of the decrees of popes and church councils, or the appeals of others to what the church or its fathers have taught, tradition cannot establish a doctrine. Only the inspired writings of the apostles and prophets can establish doctrine (Eph 2:20; Lk 16:29-31).

2. We reject all “new” revelations which claim to supplement or supplant the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures (Heb 1:1-2; Mt 28:19-20; Gal 1:8-9; Eph 2:20). *The Book of Mormon*, Mary Baker Eddy’s *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, and other such so-called revelations, which arise outside of Scripture, are to be rejected as lies of the devil.
3. We reject the opinion that God reveals himself in mighty acts in history but not in propositional statements in the Bible, and that God’s revelation to people was only in the person of his Son and not in the words of the Bible. As Luther wrote, “For it is not the mark of a Christian mind to take no delight in assertions; on the contrary, a man must delight in assertions or he will be no Christian. . . . I am speaking . . . about the assertion of those things which have been divinely transmitted to us in the sacred writings. . . . Take away assertions and you take away Christianity” (LW 33:19-21).
4. We reject the teaching that the Bible is not to be read to learn what God tells us in human language about himself and our salvation, but is to be read only to discover the God behind the events of history. This would make the Bible the subject of human speculation rather than what it is, the clear and certain revelation God gave us for our salvation.
5. We reject the view which sees the Bible as only a rule book or manual for successful living. God gave us the Bible for our salvation. It is misused when it is turned into a mere guidebook for life.
6. We reject any attempt to divorce any statement of the Bible from its relation to the gospel, in an attempt to widen the message and mission of the church to pertain to the total needs of human beings. This view is found in the social gospel and liberation theology, where the church focuses on the temporal rather than the spiritual needs of people.

III. THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD

The Reformers and the Catholics, at the time of the Lutheran Reformation, agreed the Bible is God's Word.

The Lutheran confessional writings at the time of the Reformation do not contain a separate article about the doctrine of Holy Scripture. This is not because they did not have anything to say about it. All the reformers at that time, and even the Catholics (regardless of all other differences), agreed that the Bible is God's Word. There was no argument about this topic. At the debate in Leipzig with Johann Eck (1519), Luther argued that the demanded submission to the pope could not be proven by Scripture. In Marburg (1529) he had an argument with Ulrich Zwingli about the right understanding of the words of the Lord's Supper. There was never an argument between them whether the quoted parts of Scripture were God's Word or not.

There are many today who will say the Bible CONTAINS God's Word, but they will not confess the Bible IS God's Word.

It was not until the Age of Enlightenment that doubts arose about whether God is the author of Holy Scripture in all its parts. Soon this criticism spread over the entire Bible. At first, Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and others doubted that Moses could be the writer of his biblical books. Soon others viewed the Bible as a book dreamed up by people (David Friedrich Strauss: 1808-1874).

Today many people see the Bible as an important book. They respect its great age, its wisdom and knowledge of human nature. Some think it is important to know this highly regarded book. Others expect help for daily life from it. But very few people today admit the whole Bible is God's Word in the fullest sense. Many think one can find God's Word only in some passages of the Bible—for example, when God is quoted in direct speech, as often is the case in the prophets. Others consider the Bible as man's word, and say that it only becomes God's Word in those places where it appeals to us in a special way (Karl Barth). Again, others search behind the simple words of the Holy Scripture for a deeper, demythologized meaning (Bultmann). These examples could be multiplied many times.

We confess that the Bible is God's Word, because this is what the Bible teaches.

All the previous opinions have one point in common. They say that, in some parts or in a certain sense, the Bible *contains* God's Word. However, they refuse to confess that the entire Bible *is* the Word of God. It is exactly this, however, which we want firmly to hold with all Lutherans faithful to the Confessions. This was the position of Luther and the Reformers, too. We confess this not merely because they confessed it. Rather, this confession is based on what the Bible itself teaches.

Already in the Old Testament, the prophets stress over and over again: “The word of the LORD came to . . .” (Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Ob 1:1; Jnh 1:1; Mic 1:1; etc.). Even some liberal theologians admit the words which begin these Old Testament books cannot be related only to those words which immediately follow the opening, but that they apply to the entire book of the prophet. As one of them wrote: “The books of the writing prophets are often opened by the formula, ‘The word of the LORD that came to...’ ...It certainly implies that the whole book is regarded as *debar Yahweh* (Hebrew for, the word of the LORD). In the written form no distinction is made between the divine voice in the prophet and its expression in poetry, saying, and address. We have here a transition to the final view that not merely the prophetic book, but in the last resort the whole of the OT, is the Word of God” (O. Procksch, *Theological Dictionary of the N.T.*, G. Kittel, ed., Vol. IV, p. 96).

The Lord said to Jeremiah, “Now, I have put my words in your mouth” (Jer 1:9). In Jeremiah 36:2 God gave the order to Jeremiah to write down all his words: “Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you.” So Jeremiah’s book says, with its very own words, that it is nothing but God’s Word.

God also shows us how to recognize if a word comes from him or not. He said: “You may say to yourselves, ‘How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?’ If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him” (Dt 18:21-22).

Because God’s prophecies always come true, the New Testament many times points out the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament. It does this by quoting words from the Old Testament and describing them as “God’s Word.” An example is Matthew 1:22-23: “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord has said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’—which means, ‘God with us’” (Isa 7:14). Jesus himself did the same when he said, “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Lk 24:44).

Sometimes even the name of the writer of a psalm, whose name we do not know from the Old Testament, is revealed by the New Testament. An example is Acts 4:25, where David is identified as the author of Psalm 2: “You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.’” The New Testament stresses over and over again, God spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets (Lk 1:55,70; Ro 1:2; Heb 1:1).

The New Testament also repeatedly emphasizes that it is God himself who speaks through the evangelists and apostles. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit” (1 Co 2:13). To the Thessalonians he wrote, “And we also thank God continually because,

when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe” (1 Th 2:13).

The Bible is reliable because it is God’s Word.

The entire Bible is God’s Word, according to its own words. Therefore, we can trust what it says. We do not believe *in* the Bible but alone in our Savior Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God. But we believe *what* the Bible says because God speaks to us through it. With the apostle Paul we confess, “I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets” (Ac 24:14). Our attitude toward Scripture is therefore well expressed by the hymn writer,

I cling to what my Savior taught
And trust it, whether felt or not
(*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* 226:10).

In the history of God’s people, God proved over and over again the power of his Word. Countless numbers of people were converted by this Word. Still, this inner evidence of the Holy Spirit does not make the outward reliability of Scripture unnecessary. We agree with the author who stated, “How important is the realization we gain from Scripture that God’s Word is not only that which went into us and lives in us, but is also outward and standing over us. This shows itself especially in the hours of temptation when the evidence of the Spirit is heard very little and we nevertheless stay obedient to the Word of Holy Scripture. The Bible is always just partly light to us and partly still darkness. Thus there is a need for a strong external assurance it [the Word] is in itself *only* light. If this assurance is not there, we harm ourselves by letting ourselves be misled to the conclusion that what seems to us only dark and contradictory is in fact darkness and contradiction” (Philippi, *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre*, Vol. 1, p. 117ff).

Jesus directs us to Scripture for the message of salvation.

God himself directs us to his Word. Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:31). The Bible shows us the way to the Savior and eternal life. The Lord said, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me” (Jn 5:39). The apostle Paul also wrote to Timothy, “From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Ti 3:15).

Scripture sometimes calls Jesus Christ “God’s Word” (Jn 1:1,14). In his Son God revealed himself in an incomparable way. The wonder that Jesus became true man, his bitter suffering on the cross, his resurrection and his ascension afford us an insight into God’s loving heart (Jn 1:18; 17:26). In Christ all promises are fulfilled. Through him God spoke more clearly to us than ever before. This is why it says in Hebrews 1:1-2, “In the

past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." The use of "Word" as a reference to Jesus is not, however, the normal use of "word." Its normal use is to denote what God has said to us in the Bible.

We reject the following errors:

1. We reject the teaching that the Bible merely contains God's Word.
2. We reject the teaching that the Bible is the Word of God only in a derived or figurative way, that it is possible to distinguish between the Bible and the Word of God.
3. We reject the view that the ordinary use of "Word" in the Bible refers to Christ, that the Bible is the Word of God only when it speaks of Christ or when what it says has a direct bearing on our salvation, that the Word of God is only a person but not a book.
4. We reject the belief that the Bible is not the Word of God in itself, but that portions may become a Word of God for us when we have a meaningful encounter with them.
5. We reject the assertion that to call the Bible God's Word is bibliolatry, or, deifying the Bible.
6. We reject the idea that we need to look behind the words of Scripture to find the Word of God.
7. We reject the Documentary Hypothesis (the JEDP theory) and source criticism.
8. We reject the view that the Pentateuch and other portions of the Old Testament were put together by unknown redactors (editors) from the writings of unknown Jehovist (Yahwist), Elohist, priestly and deuteronomic authors.
9. We reject the view that the Psalms were written in post-exilic times.
10. We reject the view that the second part of Isaiah (chapters 40-66) was not written by Isaiah.
11. We reject the view that the four Gospels were not written by the Evangelists whose name they bear.

IV. THE BIBLE IS GIVEN BY INSPIRATION OF GOD

Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Inspiration includes:

The divine impulse to write.

When the apostles and prophets wrote the sacred Scriptures, they did it according to God's will and command. These men also spoke and wrote other things, but only when there was a divine impulse and command did they speak and write the Word of God. St. Peter wrote: "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pe 1:21). The inspiration of the things which were to be written implies the impulse to execute the act of writing. The Holy Spirit both moved and commanded the holy writers to write. It is a self-contradiction to say that the biblical writers wrote by the inspiration and suggestion of God and nevertheless not by his command.

The message to convey.

God not only moved these writers to write but also told them *what* to write. They wrote exactly what he wanted them to write. The whole message of the Bible, whether it concerns historical events or spiritual truths, is God's own message given by inspiration. In no instance did the holy writers write anything God did not want them to write (1 Pe 1:10-12).

The words to convey the message.

Inspiration does not consist in the inspiration of the message or the thought content only, neither does it apply to the biblical writers only, but it is a *verbal inspiration*, an inspiration of every word in the Bible. The Holy Spirit caused the writers to write the exact words which they wrote. God said to Jeremiah: "Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you." (Jer 36:2). St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that his message came to them in words he had learned from the Spirit (1 Co 2:13). Christ directs us to the words of Scripture, when, referring to an individual word (*elohim* [Hebrew word for gods], *theoi* [Greek word for gods] – Jn 10:34ff), he says that Scripture cannot be broken. Every single word of the Bible is God's Word, and therefore every word is holy. No man is permitted to add anything to his Word or subtract anything from it (Dt 4:2; Pr 30:5-6).

We believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, since the Bible itself teaches it. If we reject this teaching, we can never be sure whether the words used by the holy writers express the truths of God. Rejecting the words of the prophets and the apostles as God's own words means the foundation of the Christian church is made unsure (Eph 2:20).

Inspiration is that mighty act of God whereby he spoke his Word in the words of men and made them the effective and final vehicle of his revelation. These words do not merely inform us concerning God's past action, they also convey God's action now.

ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God.

"All Scripture is God-breathed." (2 Ti 3:16). When it is stated that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, it means that the entire canon of Scripture is God-breathed (*theopneustos*). All the books of the Bible are inspired.

ALL Scripture—the entire canon.

Jesus approved the Old Testament.

Jesus is the absolute authority in establishing which books belong to the Bible. He frequently quoted from the Old Testament and referred to it as the Word of God. He approved the books of the Old Testament when he urged the people of his time to listen to these books for their salvation: "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them. . . . If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Lk 16:29,31); and when he told his disciples that his work of salvation was a fulfillment of everything that was written about him "in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (Lk 24:44). Christ did not quote from every book of the Old Testament, but he does quote from all three of the main divisions of the Jewish canon, showing that he accepted the entire Old Testament as canonical.

The Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to write the books of the New Testament and to approve the books of the New Testament written by other inspired writers (Apostolicity).

The same applies to the writings of the apostles of the New Testament. Christ promised the apostles he would give them the Holy Spirit who would teach them all things and guide them into all truth (Jn 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13-14). They should speak in his name and as his representatives. Therefore, Christ is making the word of his apostles the basis of faith for all believers (Jn 17:20). These effectual promises of Jesus are the basis for our assurance of the inspiration of the writing of his apostles and for the books that were approved by an apostle.

1 Peter 1:10-12 proves the writings of the apostles are God's own Word. Peter first states concerning the prophets of the Old Testament that when they spoke of the grace that was to come, they did this by the Spirit of Christ which was in them. But then Peter adds concerning the apostles of the New Testament: "They spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit." Here it is clearly taught that, like the word of the prophets of the Old Testament, so also the word of the apostles of the New Testament is the Word of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture is self-authenticating (Autopisticity). Thus, the canon impressed itself on the church.

The canon of Scripture was established by God himself, and not by the church. Scripture is self-authenticating and self-validating. This means that the canonical books have authenticated and validated themselves as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. They need no endorsement by men, no approval by church councils, no majority vote by any human court. They are what they are because God has spoken and is speaking through them. People listen to them and recognize the voice of God. They experience what the two Emmaus disciples felt when they recalled the conversation they had had with Jesus along the way: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Lk 24:32).

God's Word is a life-imparting and faith-creating power. "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (Jn 6:63). The books of the Bible have the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit (*testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*). Because God has worked this conviction in us through his Word, we are certain that the canonical books contained in the Bible are the Word of God. In a quiet way, they have impressed themselves upon the church as the inspired Word of God (autopisticity).

Most books of the N.T. were universally acknowledged as canonical (Homologoumena).

A few books of the N.T. were questioned by some as to their canonicity (Antilegomena).

The witness of the early church is unanimous as to the four gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the thirteen epistles of Paul, the first epistle of John, and the first epistle of Peter (the *homologoumena*). But as to the canonicity of the epistle to the Hebrews, the second epistle of Peter, the second and third epistles of John, the epistle of James, the epistle of Jude, and Revelation (the *antilegomena*), some early Christians were more or less in doubt. The church father Eusebius, for instance, makes this distinction between the *homologoumena* and the *antilegomena*. It is also well known that Luther entertained some reservations about the canonicity of some of the antilegomena (Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation). But it is important to recognize that it was not the church which created the canon. The early church accepted as canonical the apostolic writings which it had acknowledged and had used as authoritative for many years. That there was some

uncertainty and confusion for a time about a few of the New Testament books is not surprising. The amazing thing is, with regard to the vast majority of the books, there was no debate at all. From the very beginning and all through the years, there was a remarkable consensus concerning their apostolicity and inspiration, and therefore concerning their canonicity.

It has sometimes been said that Luther accepted only “a canon within a canon,” and that he considered only those parts that spoke of Christ (*was Christum treibt*) to be the Word of God. It is said that he made fundamental distinctions between the books by applying “a christological canon of interpretation” (Braaten/Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol I, p. 63). It is true that for Luther, the extent of the canon was an open question, but the books that were canonical were absolutely authoritative for him as the inspired Word of God. For Luther they were the Word of God.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God—even single words.

That all Scripture is God-breathed means that every single word is the inspired Word of God. When Christ and the apostles appeal to Scripture, they do not adduce merely general scriptural thoughts; they are not even satisfied to quote single passages, but they often lay their finger on a single word of Scripture to prove their point. In John 10:35, Christ refers to a single word *elohim* (gods) from Psalm 82:6, and adds, “The Scripture cannot be broken.” The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews puts similar stress on the word “new” to prove the new covenant is superior to that which God had made with Israel. He says that if there is a new covenant, then the first covenant must be old; and because it is old, it is also ready to be discarded (Heb 8:13; Jer 31:31).

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God—even the specific forms of the words.

In Matthew 22:43-44 Christ attests and proves to the Pharisees his deity from Psalm 110, and he proves it from the words “my Lord.” He says that David by the Spirit called the Messiah by this name. In Galatians 3:16 Paul attaches all weight to the singular noun “seed” (Ge 22:18), and proves by it that Christ was already promised to Abraham. The promise given to Abraham must refer to Christ since the word “seed” is a singular and not a plural noun. Paul also declares that God chose this term intentionally. It did not merely happen that Moses used the singular form “in your seed,” but it was the will of God that this form was used. The Holy Spirit, who taught Paul what he should say, thereby demonstrated that even the individual words of Scripture are exact and true.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God—even information about geography, history, science, as well as salvation and sanctification.

We would be doing violence to the statement “All Scripture is God-breathed” if we exempted from inspiration those parts of Scripture that contain geographical, historical, or scientific information. Although the Bible is not a textbook of history, geography, or natural science, also such information which is found in Scripture, though mentioned only incidentally, is inspired and inerrant, because it is a part of “all Scripture.”

God inspired the sacred writers, utilizing the human instruments so they spoke and wrote the words God desired.

God utilized the languages, vocabularies, and styles of the penmen.

Ordinarily, God spoke to men in words they could understand (Eze 3:4-6). If they understood Hebrew, he spoke Hebrew, and if they understood Greek, he spoke to them in Greek. Furthermore, in employing human beings as his instruments, the Lord ordinarily gave them words to speak that they were accustomed to use.

The sacred writers were not lifeless machines, but living, personal instruments, endowed with intellect and will and equipped with their own distinct style. Each writer used his mental powers, arranged his thoughts and arguments, chose his words, constructed his sentences, and retained his own style and diction. Nevertheless, in all this the men were under the constant control of the Holy Spirit who moved their mental abilities and made use of their education and learning. So the writers' searching and thinking, their choice of words and arrangement of arguments were taken into service by the Holy Spirit. He employed different types of men as his penmen: kings and peasants, fishermen and scholars, making use of their several abilities, learning, and styles of writing.

God used willing, conscious, informed, and free agents to write his Word.

Ordinarily the spokesmen chosen by God were both willing and conscious tools of the Spirit. They were told that they would speak the words of God and that these words had been put into their mouths. When they preached or wrote, they claimed divine authority for what they said. Often they made it clear to their audience that what they spoke was the words of God and not their own words (1 Co 14:37). David knew that the Spirit of God spoke by him (2 Sa 23:2), and Paul was fully aware of what he was doing when he wrote his letters to the churches (2 Th 3:17).

The holy writers got their information from their own experience (2 Pe 1:16; Ac 1:21-22), from the oral reports they heard from other witnesses (Lk 1:2; 1 Co 15:1-8), from written records (the books of Kings and Chronicles; Ezr 6). But they did not write down everything they knew. The Holy Ghost told them what to select and which words to use.

And yet the writers remained free men, in the best sense of the word. When they wrote, they wanted to write exactly what God wanted. Their own will, however, was by no means excluded in composing the Holy Scriptures. Paul even says that he for a time regretted what he had written in his first epistle (2 Cor 7:8). The holy writers wrote voluntarily, willingly, and knowingly.

Some of Scripture was given by special revelation.

There were many things that the writers could not possibly have learned without a special revelation of God. Prophecies concerning future events could never be based on personal observation, neither could the account of the creation of the world (Ge 1-2). Also the significance of the events they witnessed in many cases (e.g., the crucifixion of Jesus) would have been totally hidden from them without special revelation. The apostle speaks of things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard but which were revealed by the Spirit of God (1 Co 2:9-10). The holy writers, then, got some of their information by direct revelation from God as well.

God utilized the eye-witness accounts and the research of the writers, guiding them so they wrote what was true, accurate, and the Word of God.

Christ promised to give the apostles the Holy Spirit who would teach them all things and guide them into all truth (Jn 14:26; 16:13). When they wrote, then, they were impelled by the Holy Spirit (2 Pe 1:21) in their special calling and office as apostles to write all the truth which God wanted to share with mankind. The Holy Spirit guided them through the whole process of gaining information either from their own experience as eye-witnesses or their research.

Inspiration is a mystery, a work of God which we believe by faith.

Our conviction that the Bible is verbally inspired is not a logical conclusion based on axiomatic premises. Rather, it is a matter of faith, worked in us by the Holy Spirit. The cooperation of the Holy Spirit with the holy writers is not subject to human explanation or understanding. The Bible asserts it is inspired, and we believe it because the Holy Spirit has worked this conviction in our hearts and minds. The same Bible which claims to be inspired, has convinced us we are lost and condemned sinners, and that we are saved through the redemption of Jesus Christ. A close relationship exists between accepting the other doctrines of the Bible and accepting the verbal inspiration of the Bible.

Inspiration pertained to what the prophets and apostles spoke or wrote.

The biblical writers declare that their written word is, in content, identical with their spoken word, and ask the readers to regard them both as authoritative teaching. The apostle John says: "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard. . . . We write this to make our joy complete" (1 Jn 1:3-4). Paul also coordinates his oral and his written word: "Stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Th 2:15). When it is stated that inspiration pertains only to the thoughts of the writers, and that the words which they spoke or wrote ought not to be considered as inspired, we reject this on the basis of the witness of the biblical writers themselves.

Inspiration pertained to the original autographs of Scripture. Faithful translations are vehicles of God's inspired Word. The translations themselves are not inspired.

Copies and translations of the Scripture are not inspired. Only the original manuscripts were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God has chosen, for reasons known only to himself, to preserve his inspired word in copies made from the autographs instead of preserving the autographs themselves. This does not mean that we have any doubts about what the original documents of the Bible's books said. Variant readings in the copies do exist. There are spelling mistakes or slips or attempted corrections. But not a single Christian doctrine has been rendered doubtful in any point by all these variant readings. God has arranged the Bible so that one and the same doctrine is set down in more than one place.

We know we have the Word of God in the holy Scriptures on the basis of the divine promise. Faithful translations, therefore, are the Word of God. When Christ says that all those who will come to faith to the end of time will come to faith through the word of the apostles (Jn 17:20), he thereby promises that the word of the apostles will be present in the church to the end of time. And when he admonishes all believers to continue in his Word (Jn 8:31-32), he guarantees that his Word will be present for us to continue in it. Again, when Christ instructs not only the apostles but his church (Mt 28:20) to teach all nations all things he has commanded them, he gives the church the guarantee his doctrine in all its parts will be clearly and surely known to it to the end of time.

We reject the following errors:

1. We reject the charge that the Bible was given by a mechanical dictation.
2. We reject the claim that the textual transmission and variant readings have created uncertainty about the inspiration of Scripture.
3. We reject the idea that inspiration compromises the freedom of the writers.
4. We reject the belief that inspiration is mere divine guidance in the composition of Scripture.
5. We reject the idea that inspiration pertains only to personal thoughts of the writers, but not to the words of the Bible.
6. We reject the belief that inspiration pertains only to what teaches Christ and our salvation.

V. SCRIPTURE IS AUTHORITATIVE

Scripture is the source and norm for the Christian's faith and life.

"We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged" (FC Ep Introduction:1).

Before the writing of Scripture, people were directed to the oral proclamation of God's Word.

The Christian church came into existence immediately after the Fall, when God gave mankind the oral promise of the woman's seed, who was to destroy the works of the devil (Ge 3:15), and Adam and Eve believed the "first gospel." Through the oral word, proclaimed in various ways, God continued to build his church until the days of Moses (Ge 4:26; 13:4).

God directs us to his written Word as the sole source and norm for matters of faith and life.

After God had chosen to transmit his Word in writing, the church of every age was strictly bound to the written Word of God. The church of the Old Testament was bound to the written Word of God as its complete canon, to which only God could add from time to time. Instead of consulting other authorities, the believers should inquire of the Scriptures (Isa 8:19-20; 1 Ki 2:3).

Also the New Testament believers are bound solely to the written Word. Even in the days of the apostles the same false sources of knowledge and the same false norms were prevalent which, later on and down to our day, have plagued the Christian church, such as spurious prophecy or "spirits," alleged words of the apostles, or "tradition." Over against all such claims, the apostles point to their written word as the only source and norm for the true apostolic doctrine. When in the congregation at Corinth "prophecy" and "spirit" placed themselves alongside, and even above, the apostolic authority, Paul wrote to the congregation: "If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command" (1 Co 14:37). And in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 the apostle sets his written instruction against "some prophecy, report or letter" supposed to have come from him. Christians should not permit themselves to "become easily unsettled or alarmed" by any such pretensions.

Since "everything that was written in the past was written to teach us" (Ro 15:4), and since the holy Scriptures are able to make us wise for salvation (2 Ti 3:15), and since all God-breathed Scripture is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Ti 3:16), everyone is bound to the written Word of God as the only source and norm for faith and life.

Neither human reason nor the Christian's so-called pious self-consciousness or Christian experience is to be placed above or alongside the written Word of God. Also the illumined and regenerate reason cannot be made the principle of knowledge alongside Scripture, since the very essence of the illumined or regenerate reason consists in this, that it makes the Scriptures, and not itself, the principle of knowledge in matters of faith (2 Co 10:5).

Scripture warns against adding to, or subtracting from, God's Word.

It is not man's business to judge what is written in Scripture, accepting what agrees, and rejecting what does not agree with his personal views and rationalizations. This critical use of human reason is absolutely out of place with respect to divine truths. Where God has spoken, the right of private judgment ceases (1 Sa 3:10; 2 Co 10:5).

We may not add anything to the words of Scripture nor take away anything from them (Dt 4:2; Rev 22:18-19), nor corrupt the Word of God by putting our own meaning into the text (2 Co 2:17). It was for God alone to add to his Word until his revelation through the written Word was completed. Joshua directed the people to the book of the Law of Moses and warned them: "Do not turn from it to the right or to the left" (Jos 1:7-8). When God has said something is going to be valid forever, then it is valid forever. God may give a command or a direction with a limited validity, but then he himself has stated that in his Word. This applies, for example, to the Old Testament covenant which was fulfilled once and for all through Christ's vicarious sacrificial work (Heb 7-10).

When we hear or read Scripture, it is as though God himself were addressing us.

Because the Bible is God's Word, its authority cannot be limited by human beings. It is absolute. It does not stand under any human authority. To rebel against the authority of Scripture is the same as rebelling against God himself, because God himself is speaking to us through Scripture. When Jesus entrusted his apostles with the proclamation of his Word, he told them that what they were going to speak was not their own words, but the Holy Spirit would be speaking through them (Mt 10:19-20). Luther says: "You are so to deal with the Scriptures that you bear in mind that God himself is saying this" (St. L. III:21).

When we say that the Word of God is the absolute authority in matters of faith and life, we are also saying the Bible is the absolute authority in matters of faith and life.

The Bible is a truly unique book. It is, in distinction from the millions of other books in the world, God's Word. Many other books contain God's Word, but what there is of God's Word in the other books is taken from the Bible. Scripture is not a human report of God's Word but is itself the Word of God.

This is true both of the Old and the New Testaments. The Scriptures of the Old Testament are quoted in the New Testament plainly as God's Word (e.g. Isa 7:14 and Mt 1:22-23; Ps 2:1 and Ac 4:25). In Romans 3:2 the entire Scriptures of the Old Testament, committed to the Jews, are called "the very words of God" (*ta logia tou theou*). The apostles were also fully aware of speaking and writing not their own, but God's Word. Paul demands of the Corinthians that they be subject to his word because what he is writing to them is the Lord's command (1 Co 14:37). And in his second epistle to the Corinthians he reminds them of the fact that Christ is speaking through him (2 Co 13:3). Although written by various authors in various languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) over a period of approximately 1500 years, the Old and New Testaments form a perfect unity, presenting God's wonderful plan of salvation for sinners without any contradictions.

We believe the Bible is authoritative because:

Scripture asserts it is the inspired Word of God in every word and statement.

The authority of Scripture follows directly on the inspiration of Scripture. It is not founded on human beings, but on God himself. God is behind every statement, every doctrine, every promise and command in the Bible. The prophets received the command from God: "Speak this word to them." (Jer 14:17), and they were to go to the people and say: "Hear the words of the Lord!" The words of the apostle Paul were not his own thoughts or opinions, but "the Lord's command" (1 Co 14:37), and the Christians had received it, "not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God" (1 Th 2:13).

All Scripture is inspired of God and is our sole authority for faith and life. In 2 Timothy 3:15-17 the apostle teaches that the very Scripture, which is God-breathed, is able to make us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" and to make us "thoroughly equipped for every good work." Everything that is written was written for our edification (Ro 15:4).

A single passage or word of Scripture, taken in context, is enough to establish a doctrine.

While it is stated that the Christian doctrine must not be taken from the passages that treat of the individual doctrines (*sedes doctrinae*), but from "the whole of Scripture" (*das*

Schriftganze – cf. Schleiermacher), we hold that we can obtain the whole body of the Christian doctrine only by taking each doctrine from those passages, considered in their context, which treat that specific doctrine. There is no *entirety of Scripture* beyond the sum of all the truths established and taught by the individual passages of Scripture, which clearly state and express them.

Jesus proves the resurrection of the dead by quoting one single sentence from the Old Testament, where God says: “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” The Lord concludes: “He is not the God of the dead but of the living” (Mt 22:31-32). With reference to only one word in Psalm 82:6 (“gods”) he states that “Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn 10:35). And when he is tempted by the devil in the desert, he uses several single passages to refute the false doctrines of the devil (Mt 4:1-11).

Scripture says that prophecy will and must be fulfilled.

The writers of the New Testament repeatedly declare that all things must take their course as they were prophesied in the Old Testament. Every little detail in the life, passion, and death of Jesus must be fulfilled as it is written: “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Lk 24:44). The evangelist Matthew especially makes extensive use of the prophets’ words to prove that the things which happened in the life of Jesus happened because they were foretold by the prophets (Mt 1:22; 2:17; 4:14; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:31). But also the other New Testament writers often refer to the events in Jesus’ life, stating these things happened in order that the Word of God should be fulfilled (Mk 12:10; Lk 4:16-21; Jn 19:24; Ac 2:15-21).

Jesus treated all sections of Scripture as inspired and authoritative.

Decisive for us, above all, is the fact that in the gospels we find Jesus, our Savior, treating every word and statement of Scripture as the inspired, infallible, and authoritative Word of God. When he, in his discussion with the Jews in John 10:35, adds: “And the Scripture cannot be broken,” he reminds them how conclusive the authority of every statement of Scripture is. For him every word of the Old Testament is the very Word of God. Thus, according to Jesus, Scripture is also the only infallible authority for matters of faith and life (Lk 16:29).

Scripture asserts that it alone has been given to us for faith and life.

For his New Testament church, God has added to the Old Testament Scriptures his revelation through his Son in the word of his apostles. Beyond this we are to look for no further revelation of God to guide us in our faith and life. “In the past God spoke to our

forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb 1:1-2). This final revelation is the New Testament word of his apostles. Paul teaches us that the New Testament church is built upon the foundation of the “apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20), which means, not upon their persons, but upon their inspired words.

With the word of the New Testament apostles, God’s revelation to his church is entirely completed. When Christ in his highpriestly prayer says: “My prayer is not for them [the apostles] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their [the apostles’] message” (Jn 17:20), he is thereby making the word of his apostles the basis for the entire New Testament era.

The supreme and only authority of Scripture is denied by making the church, the doctrinal decrees of the church (councils, synods), the pope, tradition, the opinion of the majority, etc., the arbiters of truth. The church has no doctrine of its own, no doctrine alongside and without the Word of God. The church is commanded to teach the Word of Christ (Mt 28:20), and it has this Word in the word of his apostles and prophets (Jn 17:20; Eph 2:20). The voice of the church and the voice of Holy Scripture are not two different voices, but one and the same voice. If the church wants to remain a Christian church, it is bound to continue in the Word of Christ (Jn 8:31-32).

Though every word and statement of Scripture is to be accepted as true and inspired, not every statement establishes an article of faith. Some statements merely illustrate such articles. Though the many historical statements of Scripture contain elements that illustrate certain truths of faith and life and are therefore all written for our learning and worthy of our earnest study, they do not, in themselves, establish an article of faith and life. But Scripture does not cease to be a clear authority for our faith and life even though this or that statement which actually teaches an article of faith should, for one reason or another, remain unclear for us. The truths for our faith and life are not expressed merely once in holy Scriptures, but are taught again and again in a great abundance of texts, not to mention they are clearly illustrated by a wealth of examples. Open questions are questions which are not answered in the Bible, as, for example, the day on which the angels were created.

We reject the following errors:

1. We reject human reason as the norm for faith and life.
2. We reject the “whole of Scripture” hypothesis which says that individual sections of Scripture cannot establish articles of faith.
3. We reject the claim that “enlightened human reason” can serve as a judge of Scripture.
4. We reject every human authority in the church which does not rest on Scripture (the papacy, tradition, church councils, the appeal to a pastor’s or synod’s teaching, the appeal to numbers).
5. We reject calling what the Word of God has settled an open question.
6. We reject the notion that the authority of Scripture is limited only to what pertains to Christ or the gospel, to that which “teaches Christ.”
7. We reject limiting the authority of the canon of Scripture to a “canon within the canon,” to that which teaches Christ.
8. We reject the idea that whatever the Lutheran Confessions do not treat is an open question.

VI. SCRIPTURE IS INERRANT

Scripture is inerrant because all Scripture is inspired by God.

The inerrancy of Scripture is indissolubly tied to the inspiration of Scripture. If every word in the Bible is God's own inspired Word, then the Bible must be inerrant. Even though God used fallible human beings as instruments in writing down his words, all these different people were inspired by the Holy Spirit when they wrote (2 Pe 1:21; 1 Co 2:13). Therefore, every supposed mistake is excluded. The verbal inspiration of every word in the Bible guarantees its inerrancy.

Although the Bible was written by human beings, this human side of the Bible does not include the writers' capacity for error, mistaken memory, acceptance of erroneous folk beliefs, etc. Those who contend the Bible is fallible because it contains a human element commit the same error in kind as those who assert that Jesus Christ was sinful because he had a human nature. The human element is not a fallible element because it is blended with the divine element of inspiration and kept free from human error.

Because "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Ti 3:16), all Scripture is inerrant. While it is often stated that the inerrancy of Scripture pertains only to the gospel or "central" matters, and not to "peripheral" matters like the days of creation, the historicity of Adam and Eve, the temptation of Eve by the serpent, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the world-wide flood of Noah's day, the account of Jonah being swallowed by a great fish, etc., we firmly hold that inerrancy pertains to every word and statement of Scripture. In reference to one single word Jesus says: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn 10:35).

Scripture is inerrant in an objective sense.

God's Word is true and without mistakes, not only for him who believes it (true in a subjective sense), but God's Word is true by itself, even if nobody believes it (true in an objective sense). The psalmist proclaims: "All your words are true" (Ps 119:160). "Your promises have been thoroughly tested" (119:140). And the Savior says of his Father's word: "Your word is truth" (Jn 17:17). The truth of God's Word has nothing to do with what people may or may not believe: "What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar" (Ro 3:3-4).

The fact that the Bible is true, does not mean only that it was written by honest and truthful people. Truthfulness is not a distinctive feature only of the human writers of the Bible, but of every word of the Bible. Neither does the inerrancy of Scripture mean that so-called mistakes in the Bible were not made on purpose, but only out of ignorance or weaknesses on the part of the biblical writers; or that the Bible is infallible only in the sense that it always achieves its purpose, but not infallible in the sense that it is without error. We believe the words of Scripture to be infallible and inerrant in all respects, and we

say with Martin Luther: “Scripture . . . has never erred. . . . If that is not granted, what is Scripture good for?” (LW 32:11-12).

For Luther, the inerrancy of Scripture was a given fact. Even if reason said something else, we should believe God’s Word, he said, for “it is not man’s word, which could lie and be wrong; it is the Word of God, who is the eternal truth” (LW 23:95). “The Scriptures cannot lie” (LW 13:393).

The Lutheran Confessions also teach the inerrancy of Scripture. The exposition of the first commandment in the Large Catechism says: “These words must stand and prove to be true since God cannot lie or deceive” (LC I:46). “My neighbor and I—in short, all men—may err and deceive, but God’s Word cannot err” (LC IV:57).

We reject the following errors:

1. We reject the view that, if the possibility of error is excluded from the Bible, the very humanity of the writers is destroyed.
2. We reject the view that, since human beings are subject to errors, the Bible, too, must contain errors.
3. We reject the belief that fallible men spoke God’s Word with fallible human words.
4. We reject the idea that inerrancy pertains only to the gospel and not to “peripheral” matters of Scripture.
5. We reject the view that the truthfulness of the Bible is a feature of the writers but not of the words of the Bible.
6. We reject the idea that inerrancy means the biblical writers inadvertently made mistakes.
7. We reject the view that the Bible is infallible only in the sense that it always achieves its purpose, but is not infallible in the sense it is errorless.

VII. SCRIPTURE IS CLEAR

Scripture asserts it is clear.

The Holy Scriptures assert that they are the inspired Word of God and that, as such, they are the sole norm for our faith and life. They lay claim to clarity for fulfilling this purpose and function. The psalms particularly abound with statements affirming this clarity. For example, “The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes” (Ps 19:7-8). “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Ps 119:105). Only because the Bible is clear can it convey and impart its message and be “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Ti 3:16).

Throughout, Scripture clearly expresses what it wishes to say and teach. It clearly expresses every truth we need for our Christian faith and life. The great doctrinal differences which exist in the outward Christian church do not destroy the clarity of Scripture, because these differences are due only to the depravity and blindness of men, and not to any unclarity in Scripture.

We acknowledge that there are some areas in Scripture which present “exegetical difficulties.” This is because we do not have a clear understanding of the word or grammatical construction which is used in the original language. Such exegetical difficulties do not exist, however, because of any unclarity in God’s Word. The problem lies in our lack of knowledge of the original languages of Scripture, not in the clarity of Scripture.

There is an inner and an outer clarity of Scripture.

Scripture speaks of an inner and outward clarity. Scripture is outwardly clear in that, when people hear or read it, they can intellectually understand the meaning of the words. Even an unbeliever can understand that John 3:16 says we are saved through faith in Jesus Christ. The inner clarity of Scripture is the work of the Holy Spirit. Only he can give us faith in what the words of Scripture so clearly state. Scripture has an inward clarity in that it has the ability to work in us faith in what the Bible tells us (1 Co 12:3).

Difficulties in our comprehension of Scripture do not nullify its clarity.

Though Scripture is clear, it will not answer every question we have in life. Some things must wait for eternity when matters will be made clear to us. Scripture is clear, though it does not make every statement comprehensible to our reason. The teachings that God is triune, that Jesus is God and man in one person, that Christ’s body and blood are given us in, with, and under the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper, are clearly taught in the Bible. However, they go beyond our ability to comprehend them. In God-given faith we believe what Scripture clearly teaches.

Though Scripture is clear, not every statement will be clear to us. Peter noted there were some things Paul taught that were difficult to understand (2 Pe 3:16). When Luther wrote about the last chapter of the book of Zechariah, he noted the difficulties he had in comprehending what the prophet was saying. Yet, though we may have difficulties in understanding a portion of the Bible, Scripture is still clear. The difficulty does not lie in Scripture, but in our lack of understanding what Scripture says in that section. The Bible is like a clear and legible highway sign which someone cannot read, however, because of poor eyesight.

Scripture gives the church a clear message to proclaim.

The message Christ's church is to proclaim is sometimes simply stated as being the gospel. Our Lord and Savior said to his believers, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mk 16:15). Paul wrote the Romans that he is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (1:16). When he parted from the elders at Ephesus, Paul stated that, in his ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, he was "testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (Ac 20:24). He told the Corinthians he was resolved not to know anything among them except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Co 2:2).

Paul also declared to the elders at Ephesus that he had not hesitated to proclaim the whole will of God to them (Ac 20:27). He directed Timothy to Scripture as able to make him wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. He, then, stressed that the Scriptures, all inspired by God, were the comprehensive equipment of the man of God, the believer in Christ, to equip him fully for all aspects of his life (2 Ti 3:15-17).

Both the gospel and the entire Bible, therefore, can be designated as the message of the church and its ministry. This is possible because all Scripture stands in the service of its central message of God's grace in Christ Jesus, the message of the gospel. This is true also of the Scripture's important message of the law. The law, too, properly proclaimed by the church, stands in the service of the gospel, both before and after conversion. As far as unbelievers are concerned, the only express purpose for the church to proclaim the law is to bring them to the knowledge of their sins and thus prepare them for the comforting proclamation of the gospel.

We reject the following errors:

1. We reject the teaching that the Bible is an unclear book which needs further illumination from outside sources, such as the church, special revelations, or special insights.
2. We reject the idea that the difficulties we have in understanding the Bible indicate the Bible is not clear in what it reveals to us.

VIII. THE SUFFICIENCY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Scripture reveals all we need for salvation.

In connection with the sufficiency of Holy Scripture, we believe and teach that Holy Scripture is all we need for our salvation. With Peter we confess that we cannot find another way of salvation apart from what the Scripture presents to us. "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (Jn 6:68) We therefore use the Bible as the normative or judicial authority in all doctrinal controversies. We do this because we know that Scripture, which is sufficient in itself, is the standard for the settlement of any controversy. Scripture does not only help us to distinguish between truth and error but it teaches God's plan of salvation as he intended it for us. What is contained in Scripture is a testimony of what God has done to save us. John 20:31 declares, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." The Bible is a book in which the line of demarcation between truth and error is clearly drawn. It, therefore, serves as judge between truth and error. The sufficiency of Scripture, according to its own definition, consists in its teaching everything men need to know to obtain salvation.

Scripture's purpose is not to satisfy man's curiosity on everything he wants to know. Scripture will not tell us everything pertaining to our earthly life. It is not an encyclopedia of general knowledge. Neither is it a textbook on natural science. But we believe, teach and confess that, when Scripture treats a scientific subject, it is always right regardless of what scientists may say. We agree with Luther when he asserts concerning Scripture that the Bible is the only book in which historical errors cannot occur (St. L. XIV:491). We teach that Scripture is not a textbook for all human knowledge because a large amount of human knowledge is based on natural reason and human experience.

We have already stated that Scripture is all-sufficient in what we need to know for our salvation. We are not saying that Scripture reveals everything we would like to know. The apostle Paul declares that he knew in part (1 Co 13:12). He added, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" (Ro 11:33-34).

Scripture fully equips the believer for faith, life, and ministry.

In matters of eternal life Scripture is able to make us wise to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. It fully equips the believer for a life of faith in this world (2 Ti 3:17). Scripture is a sufficient source of knowledge also for the teacher of the church. It fully equips him to teach doctrine correctly and to reprove error. It strictly commands that he continue in the words of Christ, which we have in the words of the apostles (Jn 17:20). He does not have the liberty to change or add to these words (Jn 8:31-32). Scripture does not need to be supplemented with any outside material, be that tradition, church decrees, the pope, the experience of the theologian, science, or supposed new revelations.

If the sufficiency of Scripture is surrendered, the whole purpose of Scripture would be lost. If a deficiency in the Bible must be supplied from some outside source, the Christian church would not have a solid foundation on which to stand. For the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:20).

We reject the following error:

We reject the claim that further revelations are necessary to supplement or complete what the Bible teaches.

IX. THE POWER OF SCRIPTURE

Scripture has the ability to work contrition, faith, and sanctification.

Because the Bible is the inspired and authoritative Word of God, it possesses creative power, that is, it has the ability to work contrition, faith, and sanctification, because the Holy Spirit works through the Word. This is clearly taught throughout Scripture. For example, Isaiah writes: “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isa 55:10-11). And Jeremiah compares the power of the Word to “a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces” (Jer 23:29).

In the New Testament Jesus says, “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (Jn 6:63). And Jesus compares the Word of God to a seed. A seed possesses power in itself. Power and life belong to the properties of the seed. Peter says, “You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pe 1:23). Paul describes the gospel as “the power of God” for salvation (Ro 1:16). The gospel has power in itself, and it works faith in the heart of the hearer. Paul also wrote to the Thessalonians that the Word of God “is at work in you who believe” (1 Th 2:13). And the writer of Hebrews describes the Word as “living and active,” and “sharper than any double-edged sword” (Heb 4:12). Thus we see that the Bible clearly teaches that the Word of God is powerful.

Our Lutheran Confessions also have much to say about the power of the Word. One example is Luther’s Large Catechism, which states: “When we seriously ponder the Word, hear it, and put it to use, such is its power that it never departs without fruit. It always awakens new understanding, new pleasure, and a new spirit of devotion, and it constantly cleanses the heart and its meditations. For these words are not idle or dead, but effective and living” (LC I:101).

The means of grace are powerful.

Lutheran theology is rooted and grounded in the doctrine of the means of grace. In our theology we distinguish between salvation *obtained* and salvation *distributed*. Our salvation was obtained on the cross when our Savior offered up his life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, and it is distributed through the means of grace, the Word and sacraments. Luther put it this way: “Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world” (LW 40:213-214).

According to Scripture there is a twofold power in the means of grace: a giving, or conferring power, and an operative power. It is through these means that God not only offers and brings to us the blessings of Christ's redemptive work, but also works the faith to accept what they offer. Our Lutheran Confessions state: "Christ . . . offers his grace to all men in the Word and the holy sacraments" (FC SD II:57). And the Augustana says: "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel" (AC V).

What role, if any, does the law play in all of this? Certainly the law does not give or bring to us God's grace, but it does show us our sinfulness and utter inability to save ourselves (Ro 3:20). The law also makes us feel guilty and reveals God's wrath against sin. Therefore, the law does not bring us God's grace, but it serves to show us our desperate need. It is like an x-ray that shows the patient his illness, but is unable to solve the problem.

The gospel, on the other hand, is a powerful and a precious means of grace. It both offers and bestows the forgiveness of sins and works in hearts the faith to accept what it offers (Ro 1:16; 10:17; 2 Cor 5:19-21). Luther sums it up as follows: "The law says 'do this,' and it is never done. Grace says 'believe in this,' and everything is already done" (LW 31:41).

The sacraments are the visible Word.

The sacraments, which are also means of grace, are called the visible Word. In the sacraments there is a visible element connected with the Word which makes them such. Augustine says, "When the Word is joined to the external element, it becomes a sacrament." In Baptism the visible means is water, and in the Lord's Supper the visible means are bread and wine. The Word added to these elements makes them sacraments. Luther notes: "The Word must make the element a sacrament; otherwise it remains a mere element" (LC V:10).

The sacraments can therefore be called the visible Word, as in the Apology: "As the Word enters through the ears to strike the heart, so the rite [sacrament] itself enters through the eyes to move the heart. The Word and the rite have the same effect, as Augustine said so well when he called the sacrament 'the visible Word,' for the rite is received by the eyes and is a sort of picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore both have the same effect" (Ap XIII: 5).

Baptism is a means of grace. Peter said to the repentant people on Pentecost Day, "Be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Ac 2:38). Paul wrote to the Galatians, "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Gal 3:27). And Paul calls Baptism "the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Tit 3:5). Luther, in his Small Catechism, points out the

blessings of Baptism in these words: Baptism “effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe” (SC IV: 6).

The Lord’s Supper is also a means of grace. From Christ’s words of institution we learn that in the Supper we receive in, with, and under the bread and wine the true body and blood of Christ, which were given and shed for our sins on the cross (1 Co 11:23-25; Mt 26:26-28). From those same words of institution we learn the benefit which we receive from this sacrament, namely, “given and shed for you for the remission of sin.” Luther aptly summarizes the blessings of the Supper in the Small Catechism: “The benefit which we receive from such eating and drinking is shown us by these words: Given and shed for you for the remission of sins, namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.” Forgiveness of sins is the chief blessing of the Sacrament and from it flow all the other blessings of the Supper, namely, life and salvation.

In the Supper the gospel is personalized. The Lord takes each one of his children aside from the noise and pressures of life, and, knowing their desperate need for assurance and strength as they battle against sin, Satan, and their own flesh, says, “Take, eat; take, drink for the forgiveness of sins.” In his Large Catechism Luther says, “Here in the sacrament you receive from Christ’s lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God’s grace and Spirit with all his gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils” (LC V:70).

As we ponder the beautiful purpose of the Supper may we say with Luther, “I am very fond of the precious, blessed Supper of my Lord Jesus Christ in which he gives me his body and blood to eat and to drink even bodily with my own mouth along with these exceedingly sweet and kind words: ‘Given for you, shed for you’” (LW 38:227).

Absolution is also a means of grace. Because there is not a visible element in absolution, we do not usually speak of absolution as a sacrament. Yet absolution does have a command of God, and it conveys forgiveness. In John 20:23 Jesus assures his disciples, “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” (See also Mt 16:19; 18:18.) Absolution continues the dying and rising with Christ in Baptism. In brief, absolution is a daily return to our Baptism.

The divine power in the means of grace does not operate outside or alongside the Word, but through the Word, and therefore it inheres in the Word. “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Ro 10:17). Scripture nowhere promises the Spirit and his gifts outside the means of grace. In fact, our Confessions quote Luther as saying, “We should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil” (SA III, VIII:10).

The power of the Word is not irresistible.

This divine power which inheres in the Word is not irresistible, but resistible. This is also clearly taught in Scripture. When Jesus wept over Jerusalem he lamented, “How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Mt 23:37). And as Stephen was about to be stoned, he cried out to his accusers, “You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!” (Ac 7:51). Scripture does emphasize that God “wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Ti 2:4). He does not want “anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pe 3:9). Yet, when God works through means, as he does through the means of grace, he can be resisted, but in his revealed glory, or majesty, he cannot be resisted. Thus the spiritual resurrection, which is effected through the means of grace, may be resisted, while the bodily resurrection on the last day, which will be effected by God’s sovereign command, cannot be resisted.

The doctrine of the means of grace is a wonderful comfort for the believer. We do not have to run around looking for God’s grace and forgiveness; rather, he comes to us right where we are and through the audible, legible, and visible Word offers and bestows upon us the blessings of Christ’s redemptive work. May we, therefore, treasure the means of grace and continue to sing with joyful hearts:

We praise you for the means of grace
As homeward now our steps we trace.
Grant, Lord, that we who worshiped here
May all at last in heav’n appear (*Christian Worship* 323:2).

We reject the following errors:

1. We reject the teaching that it is beneath the dignity of the Holy Spirit to bring the blessings of God’s grace through such humble means.
2. We reject the Reformed teaching that the Holy Spirit does not use a vehicle to bring God’s grace to mankind.
3. We reject the teaching that the gospel is only an offer of grace but not an application of grace, and that the gospel has no power in itself but the power is in one’s decision or in the commitment one makes.
4. We reject the teaching that the words of Scripture do not become effective until one has a meaningful experience with them.
5. We reject the teaching that God is not sincere when he approaches some through the means of grace.

X. THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

In the interpretation of Scripture, we must pay attention to grammar, sentence construction, and context.

Each historian or student of literature knows that there are certain rules for interpreting a text (hermeneutics). The same applies to the Bible. One must give attention to the grammar, sentence construction and context, to the time of origin and the historical situation of a text, if one does not want to misinterpret the text. This is what is called the historical-grammatical method of interpretation. The words of the text are to be understood in their original, native meaning. Those texts that are clearly imagery or symbolical language must be interpreted as figurative language (for example, parables, Rev 20).

In interpreting the Bible it is important to note to whom a passage applies or to whom it is addressed. Thus the command to sacrifice his son was given to Abraham (Ge 22:2) and to no one else. The command to rest on the seventh day (Ex 20:8-11) was given by God to the people of Israel in Old Testament times and to no one else. The command to tithe (Lev 27:30-34; Mal 3:8-10) likewise was addressed to the Israelites and to no one else. Only those parts of the law given on Mount Sinai which are repeated in the New Testament (e.g., Mt 22:37-40; Ro 13:9) apply to all people of all times. Seventh Day Adventists and others who apply the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament to Christians today fail to recognize the freedom from the law that we have in Christ. Paul writes, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1).

On the other hand, Jesus' mission mandate, "Go and make disciples of all nations And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:19,20; see also Mk 16:15), was addressed not only to his original disciples but to all his followers in succeeding generations. This is shown by Jesus' reference to "all nations" and to the "very end of the age."

Whoever searches for the meaning of the text *behind* the simple words of the Bible sets out on the slippery ice of speculation. This happens, for example, with the method of demythologizing invented by Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976). Bultmann thought what the Bible says is revealed in mythological pictures. The layer of figurative speech should be taken away to find the original message (kerygma) of the Bible. Bultmann also views as mythological pictures all events which are important for our faith (e.g., the virgin birth of Christ, Golgotha, Christ's resurrection, etc.).

The Bible is its own interpreter.

When interpreting extra-biblical texts, similar texts are often used for comparison. In principle, this is not possible with the Bible. The Bible is God's revealed Word to us human

beings. There is nothing comparable to the Bible. From this fact comes another very important rule of interpretation: The Bible is its own interpreter. The Holy Spirit is the author of the entire Bible. In some passages he makes statements which are important for the understanding of other passages. In this way, dark and difficult words can be illuminated by other statements of the Holy Scripture.

This happens, for example, in Hebrews 2:6-10, where Psalm 8 is interpreted by the Holy Spirit himself. Psalm 8:4-5 states, "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor." Whoever reads just Psalm 8 could think its words only relate to mankind as the crown of God's creation. However, in Hebrews, God personally says the psalm speaks of Jesus Christ.

In other passages Jesus himself leads us to a deeper understanding of the Old Testament. In Matthew 22:32, for example, he uses the words from Exodus 3:6 as proof for the resurrection: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

The historical-critical method of biblical interpretation ignores the unique nature of the Bible.

Today, the Bible, for the most part, is interpreted according to the historical-critical method. For about 150 years this method has dominated theology in Europe and America. The main mistake of this method is it does not regard the unique character of Holy Scripture as God's Word. It even leaves this aspect out on purpose. Because of this, the Bible is treated like every other historical text. With that the most important aspect of the Bible is disregarded. This is about the same as if someone described a high-voltage electrical line without mentioning that it is electrified.

We reject this historical-critical method as untenable for the Bible. It denies the essential difference between the Bible and other books. Even liberal theologians admit this topic is not just about some method. It is about the essential foundation of theology. One writes, "Thus critical historical inquiry is not simply a new method of academic study, but a new total view of human life. . . . The Christian revelation is now no longer an 'absolute', 'eschatological' event separate from the rest of history and determining all history, but is one historical phenomenon among many in the wider context of the general history of religion. Jesus Christ now becomes one founder of a religion among others, and the Bible is no longer a book free from error and inspired by God . . . but is a religious document written by men, which consequently must be read, understood, and interpreted by the same methods as other human documents" (Heinz Zahrnt, *The Question of God*, pp. 207-208).

For this reason we consider even a partial use of the historical-critical method as unacceptable. The Bible is God's Word. This makes it different from all other books, and this has to be considered in its interpretation.

The Holy Spirit is the author of all Scripture, and Jesus Christ is the center of Scripture.

The Old and New Testaments have the same Holy Spirit as the author. Therefore they form a unity, regardless of all other differences which exist between the two testaments. The Old Testament contains the prophecies of Christ. The New Testament contains the fulfillment of these prophecies. The fulfillment sheds light on many prophetic words we would not otherwise understand. The New Testament shows us clearly the way to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter wrote, "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1 Pe 1:10-11).

Jesus Christ is the center and the goal of the entire Holy Scripture. Finally, even the law of the Old Covenant pointed to Christ. What is confessed in Hebrews 1:1-2 is valid, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son."

Because the Bible is God's Word, its interpretation is not just a task for reason (the intellect). It is essential to use some rules of interpretation which have stood the test of time to avoid misunderstandings. However, Scripture opens itself completely to the reader only when God leads him to an attitude of obedience and faith, which prays with Samuel, "Speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Sa 3:10).

We reject the following errors:

1. We reject the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation as a violation of the unique nature of Scripture.
2. We reject the concept of "demythologizing" Scripture, as though the meaning of Scripture lies behind layers of myth.
3. We reject any method of biblical interpretation which allegorizes or spiritualizes Scripture.

XI. THE PROPER USE OF SCRIPTURE

Scripture distinguishes between the law and the gospel.

The two chief doctrines of the Bible are the law and the gospel. These doctrines are as opposite from each other as night is from day, and they serve completely different purposes. According to one explanation of the Catechism, "The Law is that Word of God which tells us how we are to be, and what we are to do and not to do" while "the Gospel is that Word of God which tells us of the salvation Christ has won for all men." This same explanation goes on to describe the difference between these two doctrines in these words: "The Law teaches us what we are to do and not to do; the Gospel teaches us what God has done, and still does, for our salvation. The Law shows us our sin and the wrath of God; the Gospel shows us our Savior and the grace of God. The Law must be preached to all people, but especially to impenitent sinners; the Gospel must be preached to sinners who are troubled in their minds because of their sins."

For a more comprehensive definition of the law and the gospel we go to our Confessions, where we read:

We unanimously believe, teach, and confess . . . that, strictly speaking, the law is a divine doctrine which reveals the righteousness and immutable will of God, shows how man ought to be disposed in his nature, thoughts, words, and deeds in order to be pleasing and acceptable to God, and threatens the transgressors of the law with God's wrath and temporal and eternal punishment. . . . The Gospel, however, is that doctrine which teaches what a man should believe in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins from God, since man has failed to keep the law of God and has transgressed it, his corrupted nature, thoughts, words, and deeds war against the law, and he is therefore subject to the wrath of God, to death, to temporal miseries, and to the punishment of hell-fire. The content of the Gospel is this, that the Son of God, Christ our Lord, himself assumed and bore the curse of the law and expiated and paid for all our sins, that through him alone we re-enter the good graces of God, obtain forgiveness of sins through faith, are freed from death and all the punishments of sin, and are saved eternally. For everything which comforts and which offers the mercy and grace of God to transgressors of the law strictly speaking is, and is called, the Gospel, a good and joyful message that God wills not to punish sins but to forgive them for Christ's sake (FC SD V:17-21).

From this we see that both law and gospel are the Word of God and that both apply to all people for all time. It has been well said: "As the Word of the Law, 'Ye shall be holy, for I am holy,' imposes a duty on the king and the beggar, the cultured man and the barbarian, so, too, there is not a man in all the world for whom the Word of the Gospel, releasing all men from guilt and damnation, is not intended" (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol III, p. 224).

The law convicts of sin.

As we examine our lives in the light of God's holy law, we see that we have fallen far short of its holy demands. Who of us can say that we have even come close to measuring up to the perfection which the law demands! And in case we might be tempted to think that we are doing pretty well, that same law clubs us with these words, "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (Jas 2:10).

From the law, then, we see how we are to be, namely, perfect, and the law will not settle for anything less. "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). What makes perfection on our part impossible is that we carry in our bosom a heart that "is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jer 17:9) and that "from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'" (Mk 7:21-23).

Not only does the law show us how we are to be, but also what we are to do. In his letter to the Romans St. Paul writes: "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Ro 13:8-10). The law also reveals to us that sinful thoughts and words are as serious as sinful deeds. "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28). "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer" (1 Jn 3:15). Paul writes, "I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet'" (Ro 7:7).

Through the law, then, the Holy Spirit reveals our sin problem and our inability to solve it by ourselves. The law also shows us God's wrath and anger against sin, and works sorrow and terror in our hearts. In the Smalcald Articles Luther describes the function of the law: "The chief function or power of the law is to make original sin manifest and show man to what utter depths his nature has fallen and how corrupt it has become. So the law must tell him that he neither has nor cares for God or that he worships strange gods—something that he would not have believed before without a knowledge of the law" (SA III, II:4).

Furthermore, St. Paul writes that the law is to be preached in such a way "that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God" (Ro 3:19). Yes, the law puts us all in our place and shows us that we stand condemned before God. The same law of God exposes us for what we really are. It opens the book of our lives and lays bare every evil thought, word, and deed. Any cover-up on our part is as ridiculous as it is futile; we deceive only ourselves. Nothing lies hidden from the all-seeing God.

From God's holy law we see, then, that we have broken his law again and again in our lives, and we continue daily to do so. "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O LORD, who could stand?" (Ps 130:3). Because of this transgression we are deserving of eternal damnation. "The wages of sin is death" (Ro 6:23): temporal, spiritual, and eternal death. "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.' Clearly no one is justified before God by the law" (Gal 3:10-11).

The gospel saves.

If we had only the "ministry of condemnation" (the law), then we would have only sorrow, misery, despair, and condemnation. But we thank and praise our God forever that we also have a "ministry of righteousness" (the gospel). The gospel tells us what God has done for us lost and condemned sinners. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). In God's time his Son was "born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Gal 4:4,5). "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'" (Gal 3:13).

The mystery of the incarnation is that God himself became a man in the person of the Babe of Bethlehem in order to do for us what we could not do, namely, fulfill God's law perfectly for us by leading a perfect life (his active obedience) and to suffer the punishment which we deserved to suffer. He went to the cross where he paid the full penalty for our sins (his passive obedience). Because of his vicarious satisfaction God has declared the world forgiven, for "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Co 5:19).

The gospel, then, is the only solution to our problem of sin and death. Through the word of the gospel this treasure is brought to us and made our own. Yes, God is, as Luther reminds us, "surpassingly rich in his grace" and brings this grace to us in various ways, through the spoken Word, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the keys, and "the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren" (SA III, IV).

Law and gospel also have this in common that they are to be taught side by side in the church up to the last day. "We believe and confess that these two doctrines must be urged constantly and diligently in the church of God until the end of the world, but with the due distinction, so that in the ministry of the New Testament the proclamation of the law and its threats will terrify the hearts of the unrepentant and bring them to a knowledge of their sin and to repentance" (FC SD V:24).

The differences between the law and the gospel:

Law and gospel differ in the manner of their revelation.

These two doctrines differ as regards the *manner* in which they have been revealed. Man was created with the law written in his heart. This inscribed law, though, became blurred when man fell into sin. However, as St. Paul points out in Romans 2:14-15, even pagans have the moral law in their heart and conscience and thus have a certain knowledge of right and wrong. Later in time the Lord gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai for the purpose of bringing out in bold outline the dulled script of the original law written in man's heart. On the other hand, as the same apostle writes in Romans 16:25-26, the gospel was given by revelation and became known only through an act of the Holy Spirit who inspired men to write its message.

Law and gospel differ in content.

The law and gospel also differ as regards their *contents*. The law tells us what we are to do, namely, love God and our neighbor with our whole heart, soul, and mind (Mt 22:37-39). The law also gives commands and demands and condemns those who do not meet those demands. St. Paul pronounces a curse upon everyone "who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (Gal 3:10). The gospel, on the other hand, contains nothing but grace. It proclaims a completed salvation, obtained by the atoning work of our Savior Jesus Christ. The heart of the gospel is: "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (Mt 9:2). John 3:16 also gives the assurance that "whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Law and gospel differ in their purposes, effects, and promises.

Law and gospel also differ as to their *purposes*. The purpose of the law is to bring us to a knowledge of sin and to repentance. This is its chief purpose. The law also serves as a curb in maintaining outward discipline and decency in the world, as well as a guide that shows believers how to live as grateful children of God. The purpose of the gospel is to proclaim the salvation which Christ has won for us. The difference in purpose between the law and the gospel can be summed up in the words of the risen Savior which he gave to the church before his ascension, namely, that "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations" (Lk 24:47). The law works contrition, and the gospel offers and bestows forgiveness and faith.

So far as the *effects* are concerned, the law reveals the wrath of God against all ungodliness and thus strikes the heart with terrors of conscience. It also arouses anger toward God. The gospel, on the other hand, gives peace and comfort, and engenders love in the new man (Ro 1:18; 7:5; Isa 40:2; Gal 2:20; Ro 10:4).

Law and gospel differ by reason of their *promises*. The law promises salvation, but on the condition that we keep it perfectly. "The Law offers us food, but does not hand it down to us where we can reach it" (C.F.W. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, p. 10). The gospel, on the

other hand, promises us forgiveness and salvation without any condition whatsoever. We have an unconditional gospel. We are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Ro 3:24).

We distinguish between legal and evangelical conditional clauses.

In this connection we would do well to be reminded that the dogmaticians distinguish between *legal conditional clauses* and *evangelical conditional clauses*. The former denote a human accomplishment, e.g.: “If you keep the law, you will obtain eternal life,” while the latter denote the mode and manner of appropriation, e.g., “If you believe, you will be saved.” Believing does not denote a product or work of man, but merely the manner in which salvation is appropriated. The sense of the sentence: “If you believe, you will be saved,” is not, “If you furnish the faith, you will be saved,” but rather, “By way of faith, without any goodness or accomplishment of your own, you will be saved.” In this regard Gerhard points out: “The particle ‘if’ is either etiological or syllogistic; it names either the cause or the result. In legal statements: If you do that, you will live, the particle ‘if’ is etiological, since the obedience is the cause because of which eternal life is given to those who observe the Law; but in the evangelical promises: ‘If you believe, you will be saved,’ the particle ‘if’ is syllogistic, for it denotes the divinely constituted mode of the application, for which faith alone is fitted” (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 36 [1 Jn 1:9]).

Therefore it follows that the law demands obedience but gives no ability to carry out its commands (a law imperative, cf. Mt 22:37), but the gospel gives what the law demands (a gospel imperative, cf. Ac 16:31). The directions which the law gives are impossible for man to follow and fulfill; whereas the gospel gives and imputes to us the righteousness of Christ. In other words, what the law demands the gospel gives.

The law is preached to secure sinners; the gospel is proclaimed to alarmed sinners.

A final point of difference between the law and the gospel is regarding the *persons* to whom either doctrine is to be preached. The law is to be preached to secure sinners and the gospel to alarmed sinners. Inverting this order means confounding both, and by confounding them, is commingling both in the most dangerous manner. To make a crushed sinner the subject of law preaching is spiritual tyranny; such a one needs to hear the comforting news of forgiveness in Christ.

C.F.W. Walther reminds us that “the primary requisite for a salutary knowledge of the Holy Scriptures is the correct understanding of the distinction between the Law and the Gospel” and that “without this knowledge Scripture is and remains a sealed book” (Walther, *Law and Gospel*, p. 60).

We conclude this section by reminding ourselves again of the importance of preserving the proper distinction between law and gospel. Our Confessions sum up the importance by

saying that this is “an especially brilliant light which serves the purpose that the Word of God may be rightly divided and the writings of the holy prophets and apostles may be explained and understood correctly” (FC SD V:1). If the proper distinction between these two doctrines is not maintained, the results are disastrous for the Christian; the gospel is made into a new law, the merits of Christ are obscured, and troubled consciences are robbed of the comfort of the gospel promises.

We reject the following errors:

1. We reject the view that the distinction between law and gospel is unnecessary.
2. We reject the view that the gospel is only an “offer of grace,” and not an “application of grace.”
3. We reject the view that the gospel has no power in itself, but that the power is in one’s decision to accept it (Decision theology).
4. We reject the error that the Christian does not need the law (Antinomianism).
5. We reject the error that the chief function of the law is moralizing, namely, to improve human behavior through the law.
6. We reject the error that the law is the driving power or motivation in sanctification.

God’s Word Is Our Great Heritage

God’s Word is our great heritage
And shall be ours forever;
To spread its light from age to age
Shall be our chief endeavor.
Through life it guides our way;
In death it is our stay.
Lord, grant, while worlds endure,
We keep its teachings pure
Throughout all generations (CW 293).