

The Bible speaks with the authority of God

When our first parents fell into sin, God promised them the Saviour. This promise was passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation, from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Shem, from Shem to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses. God directed and inspired Moses to write the first five books of the Bible. Since that time, God has directed people to His written revelation, recorded in the Bible. God also warns people not to turn away from His Word, adding to it or subtracting from it. It has been said that when we hear or read the Bible, it is as though God Himself were speaking to us.

Through the Law in the Bible, God tells us how He wills that we be: perfect. He tells us what He expects us to do: obey His commandments. There is no debate or doubt over what God wills. He has spoken clearly and with authority through His Word. Through the Law, God tells us that our relationship with Him has been destroyed because of our sins. He tells us that we deserve His just punishment. This word of the Law is authoritative. It condemns us, and our consciences agree with the verdict.

Through the Gospel in the Bible, God tells us with equal authority that He has forgiven our sins through His Son, Jesus Christ. Through faith in Jesus, we have eternal life. This word of the Gospel is authoritative. When the devil accuses us of our sins, when our consciences condemn us, when it seems as if God has turned His back on us, the Gospel tells us with authority that God will never leave us or forsake us. He forsook His Son so that we will never be forsaken. The Gospel tells us that nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:38-39).

The authority of God is behind every word of the Bible. When we say that the Word of God is the absolute authority in matters of faith and life, we are saying that the Bible is the absolute authority in matters of faith and life. The Bible is the Word of God. The Bible itself asserts that it is the inspired Word of God in every word and statement (2 Tim. 3:16). A single passage or word of Scripture, taken in context, is able to establish a doctrine. Jesus said that the prophecy of the Bible must be fulfilled (Luke 24:44). Jesus Himself treated all sections of the Bible as inspired and authoritative (John 10:35). The Bible asserts that it is the sole authority for our faith and life (Heb. 1:1-2).

Our Lutheran Confessions assert that all doctrine must be drawn from Scripture and that all religious teaching must be judged by Scripture. The reformers faced the assertion of the Roman Church that Tradition (the oral teaching allegedly given by Christ to his apostles and then transmitted by them through their successors, the papacy and the bishops of the church) was also a source for doctrine. They also faced the assertions of others who claimed that God spoke to them directly (the Enthusiasts, who denied that God chose to use the means of His Word alone to speak to us). The followers of Zwingli and Calvin wanted to place the Bible under the authority of human reason. Thus, the confessions assert:

- The Word of God - and no one else, not even an angel - should establish articles of faith. (SA II II:15)
- We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone. (FC Ep Rule and Norm:1)
- Holy Scripture alone remains the only judge, rule, and guiding principle, according to which, as the only touchstone, all teachings should and must be recognised and judged, whether they are good or evil, correct or incorrect. (FC Ep 1:7)

Therefore, we must reject a number of false authorities to which people appeal instead of the Bible:

- Human reason cannot be an authority in the matter of establishing doctrine. Human reason has been corrupted by sin and will always come up with the wrong answer when dealing with spiritual matters (1 Cor. 2:9-14).
- Human authorities in the church must be rejected, be they the papacy, church councils, appeals to a synod's or a pastor's teaching, or appeals to the majority opinion. The Word of God alone shall establish an article of faith.
- Private opinions or revelations must be rejected. God has spoken to us in the Bible.

We must also reject the idea that we can agree to disagree on doctrines as long as we agree on the central doctrines of the Bible that pertain to our salvation. Where God has spoken, we are bound to obey, whether the teaching pertains to our salvation or our sanctification. All of Scripture is authoritative, not merely those matters that pertain to our salvation. There is no "canon within a canon," that is, we are bound not only by those statements or books in the Bible that deal exclusively with our salvation. All Scripture is profitable for doctrine (2 Tim. 3:15-17). Also, if the Lutheran Confessions do not deal with a topic, we still are bound by what Scripture says. The Lutheran Confessions did not deal in detail with the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. That was something all churches of Luther's day accepted. There was no need to address the issue. When Lutheran churches today say we can deny the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture because the Lutheran Confessions do not deal with the issue, we must object. The Bible asserts that it is, in its entirety, the sole source and standard for a Christian's faith and life. This is what we also will believe, if we are faithful to God's Word.