

Doctrinal Proceedings.

(Speaker: Dr. F. Pieper.)

The Holy Scriptures.

To the Christian doctrine, which Luther defended and confessed before the whole world and church four hundred years ago at Worms, belongs primarily the truth that the Holy Scriptures are the only source and guide of Christian doctrine, because the Holy Scriptures are²⁴ not the word of man, but the Word of our great God and Savior, and God wants to teach all men through this Word and govern their hearts and consciences. We are all familiar with the answer Luther gave to the papal spokesman when he asked him at Worms to finally give a short and clear answer as to whether or not he wanted to recant some or all of his doctrine. Luther's answer was: "Unless I am overcome by the testimony of Scripture or by clear arguments — for I believe neither the Pope nor the Councils alone, since it is clear that they have often erred and contradicted themselves — I am

overcome by the passages of Holy Scripture I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to God's Word. I cannot and will not recant, because it is unsafe and dangerous to act contrary to conscience." It is clear from these words that Luther recognized no other authority in the Christian Church and for the conscience of every individual Christian than Holy Scripture. He rejects any other authority in the Christian Church, be it pope or church assembly. This was Luther's position, and he held fast to it. Luther did not leave immediately after his public appearance on April 17 and 18, but stayed in Worms for another seven days, until April 26. And in the meantime, a number of attempts were made in several private meetings, including the use of flattery, to force Luther away from his fine position on the Holy Scriptures. These meetings were held in the house of the Archbishop of Treves. He was one of the few papists with whom Luther had a certain amount of trust. Luther's words: "I cannot help it, my conscience is captive to God's Word" had made a powerful impression on the entire assembly in Worms. And so the Archbishop of Treves and other Roman theologians made an attempt to see if they could dissuade Luther from his firm standpoint. Four more meetings were held, on April 24 and 25, in the mornings and afternoons. In the first meeting, Luther was asked to recognize the authority of the councils, especially the Council of Constance. Luther had written many good writings that were useful for Christians to read, and these writings would not be read if he rejected the authority of the councils. Luther replied that the Councils could not be relied upon, as the Council of Constance had demonstrated by its unjust condemnation of John Hus; therefore he could not recognize the Councils as authorities. He stuck to *sola Scriptura*. Scripture alone must teach Christianity and govern hearts and consciences.

The organizers of the meeting withdrew for a consultation and then came forward with the suggestion that Luther should let the emperor and the empire judge his doctrine. Luther replied that he was heartily willing to do so, on condition that the emperor and the empire would judge on the basis of Scripture. On the following day, Thursday, April 25, another attempt was made to persuade Luther to submit to the emperor and the empire without reservation. They promised to ensure that Luther's writings would only be presented to unobjectionable and just judges. Luther replied that in matters of Christian doctrine one could not and should not rely on men at all, not even on so-called impartial men, but only on God's Word. He cited Jer. 17:5: "Cursed is the man who relies on men!"

Finally, it was suggested that Luther should at least leave the decision on his doctrine to a future council. But here too Luther added the condition that he could only submit to the decision of a future council if the decision was proven by the testimony of Holy Scripture. They now refrained from dissuading Luther from the *sola Scriptura*. The following day, on April 26, at 10 o'clock in the morning, Luther departed from Worms. From Friedberg, north of Worms, he sent a letter to the emperor and the imperial estates on April 28, in which he thanked them for the hearing he had been granted and the safe conduct, and pledged himself to all obedience in worldly matters, but at the same time repeated that in matters of Christian doctrine his conscience was bound by God's Word alone.

We will now hardly find ourselves in the position of being placed before the emperor and the empire as Luther was four hundred years ago in Worms. But according to God's will, we are to take the same position with regard to Holy Scripture. And we need the same position if, by God's grace, we want to achieve the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls. By God's grace we also take this position. But in doing so, we have virtually the entire world, the host of hell, and most of contemporary external Christianity as our enemies. We are not left in peace. With the use of mockery and derision, with the use of obviously godless and pious-sounding speeches, also with the occasional use of flattery, that there is much good in our writings, that people like to read them, etc., they try to push us away from the Holy Scriptures as the only basis of our Christian faith. In addition, our own sinful flesh is very reluctant to recognize and accept the Holy Scriptures as God's own Word. But we must triumph over the devil, the world and the flesh. God's Word is the only light in the darkness of this world when it comes to the question: What must I do to be saved? It is the only bridge that connects us with heaven in this life and carries us through death into life.

Well, let us strengthen ourselves for this battle and victory through a doctrinal discussion of the Holy Scriptures, first by allowing the Scriptures themselves to testify to us what they are, namely God's own Word by inspiration, and then by recognizing and rejecting the objections raised against them as null and void. The following theses about Holy Scripture may serve as a basis for discussion:

- I. The Holy Scripture, unlike all other books in the world, is God's own word.
- II. The Holy Scriptures are God's Word by inspiration, that is, by the fact that God has inspired the Scriptures to the sacred writers.
- III. The objections raised against this are null and void.

I.

The Holy Scripture, unlike all other books in the world, is God's own Word.

Someone might ask: Is there anyone at all who wants to be a Christian and yet does not believe that Holy Scripture is God's Word? To this we must reply: There was, however, a time when this truth was hardly contested by anyone in the Christian church. Even if in the time that we usually call the time of the Church Fathers, Christian doctrine was no longer taught publicly as purely as it was in the Apostolic Church, the so-called Church Fathers of the first centuries nevertheless confessed in their writings the indisputable divinity of Holy Scripture. Furthermore, in the time of the Christian Church, which we call the Middle Ages, the papist teachers falsified Christian doctrine from the ground up. They replaced the Gospel of Grace with the pagan doctrine of works, and they actually replaced Holy Scripture with the decrees of the pope and the councils. But in doing so they left unchallenged, even if only outwardly, the proposition that Holy Scripture is the Word of God. And as far as the time of the Reformation was concerned, in addition to the truth that man obtains forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ without the works of the law, Luther again placed the truth brightly on the lampstand that the Holy Scriptures alone should constitute articles of faith, on the grounds that the Scriptures alone are God's own and infallible word. This truth remained fairly unchallenged for over two hundred years in Lutheran and also mostly in so-called Protestant Christianity. This changed in the third century after the Reformation. It became even worse in the fourth century.

At present, in so-called Protestant Christianity, the doctrine that Holy Scripture is God's Word and therefore infallible truth has been abandoned by most public teachers who have the great reputation. Holy Scripture is not supposed to be God's Word itself. It is not supposed to be the book in which God himself speaks to us, but only a kind of church record of the first Christian churches, in which people tell us how they understood the teaching of Christ. These people may have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit working in the church, but human opinions and errors are not excluded. Scripture is called "divine-human" in the sense that human error is also found in Scripture alongside divine truth. [Cp. with the LC-MS's and Dr. Samuel Nafziger's [Confessing the Gospel](#), and others.] It is therefore the task of the Church, especially of learned theologians, to distinguish between truth and error. With this, however, the sure ground of the apostles and prophets is abandoned and everything is put in doubt.

We Missourians and our fellow believers and confessors are regarded in wide circles as "backward" people who have lagged behind in the necessary development. But by God's grace we are not deceived. We hold fast to the fact that the Holy Scriptures are God's own Word, in contrast to all other writings that exist in the world. When we open the Scriptures, we know that God is speaking to us. When the Scriptures are read aloud, the congregation rises up, because God is speaking to it. There are, of course, many writings in the world that contain God's Word. Since the time of the apostles, hundreds of thousands of writings have been written that contain God's word in such a way that God's word is recorded in them from the Scriptures. Augustine's writings, written in the fifth century, and Anselm's writings, written in the Middle Ages, contain God's Word more or less purely. Luther's, Gerhard's, Walther's writings contain God's Word. And such writings are also useful to read. We should also look at the Word of God contained in such writings and take it to heart as if God himself spoke it to us. But what is really God's Word in these writings has come into them from the Holy Scriptures. Many people have also been converted to Christ through reading such writings. But these writings have only had this blessed effect to the extent that they have absorbed the word of Holy Scripture. This is not a human thought, but the clear teaching of Christ when he says in John 17:20 in the high priestly prayer that all Christians will "believe in me through their" — the apostles' — "word until the last day". But we have the apostles' word in the writings of the apostles, which we now call Holy Scripture. That is why Luther rightly says in his well-known instructions for theological study: "First of all, you should know that Holy Scripture is such a book that makes foolish the wisdom of all other books, because none of them teaches about eternal life except this one alone." If, thank God, other books also teach about eternal life, namely the right way to eternal life, then this is taken from the Holy Scriptures. We have books by Greek philosophers. But they do not contain God's Word and do not teach anything about eternal life, because the writers of these books were not familiar with the Holy Scriptures. Socrates is considered the wisest of all Greeks. When he was about to die — because he drank the cup of poison — he did not express the confidence that he had a merciful God through faith in Christ, but said: "Do not forget to sacrifice a cock to Asclepius!"

Thus we also maintain with Luther that Holy Scripture is a book of a unique nature, namely, in contrast to all books, God's book, that is, God's own Word. Among all other books that exist, Holy Scripture forms a class

of its own, "*forming a class by itself*". ⁽¹⁾ [1) Davis, *Bible Dictionary*, sub "Bible."] If, in arranging the books in a library, we wanted to express the nature of the Bible externally, we could place the Bible on a book shelf that stands by itself or is placed in the center of the library. In short, our thesis is that Holy Scripture, unlike all other books in the world, is God's own Word.

How do we know this? Just as we take all other teachings from Scripture, so also the teaching about Scripture itself. So we ask: What does Scripture say about itself? And the answer is: Scripture says of itself that it is the Word of God, and it does so in several ways.

1. The words of the Old Testament Scriptures are quoted in the New Testament as God's words. Matthew 1:23 quotes from the prophet Isaiah, namely from Isaiah 7:14, the words: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." But of these words it is said in v. 22 that the Lord spoke them through the prophet. Matt. 2:15 quotes the words from Hos. 11:1 : "Out of Egypt have I called my son." With regard to these words it is immediately testified that the Lord spoke them through the prophet. Acts 4:25 is quoted from the 2nd Psalm: "Why do the nations rebel, and the peoples take in vain?" But it is also said of these words that God spoke them through the mouth of his servant David. Acts 28:26 the words of Isaiah 6:9-10 are held up to the Jews in Rome: "Go to this people and say, 'With your ears you will hear and not understand, and with your eyes you will see and not recognize,' etc. And to these words is added the judgment that the Holy Spirit spoke them well (that is, correctly) through the prophet Isaiah to the fathers of Israel, v. 25. Heb. 3:7 says of a quotation from the 95th Psalm: "As the Holy Spirit says: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts!" Romans 3:2 refers to the entire Holy Scripture of the Old Testament, which was entrusted to the Jewish church: "what God has spoken" (*ta logia ton Theou*, God's sayings, God's words). And because the whole Scripture of the Old Testament is God's own Word, Christ says of this Scripture in John 10:35 that it cannot be broken in a single word.

Even more. There are a number of scriptural passages that are sometimes overlooked when people talk about Scripture being God's Word. But they are tremendous proof of the divinity of Scripture. These are the passages of Scripture that say that all events in the world must be or happen according to the Word of Scripture. Everything that has happened and will happen, from

the beginning to the end of the world, must and will happen as it is written. Thus Matthew 1:22, as we have already heard, says of the birth of Christ from the Virgin Mary that it happened "so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled". John 17:12 speaks of Judas' apostasy and end and adds: "that" (*hina*, so that) "the Scriptures might be fulfilled". When Peter wants to save Christ from being taken with the sword in the garden, Christ also rebukes him with the words: "How will the Scriptures be fulfilled? It must be so." And of all that happened to Christ, especially of His suffering and subsequent glory, Christ Himself says in Luke 24:44 ff: "All things must be fulfilled that are written of Me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms," etc. If all that is written in Scripture must come to pass, then Scripture must not be the word of man, but the word of Him who has everything in heaven and on earth in His hand, who directs all events, without whom nothing can happen in heaven and on earth, who is omnipotent and omniscient, in short, the great, majestic God Himself.

2. This is said first of all of the Scriptures of the Old Testament. But that the writings of the apostles of the New Testament are of the same nature, namely also God's own Word, is taught in 1 Pet. 1:10-12, where it is first said of the Old Testament prophets that they prophesied of the future grace of the New Testament through the Spirit of Christ who was in them, but then it is added with regard to the New Testament apostles: "Which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." Here it is clearly taught that, as 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 Ghost. The objection that only the oral word, not the writings of the apostles, is spoken of here does not apply, because the apostles expressly say that they wrote the same things that they proclaimed orally. Thus the apostle John writes in 1 John 1:3-4: "What we have seen and heard we declare to you ... and these things we write to you, that your joy may be full." In the same way, the apostle Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to make no distinction between what the apostle preached to them orally and what he wrote to them, saying: "Stand therefore, brethren, and hold fast the doctrines which ye have been taught, whether by our word, or by epistles", 2 Thess. 2:15. And what is more, the apostles insist very firmly on sola Scriptura, on the written word. The apostle Paul explicitly refers the Christian churches of his time to his letters and demands that the churches should accept the letters he has written as God's Word and commandment. There were people in the church at Corinth who

boasted that they were also prophets and had the Holy Spirit, and therefore placed their word alongside and above Paul's word. The apostle points out to them that all those who boasted of being prophets and spiritual must prove themselves to be true prophets and truly spiritual people by recognizing the apostle's written word as God's Word and submitting to it. He writes in 1 Cor. 14:37: "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge the things that I write unto you: for they are the commandments of the Lord." Even at the time of the apostles it happened that people referred to oral tradition, that is, to words that were supposedly spoken by the apostles and to letters that supposedly came from the apostles. Paul therefore writes in 2 Thess. 2:2 to the Christians in Thessalonica that they should not allow themselves to be shaken and frightened "neither by spirit nor by word nor by letter, as having been sent by us". So that the Christian congregations could distinguish genuine apostolic writings from those that had been foisted on them, Paul refers to his handwriting in 2 Thess. 3:17: "The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write." So abundantly is it attested in Scripture that, as the Scriptures of the Old Testament, so also the Scriptures of the New Testament are the Word of God.

Thus Luther and the old Lutheran teachers. Luther: "Thou shalt therefore deal with the Scriptures, that thou mayest think as God himself speaketh." ([St. L. III, 21](#)) Gerhard: "There is no difference between the Word of God and Holy Scripture." (*L. de Scriptura Sacra*, § 7.) There is only a difference in expression, whether we say: "Scripture says" or: "God says." In substance it is one and the same.

The truth that Holy Scripture is God's Word easily fades into the background, because Holy Scripture speaks to us in such simple, human words and also deals with the things of human life, e.g. household, agriculture, animal husbandry, clothing and food, etc.. The Holy Scriptures are therefore concerned with how Christ was at the time when he walked on earth. Because Christ was found to be like a man in appearance, the Jewish public regarded him as a mere man like John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets, Matt. 16:14. The same applies to the Holy Scriptures. Because it is written in simple-minded, human language, it is not considered to be the Word of God, but is placed in the same class as human books and criticized. May never a Lutheran pastor in the pulpit or a teacher in the school criticize the Scriptures! May God also protect us especially from professors who criticize God's Word because the Scriptures have such a simple outward appearance! Luther says in his preface to the Old Testament ([St. L. XIV, 3 f.](#)): "I beg and faithfully warn

every pious Christian not to be offended at the simple-minded speech and history that he will often encounter, but do not doubt how lowly it can always be regarded, that it is mere words, works, judgments and history to the high divine majesty, power and wisdom. For this is the Scripture that makes fools of all the wise and clever, and is open only to the small and foolish, as Christ says in Matthew 11:25. Therefore, let your arrogance and your feelings go, and think of this Scripture as the highest and noblest sanctuary, as the richest treasure trove, which can never be sufficiently filled, so that you may find the divine wisdom which God presents here so foolishly and simply that he may subdue all arrogance."

Is the Scripture God's word to us personally?

We conclude this section with a self-examination as to whether we, too, take the Holy Scriptures seriously as God's Word and the only source and guideline of Christian doctrine. Let us ask ourselves:

1. Do we consider every time we open our Bible that it is a book in which not a man, but the great God Himself, the Creator of heaven and earth, and our Savior, speaks to us? And yet this is indeed the case. Walther used to say: "When I have my Bible under my arm, I feel extremely rich, because God speaks to me in this Bible." When we use the Bible in this way, we are using it in accordance with the truth that the Bible is God's own Word. God is an invisible God to us in this life; no one has ever seen God. Of course, we know that God is and works everywhere. We see from every blade of grass: this is God's work. But the work of creation does not open God's heart to us as it does to us sinners. It is not written on the mountains or in the valleys, on the stars or in the depths of the earth, that God will not condemn us but take us to heaven for Christ's sake; God only tells us this in his Word. There he speaks to us as a man speaks to man. We cannot come closer to God for our salvation in this life than in His Word. We will not allow ourselves to be misled by the fact that some say: Christ has appeared to me. Luther repeatedly says that he does not want Christ to communicate with him through apparitions, because there is a possibility that, with God's permission, the devil could disguise himself as an angel of light. But he, Luther, was certain that Christ was with him, not silently, but speaking in his revealed Word. ([St. L. 1, 1118 ff.](#)) So it is. Christ has pointed us to His Word: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.", John 8:31-32. Let us remember this when we open our Bible or hear the words of the Bible,

so that we may worship in reverence of God in His Word and say: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth!"

2. Do we read the Scriptures diligently? That is how it should be. Holy Scripture is a letter from God to us humans. Luther says repeatedly: Letters of lords and princes should be read two or three times, for they are written thoughtfully. But the Scriptures, our God's letter, should be read incessantly, a hundred and a thousand times. ([St. L. I, 1055](#); [XXII, 544](#). [1069](#).) Now there is hardly a house in our synod in which a Bible is not to be found. Yes, there are probably several copies of the Bible in almost every house. But in order to test ourselves as to whether we take the Holy Scriptures seriously as the Word of God, we should ask ourselves the question: Is the Bible the most read or the least read book in our home? If we investigate, we will find that we have sinned greatly in this respect. And this is because we forget that the Bible is God's own Word, God's letter, written to every human being. If we want to establish diligent Bible reading in our churches, we must point this out again and again: Remember, dear Christian, what you have in your Bible! It is God's letter, also addressed to you personally. In it you are told: God is merciful to you; you, sinner, are reconciled with God through Christ's death; God has accepted you for the sake of Christ's blood.

3. Do we diligently listen to God's Word when it is preached in public? God not only wants His Word to be read, but he has also ordained that His Word be proclaimed in public preaching by those who are competent and called to do so. What follows from this? All who have feet to walk and ears to hear should go to church for public preaching, unless God himself tells us through the circumstances at hand: You are not going to church today. Only ministries of love, such as caring for the sick, should prevent us from doing so. It is a contempt for the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God if we become sluggish and lazy in attending public services.

4. Do we allow God's Word to dwell richly among us, even in our conversation and interaction with the brethren? Christians can and should also talk to one another about the things that belong to their worldly and civil profession. They will also discuss contemporary events. The world is wrong in its assessment of current events. Christians need not err with the world. They can and should put all these things in the light of the Word of God. God has written the letter of His Word to them for this purpose. That is why Christians talk among themselves above all about God's Word and church matters. This was probably better in our synod in the past than it is now. [[Pieper says a falling away was beginning in 1921.](#)] We pastors should always exhort our congregations

not to forget to let the word of Christ dwell abundantly among them in their social gatherings.

5. Are we diligent to commit as many words of Scripture as possible to our memory, so that God's Word may be present to us as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, even when we do not have our Bible with us? Care should be taken at home and at school to memorize such a selection of stories and Bible verses which express the main points of Christian doctrine and life.

6. Do we show diligence and zeal in the distribution of the Bible? The Bible should be read. "Search the Scriptures!" Let us not forget: when we spread the Bible, we also bring into the hands of unbelievers the book in which God speaks to them. But the Holy Spirit is connected with God's speech in the Scriptures, both with the law and with the gospel. Through the law, the Holy Spirit works knowledge of sin; through the gospel, faith in Christ. So, *give the Bible a chance!* We do this by spreading the Bible. Many unbelievers have been converted to Christ by reading the Bible. [Contrary to many in the LC-MS!] All Christians, not just pastors, should therefore always have Bibles and Testaments in their homes so that they can hand them out occasionally. It is fitting that we believe that the Bible is God's own book, written to each and every person.

7. Are we diligent in the work of training teachers and preachers who make it their life's work to teach God's Word? God also wants His Word proclaimed in the public preaching ministry, as we have already heard. But we must train the preachers. Christ himself taught his disciples for three years. The apostles also had a kind of seminary. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: "Hold fast the example of the words of salvation which you have heard from me." 2 Tim. 1:13; and Timothy should look around the churches for such people "who are able to teach others also", 2 Tim. 2:2. We must do the same. It should be our constant concern that people who teach the Scriptures publicly are also trained for this ministry. [A hot topic in today's LC-MS.] A synod that neglects its teaching institutions proves that it does not believe from the heart that Scripture is God's own Word.

II.

The Holy Scriptures are God's Word by inspiration, that is, by the fact that God gave or inspired the Scriptures to the sacred writers.

The Holy Scriptures not only tell us the fact that they are God's Word, but also teach very clearly and distinctly where

this comes from, namely, that the Holy Scriptures were breathed or inspired by God into the men through whom they were written. It is said in 2 Tim. 3:16 of the Holy Scriptures: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" and in 2 Pet. 1:21 of the writers of the Holy Scriptures: "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." This divine act of inspiration is the reason why Holy Scripture, although written by men and in human language, is not the word of man but the Word of God. The following is contained in the above-mentioned scriptural statements about inspiration:

1. The inspiration of Scripture is the inspiration of the words of Holy Scripture, in theological terms: *verbal inspiration*, *plenary inspiration*. It is quite curious how now and then even well-meaning people who want to stand up for the divinity of Scripture nevertheless express doubts about the inspiration of words or verbal inspiration. In Germany there are a number of pastors who, in the face of unbelief, want to advocate the divinity of Scripture, including the inspiration of Scripture, but strangely enough reject the inspiration of the words of Scripture. They want to admit that the persons who wrote the Scriptures were inspired (personal inspiration), but the inspiration should not extend to the words used by the sacred writers. It will also be admitted that the things about which they wrote were presented to the sacred writers (real inspiration), but inspiration should not extend to the words with which the things are described. But these are both foolish and unscriptural thoughts. As certainly as 2 Tim. 3:16 says of Scripture "inspired by God", and Scripture, as everyone admits, does not consist of "persons" or "things" but of words, so certainly the inspiration of Scripture is word or verbal inspiration. The same is clear from 2 Peter 1:21: "The holy men of God have spoken, moved by the Holy Spirit." From this passage it is clear that the holy men of God, driven by the Holy Spirit, did not merely think or contemplate, but that they spoke, that is, produced words. That we are speaking here of the written words of Holy Scripture, and not merely of the spoken word, is expressly stated in the preceding verse (v. 20), where the words produced by the holy men of God are more specifically described as "prophecy in the Scriptures". And when we look at the use that Christ and the apostles made of the Scriptures, we see that they insist precisely on the words of Scripture. When Christ says of the Scriptures that they cannot be broken (John 10:35), he is referring precisely to the words of Scripture. For he bases his argument against the Jews, that he does not

commit blasphemy when he calls himself "Son of God", on the fact that in the 82nd Psalm the word "gods" is even used of mere men, of the judges of the earth. We see from the story of the temptation of Christ that in Scripture it is precisely the words that matter, and that every dispute is decided by words. By saying "It is written" three times, Christ confronts the devil with the words of Scripture and wins the victory. The Savior says: "It is written: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'", Matt. 4:4. "Again it is also written: 'You shall not tempt your Lord God'", v. 7. "It is written: 'You shall worship your Lord God and serve him only'", v. 10. That in divine revelation to mankind it is precisely the words that matter, and faith must adhere to them, is something Christ also says in John 8:31-32: "If you abide in my teaching [that is, in my word], then you are truly my disciples and will know the truth." So much does everything depend on the words that the apostle Paul says of all teachers who do not abide in Christ's words that they are darkened and know nothing, 1 Tim. 6:3 ff. In short, if we did not hold that the inspiration of Scripture is word inspiration or verbal inspiration, so that the words of Scripture are God's words, Scripture would be of no use to us, because we would always have to remain in doubt as to whether the human writers had also found the right words in the high divine things. But now that the Scriptures — that is, the words of which the Scriptures are composed — are inspired by God, our faith has a foundation on which it can rest securely, because it is firmer than heaven and earth. That is why we dare not depart from any part of God's written word. Luther calls those reckless despisers of Scripture who ignore even one clear passage as if it did not exist, and adds for his own person: "So it is for me that every Bible-passage makes the world too narrow for me." ([St. L. XX, 788](#)) In short, Holy Scripture teaches nothing but verbal inspiration.

2. The inspiration of Scripture does not consist in a mere guidance of the sacred writers (*assistentia, assistance, direction*) and preservation of them from error, but in the divine presentation or giving of the words of which Scripture consists. 2 Tim. 3:16 says of Scripture not merely: "All Scripture is directed or guided by God", but: "All Scripture is inspired by God." Guided or directed by God and inspired by God are quite different concepts. Within the Lutheran Church of the seventeenth century, the Helmstedt theologian [Georg Calixt](#) wanted to assume a mere divine

guidance and protection from error with regard to such things in Scripture that were already known to the sacred writers beforehand and were of lesser importance in general. ²⁾ To some, this seems harmless at first glance. But Calixt's opinion was rightly rejected by the old Lutheran theologians as contrary to Scripture, because it made a change in the scriptural statement 2 Tim. 3:16, namely, for the statement "inspired by God" another statement was substituted, different in content: "directed or guided by God". Furthermore, it was rightly pointed out by our old theologians that if "guidance" were substituted for "inspiration", the Scripture would at best be the flawless word of man, but not God's Word itself. Scripture is the majestic Word of God itself only through inspiration. ³⁾

In the Church of God, only "from the mouth of God" should be spoken. The prophet Jeremiah warns the children of Israel: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They deceive you, for they speak from their hearts and not from the mouth of the Lord", Jer. 23:16. Let us note the difference between church and state: in the state, people are allowed, indeed commanded, to speak from reason; civil society is to be instructed from reason about good and evil. But in the church, a completely different order prevails. The church is God's house, God's temple, and in this house, as Luther often says, only the word of the great master of the house should resound. If, for example, a member of the congregation comes to the pastor and says: "Pastor, I cannot accept what you have said", the pastor must be able to say and prove it: I have spoken from God's mouth, not from my mouth; this is what God says in His Word. In the same way, our school teachers and professors must be able to say: I teach from the mouth of God; thus saith the Lord; thus it is written.

3. Inspiration does not extend merely to a part of Scripture, such as the principal things, or to what was previously unknown to the sacred writers, etc., but to the whole of Scripture. What is part of Scripture is also inspired by God. This and nothing else is expressed in the words: "All Scripture is inspired by God." We would do violence to these words if we wanted to exclude parts of Scripture from inspiration, such as those parts that contain interwoven historical remarks or descriptions of countries and natural things, or even events that were already known to the sacred writers beforehand. In discussing the question of the extent of inspiration in Scripture, we emphasize the word "all": "all

2) Thus already before Calixt the Jesuit Bellarmin († 1621) and other Jesuits. In Quenstedt I, 99 sq. Likewise Grotius († 1645 in Rostock). In Quenstedt, I. c., p. 100.

3) Quenstedt I, 98 sq., against Calixt and Bellarmin.

Scripture inspired by God". 4) [4] Quenstedt I, 98] John 10:35 also belongs here again: "The Scriptures cannot be broken."

4. The inspiration of Scripture naturally also includes the divine impulse and the command to write. When Roman theologians, such as Bellarmin and other Jesuits, admit that the writings of the New Testament were also inspired or inspired by God to the evangelists and apostles, but nevertheless deny that the evangelists and apostles had God's will and command for their writing,⁵⁾ [5] Bellarmin, *De Verbo Dei* IV, 3; in Quenstedt I, 94] this is a contradiction in terms. God would not have given or inspired the sacred writers their writings if they had not had God's will and command to write them. The old Lutheran theologians therefore rightly say that inspiration always includes God's will and command to perform the act of writing (*importare*). That the Romanists absurdly deny this is due to the fact that they want to lower the prestige of Holy Scripture and, on the other hand, raise the prestige of the "oral tradition" they fabricate. [Against Biermann and his "tradition"!]

Recent Protestants who deny the inspiration of Holy Scripture have also claimed that the apostles wrote their letters "by chance". The intention is the same as with the Romans. They also want to evade the divine authority of Holy Scripture. They therefore argue that the writings of the apostles were only prompted by particular circumstances in the individual congregations of their time and could therefore not be a rule and guideline for the church of later times until the Last Day. The letter to the Romans was prompted by the fact that the apostle Paul "coincidentally" had not yet been in Rome and therefore had the idea of writing a letter to the Roman church, Rom. 1:13 ff. The apostle had written to the Corinthians because he had "accidentally" learned from Chloe's servants that the church was suffering from partisanship. But anyone who calls these occasions "accidental" and wants to prove from them that the apostle's word is not the source and guideline of Christian doctrine for the church of all times must basically deny that there is a God who has all "accidental occasions" in his hands. Christ expressly says that he teaches Christianity until the Last Day through the word of his apostles, John 17:20. The apostles are also aware that their teaching covers the entire period of the church until the end of time, 1 Cor. 11:26; 18:12; 1 Tim. 6:13-14. Luther was also already aware of the objection that the letters of the apostles could not have general validity because they were prompted by special circumstances in the individual congregations. He deals with this in his writing "On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church", where he says ([XIX, 19 f.](#)):

"If we admit that any letter of Paul or any passage of any letter does not concern the general church, then the whole reputation of Paul is already destroyed. For the Corinthians will say that what he teaches about faith in his letter to the Romans does not concern them. What could be more blasphemous and nonsensical than this foolishness? Far be it from him, far be it from him, that there should be any trifle in all of Paul, whom the whole universal church should not follow and hold! Such was not the opinion of the fathers until these perilous times, in which, as Paul foretold, there would be blasphemers, blind people, and people of disturbed minds."

5. The fact that Holy Scripture is inspired by God and is therefore God's own Word also implies its complete inerrancy (*infallibilitas Scripturae Sacrae, infallibility, inerrancy of Holy Scripture*), because "to err is human", but not divine. That there can be no error in Holy Scripture, we still have the testimony of the Son of God himself, as we have repeatedly recalled, when he says in John 10:35: "The Scripture cannot be broken." One of our old Lutheran theologians, namely Quenstedt, says: "In the canonical Holy Scriptures there is no lie, no false statement, none, not even the slightest error, either in things or in words, but the whole and the particular is entirely true, whatever is taught therein, whether it concern doctrine of faith or morals or history, chronology, description of places or names, and no ignorance, no carelessness or forgetfulness, no error of memory can or may be ascribed to the writers of the Holy Spirit in writing the Scriptures." 6) [6] *Systema* I, 112] These words of Quenstedt sound appalling to modern ears, but they do not go even one line beyond Christ's words: "The Scriptures cannot be broken" and beyond his Apostle's words: "All Scripture is inspired by God."

The relationship of the Holy Spirit to the writers of the Holy Scriptures.

More recent theologians declare the relationship of the Holy Spirit to be an insoluble problem. They want to leave the relationship undefined. But they speak here of an insoluble problem in the interest of their position, according to which the boundary between truth and error cannot be clearly defined in Scripture. But the Scriptures indicate the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the writers of Holy Scripture very precisely by saying that the Lord spoke "through the prophet" (Matt. 1:22; 2:15) and that the Holy Spirit "spoke through the mouth of David" (Acts 1:16; 4:25). According to this, God used the holy scribes as his mouth, that is, as

his organs or instruments, and indeed as his organs and instruments in such a way that they did not write their word, but God's word. Paul tells the Corinthian church in 1 Cor. 14:37: "The things I write are the commandments of the Lord", thus justifying the claim that all those in the church who considered themselves "prophets" and "spiritual" were subject to His Word. The Jewish people had the advantage over other peoples that with the Holy Scriptures they were entrusted with what "God had spoken". Thus Scripture itself provides very clear information about the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the writers of Holy Scripture. The sacred writers were no more and no less than organs or instruments of the Holy Spirit in the creation of Holy Scripture. To describe this relationship (of instrumentality), both the Church Fathers and the old Lutheran theologians call the sacred scribes pens of the Holy Spirit, hands of the Holy Spirit, notaries, scribes, secretaries of the Holy Spirit. These expressions are much ridiculed by more recent theologians. But these expressions are scriptural as long as the point of comparison (the *tertium comparationis*) is maintained, namely that the holy scribes were only God's instruments in writing the Holy Scriptures. They are intended to express no more and no less than that the sacred writers did not write their own word, but God's Word. And this is true, as we have seen from Scripture itself. But that the sacred writers were not dead, mechanical instruments, but living ones, equipped with reason and will and a certain style, a certain mode of expression (*modus dicendi*), has also been very emphatically emphasized by the ancient theologians. If more recent theologians ascribe to our ancient theologians a purely mechanical concept of inspiration, this is a pure invention and at best can be attributed to ignorance on the part of the ancient dogmatists. Quenstedt explains in I, 109 f., quoting from the Church Fathers and Lutheran teachers, that the Holy Spirit took the natural disposition and formation of the individual writers into His service. He also uses the Church Fathers' image of a musical instrument. [Cp. [this blog post](#).] In a musical instrument (e.g. in an organ) the pipes sound unequally, but the player is only one. Quenstedt also describes in detail the different styles in the writings of the Old and New Testaments.

III.

The objections to the inspiration of Scripture are null and void.

The objections to the literal inspiration of Scripture do not reveal cleverness or sharpness of mind, but just the opposite. We have in the objections a clear example of the fact that every critic of the Word of God is struck by God's

judgment, also in the sense that the critic also denies his natural understanding or common sense, becomes unreasonable and illogical. This will confront us when we examine the objections.

1. The different styles found in the various books of Scripture have been objected to against inspiration. By style we mean the particular manner which we perceive in a certain writer in the use of certain words and modes of speech, in the arrangement of sentences, in the connection of sentences with one another, etc. Just as people are distinguished from one another by their facial features, so that we can recognize them from one another — by the way, this is a very useful divine arrangement among men — so people are also distinguished from one another by the way they express their thoughts orally and in writing. To give a few examples: Luther writes in a different style from Melanchthon and Chemnitz, Gerhard in a different style from Dannhauer, Walther in a different style from Sihler, Goethe in a different style from Schiller, Shakespeare in a different style from Longfellow. So too in the Holy Scriptures. Isaiah clearly writes in a different style from Amos, Matthew in a different style from John, Paul in a different style from Peter. This is also recognizable in the translations. The argument used by the deniers of inspiration goes like this: If all Scripture were inspired by God, then only one style should be found in the whole of Scripture. Much is made of this argument, and yet it is very foolish. — We reply to this argument: The different styles do not contradict divine inspiration, but are required by it, because God spoke not only through one, but through several men, each of whom had his own style, and which God used to communicate His Word as he found it in the individual writers. God could not use his own divine style when he wanted to speak to us humans because we would not understand it. This can also be seen, for example, in 2 Corinthians 12:4. There the apostle Paul reports that he was raptured in the heavenly paradise and heard words there. But they were "unspeakable words, which no man can utter", 2 Cor. 12:4, namely on earth, in human society. Thank God for his grace that he spoke to us humans in the human style he found in the holy writers, in order to lead us to heaven! The heavenly style, which we cannot understand here on earth, we will one day understand in heaven. Quenstedt says (I, 109): "As the holy writers were educated or accustomed to speak and write more loftily or more simply, so the Holy Spirit used them and wanted to adapt himself to the nature of men and condescend to them." It is the same with human speech in Scripture as with Christ's walk

on earth during the thirty-three years. In order to redeem us men, that is, to fulfill the law in our place and to suffer and die in our stead, Christ had to become like another man and be found in appearance as a man, Phil. 2:7. Had he appeared in divine glory, everything in the Jewish land would have fled from him from Dan to Beersaba. So Christ, having acquired salvation for all mankind, became man in the Holy Scriptures in order to be able to distribute the acquired salvation to mankind. This could not be done in heavenly speech, which we humans would not have understood, but only in the speech and language in which people communicate with each other here on earth.

2. Another objection to inspiration has been the fact that the sacred writers rely on human research, human information, and human knowledge. This is indeed the case. The evangelist Luke says that what he writes "he has known all things from the beginning" (Luke 1:3). The apostle Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:11: "It has come to me [that is, it has been reported] through those of Chloe's household [family] that there is strife among you." The apostle John says in 1 John 1:3-4: "What we have seen and heard we declare to you ... and these things we write to you." The argument that the deniers of inspiration want to take from this against inspiration goes like this: If the sacred writers were inspired by God as to what they should write, why do they refer to their own research, communication from others and their own experience for what they have written? That contradicts itself! Why don't they just stick to what they say: God, Christ, the Holy Spirit speaks through us? Answer: This objection belongs to the same class as the objection that is taken from the different style. Just as the Holy Spirit used the style that he found in the individual writers, so he also used the historical knowledge that the writers had through their own experience or through research or through communication from other people. We have an example of this in the account of the first Pentecost, Acts 2: The apostles knew about the resurrection of Christ through their own experience. They had seen and heard the risen Christ. Nevertheless, on the first Pentecost they also spoke of the resurrection of Christ, "as the Spirit gave them utterance", Acts 2:4. In the Psalms David also speaks of the fear of sin and the consolation of grace from his own experience, and at the same time he attributes his Psalms to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit when he says of his Psalms in 2 Sam. 23:2: "The Spirit of the Lord has spoken through me, and his word has come through my tongue." Luther remarks on this (St. L. III, 1890): "What a glorious, lofty boast this is! He who may boast that the Spirit of the Lord speaks through him,

and that his tongue speaks the word of the Holy Spirit, must of course be very certain of his own affairs. This will not be David, the son of Jesse, born in sin, but the one raised up as a prophet by God's promise. Should he not make sweet psalms who has such a master, who teaches him and speaks through him? Hear now, he who has ears to hear! My speech is not my speech, but he who hears me hears God; he who despises me despises God. For I see that many of my descendants will not hear my words, to their great detriment. Neither we [Luther — Chemnitz, Gerhard, Quenstedt — Walther, Sihler — professors in St. Louis — pastors from the pulpit — teachers in the classroom] nor anyone who is not a prophet may have such fame. This we may do, provided we are also holy and have the Holy Spirit, that we catechumens and disciples of the prophets may boast as those who repeat and preach what we have heard and learned from the prophets and apostles, and are also certain that the prophets taught it. These are called in the Old Testament the 'children of the prophets', who do not set up anything of their own or new things, as the prophets do, but teach what they have from the prophets, and are 'Israel', as David says, to whom he makes the psalms." The writings of Christian teachers contain God's Word, taken from Scripture; Holy Scripture, on the other hand, is God's Word, especially in the Psalms, which the Holy Spirit speaks "out of David's experience".

3. The various readings (variants) found in the copies we have of the original writings have also been used against the inspiration of Holy Scripture. These various readings are indeed a fact. The situation is this: We no longer possess the original writings of the apostles, which were written in the first century, but only copies. The oldest copies that have come down to us date from the fourth century of the Christian church. And in these copies there are slight differences in some places, which are the result of mistakes made by the copyists. The argument that the deniers of inspiration want to take from this is as follows: because there are obviously scribal errors in the copies, it is no longer possible to determine exactly which are the original words of God, and therefore the inspiration of the Word must be abandoned as useless. The first answer to this is that scribal errors in copies have nothing whatsoever to do with the inspiration of the original writings. Let us take an example from our civil circumstances. Our state legislatures adopt laws. If errors occur in the copies or impressions from an oversight on the part of the copyist or printer, we do not reasonably draw the conclusion that the law was not adopted

in a particular wording at all. We refute the further objection that we cannot know exactly whether we still have the necessary Word of God in our time, which Christ gave to the Church through his apostles, in two ways. That we nevertheless possess the word of the apostles, despite the slight differences in the copies, we know first of all quite precisely and before all human investigation from the divine promise. Our Savior says John 8:31-32: "If ye continue in my word, ye are my true disciples, and shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." This admonition of Christ to abide in His Word naturally applies to the entire time of the Christian Church until the Last Day. But the exhortation to abide by His Word foresees that Christ's word will be available until the Last Day. But that we have Christ's Word in the word of his apostles, Christ himself says in the high priestly prayer, where it says in John 17:20: "I do not pray for them [namely the apostles] alone, but also for those who will believe in me through their [namely the apostles'] word." If all Christians come to faith through the word of the apostles until the Last Day, it is thereby presupposed and promised that the apostles' word will not be lost until the Last Day, but will be present. The same is clear from Eph. 2:20, where it says of the Christian Church for the entire time of its existence: "Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." Secondly, we also know that we have the word of the apostles, despite the slight differences in the copies, through human investigation, which we can also call scientific research. For we can ascertain that the various readings (variants) available do not alter Christian doctrine in the slightest. This is admitted by the very men who have made the investigation of the various readings a special study. It would be a futile objection if someone wanted to say: Because 1 John 6:7 contains the words about the three witnesses in heaven. Because the words about the three witnesses in heaven are missing in the oldest copies, therefore the testimony about the Holy Trinity is missing in the New Testament. Folly! There are other very clear passages for this teaching, e.g. Matt. 28:19: "Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", and 2 Cor. 13:13: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all!"

4. Finally, the inspiration of Scripture is denied by the assertion that there are contradictory passages in Scripture. With regard to these alleged contradictions, to summarize briefly, it stands thus: With reasonably good will and reasonably diligent attention, the possibility of reconciliation can be easily demonstrated in most cases. For example, a

contradiction has been found between 1 Cor. 10:8 and Num. 26:9. In the former passage, the apostle Paul writes: "23,000 fell in one day", while in the latter passage it says: "24,000 were killed in the plague." This apparent contradiction was recently given by a pastor outside our synod as a reason why he could not accept the inspiration of the Word of Scripture. But here, too, a balance is easily possible. The apostle Paul gives the number of those who fell in one day, as he himself says, and that was 23,000, while Numbers 25:9 gives the number of those who were killed in the whole plague. If Paul only mentions 23,000, he is not counting the rulers of the people whom Moses had killed by hanging at God's command according to Numbers 25:4. There may well have been 1000 of them. If these are added, the total comes to 24,000. Everyone should admit that this compensation is possible. And one possibility of compensation must be enough for any fair-minded person. It is unreasonable to demand proof that a particular solution to the apparent contradiction is the only correct one. Because we do not know the exact circumstances (place and time) of some reported events, we must admit several possibilities of reconciliation from the outset. This is what our old Lutheran theologians say. So also Luther, when he often reminds us that it does not matter whether one resolves an apparent contradiction in one way or another. Incidentally, even in the sectarian community there are still theologians from time to time who firmly declare the Scriptures to be God's Word and therefore also say the right thing about the resolution of apparent contradictions. Thus A. T. Robertson (in Broadus, *Harmony of the Gospels*, p. 232) says: "*In explaining a difficulty, it is always to be remembered that even a possible explanation is sufficient to meet the objector. If several possible explanations are suggested, it becomes all the more unreasonable to contend that the discrepancy is irreconcilable. It is work of supererogation to proceed to show that this or that explanation is the real solution of the problem.*" If, however, a case should occur to us where we do not recognize a possibility of reconciliation, we as Christians leave the matter alone, because we believe the inerrancy of Scripture on the authority and clear testimony of the Son of God, who says in John 10:35 precisely with regard to the words of Scripture: "And yet the Scripture cannot be broken." Pastor G. Schulze in Walsleben said very correctly: "We await the time when it will be clarified, and die confidently, even if it does not happen." (Quoted in [L. u. W. 1891, p. 357](#)) All objections against the inspiration and therefore also against the inerrancy of Scripture are unworthy of a Christian, because they place human judgment in relation to the Holy Scriptures above the judgment of Christ, the Son of God. Whoever believes Christ in John 3:16:

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" can also believe him in John 10:35, where he says: "The Scriptures cannot be broken."

This is also Luther's judgment on Scripture, not only at the beginning of his life, but also at the end of his life. He wrote in 1520: "Scripture cannot err." ([St. L. XIX, 1073](#)) In the same year: "Scripture has never yet erred." ([XV, 1481](#)) In 1524: "Scripture agrees everywhere." ([III, 18](#)) In 1527: "It is certain that Scripture cannot be at variance with itself." ([XX, 798](#)) In 1535: "It is impossible that the Scriptures should be contrary to themselves, without the ignorant, coarse and obstinate hypocrites [thinking so]." (W. VIII, 2141.) In the years 1541 and 1545 Luther speaks in his "Chronikon" of the fact that the dates of ancient human historians sometimes do not agree with the dates of Holy Scripture, and adds that in such cases Holy Scripture is always right, because it is God's Word. Luther says ([St. L. XIV, 491](#)): "I use them (namely the human historians) in such a way that I am not forced to contradict Scripture. For I believe that in Scripture the truthful God speaks, but in the histories good men show their diligence and faithfulness (but as men), or at least that the copyists could have erred." [[See this blog post.](#)]

Summary.

So let us not forget: Holy Scripture is the book in which God himself speaks to us. Let us consider daily what a wonderful, unique book it is that we have in our homes and can use at any time. In it God reveals to us first of all our sin, by which we have earned God's wrath and eternal damnation. But God reveals our sin to us in the Bible, not in order to destroy us, but in order to grant us forgiveness of sins through the same Bible for the sake of Christ. — Furthermore, God himself tells us not just once, but often in the Bible, what works are pleasing to him and what works we must avoid so that we do not lose our heavenly inheritance. And when affliction comes upon us and we open our Bible or someone reads it to us, it is God himself who comforts us as a mother comforts him.

Thank God that He has given us the Holy Scriptures! With the Bible in our hands, we can walk confidently and safely through this life. In it we have sufficient light in the darkness of this world. In it we also have sufficient strength in our weakness; for because the Bible is God's Word, it is endowed with divine power, which becomes effective in us and passes over into us as often as we

use the Bible. It works in us both that we do not err with the erring world and to ensure that we do not fall into its same disorderly ways. It also keeps us from slothfulness in the works which God wants us to do and which are pleasing to him. For if we want to become cold and sluggish in good works, let us open our Bible and warm our hearts with the fire of divine love that beats against us in such Bible words as: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life", John 3:16. That is why our prayer is [**according to the German**]:

Let your word, O Lord, be always
The lamp unto our feet,
Keep it with us clear and pure,
Help us to enjoy from it
Strength, counsel and comfort in all adversity,
That in life and in death
That we may constantly trust in it!

God the Father, for your honor
Your word spread far and wide;
Help, Jesus, that your teaching
May enlighten and guide us;
O Holy Spirit, your divine Word
Let it work in us again and again
Patience, love, hope, faith!

(No. 178, 9. 10.)

Amen.