

## LCMS, LCC and NALC Leaders Release Joint Statement on Scripture

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As an important step forward in the ongoing consultation between representatives of the Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC), The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), the participants who represented the three church bodies are releasing their joint statement on Holy Scripture, “God’s Word Forever Shall Abide: A Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures.”

Representatives of the three Lutheran church bodies have been meeting twice a year since late 2011, with conversations focused on similarities and differences, as well as topics of common concern. Discussion regularly addresses the challenges to marriage, sexuality, the sanctity of all human life and religious liberty. From the beginning, however, the participants have been engaging in serious, in-depth conversation about the authority of Scripture, which is foundational to the church bodies’ understandings of these other issues.

The two most recent consultations, Sept. 9-10, 2015, in St. Louis, and March 16-17, 2016, in Bradenton, Fla., resulted in the drafting of the common statement, understood as providing guidance to the participants in ongoing, future conversations. The introduction to the document states:

*We confess that the Bible is God’s written Word as part and parcel of our deepest confession — that Jesus Christ is the very Son of God, God incarnate, “very God of very God” and the Savior and Redeemer of all humankind. We confess that the Bible is God’s Word because its entire message is focused on Jesus Christ and His saving work. He is the heart and center of Scripture and the key to its true meaning.*

Topical sections of the statement address: how did the Bible get here, what kind of book is the Bible, suitable methodology of interpretation and proper use of the Bible.

The statement is a reflection of the consensus of the participants and not an official document or doctrinal statement approved by any one of the three church bodies. It is intended to serve as a guideline for further joint study by the representatives and by other groups within the three denominations who are seeking to know more about each other. It also is hoped that it may help pastors and congregations who want to know more about the confessional Lutheran understanding of the truth and authority of Scripture on which the LCMS, the LCC and the NALC are founded.

The statement concludes:

*We rejoice in our consensus in these truths. We pray that our shared understanding will be a sure and solid foundation for us to address future conversations and discussions, both in matters of agreement and areas where we do not share a common teaching or practice.*

Participants in the ongoing consultations between leaders of the LCMS, the LCC and the NALC have been the Rev. Dr. Albert Collver III (LCMS), the Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer (LCMS), the Rev. Larry Vogel (LCMS), the Rev. John Pless (LCMS), the Rev. Robert Bugbee (LCC president), the Rev. John Bradosky (NALC bishop), the Rev. Mark Chavez (NALC), the Rev. Dr. Jim Nestingen (NALC), the Rev. Paull Spring (NALC) and the Rev. Dr. David Wendel (NALC).

“God’s Word  
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**A GUIDING STATEMENT ON THE  
CHARACTER AND PROPER USE  
OF THE SACRED SCRIPTURES**



# “God’s Word FOREVER shall ABIDE”

## A GUIDING STATEMENT ON THE CHARACTER AND PROPER USE OF THE SACRED SCRIPTURES<sup>1</sup>

*God spoke, and it was so (Genesis 1). Together we acknowledge that God works by His Word. The Word of God brings creation into being in a way beyond human knowledge — a way that can only elicit doxology, not human understanding. Then, to a fallen world God spoke through prophets in great compassion with human speech for human comprehension (Gen. 15:1). And now “in these last days,” with grace beyond comprehension, “he has spoken to us by his Son”: the Word by whom He upholds His universe and, yet, the Word made flesh. The Son, who dwelt among us, reveals that God is love as He bears sin and death in a great exchange that grants us resurrection and eternal life (Heb. 1:2–3; John 1:1–4, 14, 18).*

*God’s Word is not silenced. He speaks through human voices proclaiming His excellencies. He bespeaks us righteous in sermon and absolution. He declares His Word by human lips over baptismal water and eucharistic bread*

<sup>1</sup> This statement, “God’s Word forever shall abide” (“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” verse 4; see *LBW* 228, 229; *LSB* 657), was conceived at the Sept. 9–10, 2015, meeting of representatives of the LCMS and NALC where we agreed to prepare a joint statement on the authority of Holy Scripture. The LCC representative for the ongoing discussions — although unable to be present for these discussions — affirmed both the goal and this document. The present document uses materials provided by both groups (see the attached bibliography for resources that informed our discussions) and is the result of further conversation and consideration at the March 16–17, 2016 meeting of the representatives. The statement’s initial purpose was to serve as a foundation and guidelines for our deliberations, on the basis of God’s Word, both in areas where we seek to express a common position and also regarding such topics and practices as may divide us. It is offered here as a report from the representatives involved in these discussions.

*and cup. And He speaks with clarity and authority in the Holy Scriptures, which we recognize and confess to be “the only guiding principle and rule” for all Christian teaching, preaching, life and practice (FC SD Binding Summary 9).<sup>2</sup>*

*We confess together that the Bible is the written Word of God. We confess this even as we recognize that it is a collection of human writings spanning a time period of more than a thousand years in three different human languages. We confess this even as we recognize that the biblical texts address a variety of particular circumstances and exhibit the influence of cultural particularities, historical experiences, individual character traits and so forth.*

*We confess that the Bible is God’s written Word as part and parcel of our deepest confession — that Jesus Christ is the very Son of God, God incarnate, “very God of very God” and the Savior and Redeemer of all humankind. We confess that the Bible is God’s Word because its entire message is focused on Jesus Christ and His saving work. He is the heart and center of Scripture and the key to its true meaning. We trust the Bible because it has led us to trust in Jesus as our Savior and Lord. As St. John reminds us: “But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31; cp. John 5:39). We rejoice in the truth that comes in Christ*

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from the Book of Concord are from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

alone — the truth that is given by God's gracious act of sending His Son: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Heb. 1:1–2).

With the Church of every era, we regard these texts as the authoritative Word of God, because the Gospel of Christ is known through them and they alone rightly guide the life of faith. Our Lord Jesus Himself declares the trustworthiness of the Hebrew Scriptures when He quotes their authority, saying time and again, "It is written" (e.g., Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; Luke 24:46). He also assures us that His apostles, whose testimony undergirds the entire New Testament, were inspired by the Holy Spirit and that their writings are trustworthy in every way: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26).

Therefore, we joyfully confess that we are not strangers to God and His truth, for in justifying us sinners He has made us members of His household, "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Eph. 2:19–20). The Scriptures' prophetic and apostolic testimony to God's work from creation until Christ's future return and renewal of creation is the only trustworthy basis for knowing God rightly. Its authority is complete. We receive it with joy and accept its truth without qualification.

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## Part 1: How Did the Bible Get Here?

1. Lutheran confessional theology teaches that God has given humankind a revelation of Himself in His works of creation. The self-disclosure of God in the realm of nature is called "general revelation." The revelation of God in nature, which does reveal God's wisdom and power (Rom. 1:20), nonetheless is finally a revelation of God's law.
  - a. Ever since the entrance of sin into the world, the whole creation groans under the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:19ff). Our whole physical environment witnesses to the judgment of God who visits *death* on the works of His own hands because of human rebellion against Him.
  - b. Since general revelation does not witness to the grace that pardons but only to the wrath that punishes sin, the sinner responds to the revelation

of God in nature by willfully suppressing the truth to which it witnesses (Rom. 1:18). The sinner either denies that there is a God (Ps. 14:1; 53:1) or invents an idol whose wrath can be appeased by human devices (LC I 18–23).

2. The revelation in which God makes Himself known as a *gracious* God is called "special revelation." While special revelation cannot simply be equated with the Holy Scriptures, since God spoke to His people in many ways before any Scriptures were written and has spoken to us in these last times especially in His Son (Heb. 1:1–2), it is nevertheless true that it is in the Scriptures that the knowledge of these special revelations of God's mercy has come to us.
3. The revelation given to us in the Scriptures about all that God has done in human history to effect our salvation *comes from God*. No prophetic teaching about what God was doing through His people to keep His promise of sending a Redeemer arose from any mere human reflection on an interpretation of Israel's history. But men spoke from God about these things as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21).

Apostolic proclamation concerning all that God did in Christ was "revealed ... through the Spirit" and imparted "in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:10, 13; Gal. 1:11–12). The apostle Paul can declare of the Scriptures that nurtured Timothy (and us as well) that "all Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). So also, he can claim the same Spirit as the One who inspired his own writings (Rom. 15:18–19; 1 Cor. 2:13; Eph. 3:4–5).

4. Scriptures inspired by God were written by *human beings*. God gave His Word to His Old and New Testament people through human beings whom He Himself chose and endowed to speak His Word to concrete situations and circumstances in the history of His people.

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## Part 2: What Kind of Book Is the Bible?

The Bible, inspired by God and written by men, is a divine-human book. However, this is not to say that these are two parts that can be separated. The divine and the human in the Bible are combined in an inseparable union analogous to the union of the two natures in the Person of Christ.

### 1. A book written by human authors

Lutherans acknowledge and teach that the Bible, even though it is and transmits God's very own Word, is a thoroughly human book. They do not have a docetic view of the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

- a. One obviously human aspect of the sacred Scriptures is that the language of the Bible is *human language*, written to be read and understood by human beings. Accordingly, the Bible's language conforms to the usual principles of grammar and syntax. The biblical literature contains many of the literary forms and devices used by other literature for the purpose of effective communication.
- b. The Bible, considered as written communication, is human also in that it has a *history*.
  - i. In a sense, the biblical literature represents a "development." The Bible did not fall full-blown from heaven, but grew upon earth. The biblical literature came into existence over a period of many centuries and was written *by* human beings *for* human beings who lived in varying cultures and conditions, but the message remains the same.
  - ii. Inasmuch as the Bible was written in history by authors who were not insulated from the culture in which they lived and wrote, and inasmuch as its literature was not produced in a vacuum but was originally composed for and addressed to distinctively discreet situations and circumstances, this literature has a historical dimension that gives *it its own peculiar and concrete particularity*. In this sense, it bears the marks of a particular time and culture.<sup>4</sup>

### 2. A book inspired by God

Lutherans, however, also teach that the Bible is a *divine* book.

- a. While Lutherans recognize that the Bible as an historical phenomenon is open to investigation by the historian, they believe and confess that there is a not-of-this-world dimension to the sacred

Scriptures, not discernible by historical research. Lutherans, therefore, do not surrender the Bible to historians as though they could by their methods give a full account of the origin and nature of the biblical literature.

- b. Lutherans will not admit that the historian has the last word to say about the kind of a book the Bible is. They will not permit the historian to rule that the Bible is the product of precisely the same processes that produce other literature.
- c. Lutherans believe that in the history that occasioned the writing of the biblical literature God was active in a unique way, so that there is a qualitative difference between the inspired Scriptures and every other form of human expression.

### 3. A perfect unity

Since *God* is their primary Author, the Scriptures differ qualitatively from other literature in that they possess such attributes as unity and complete truthfulness or reliability.

- a. Lutheran theology has always acknowledged that there is a certain progression discernible in the revelation that God gave of Himself and of His saving actions in history when earlier Scriptures are compared with later Scriptures (as when the Old Testament is compared with the New Testament.)
- b. Lutheran theology also acknowledges that there are in the Scriptures no conflicting or contradictory conceptions of God and His ways with humanity, but rather a perfect theological unity, despite different emphases in different biblical books and authors.
- c. For Lutheran theology, it is a self-evident truth that God's revelation of Himself in the sacred Scriptures is always perfectly consistent with itself.
- d. Lutherans have given deep consideration to the implications of our Lord's two distinct natures united in His person and the Bible's character as a book that is both human and divine.
  - i. With the Church through the ages we confess that the divine and human natures and attributes of the incarnate Son of God relate to or "communicate" with one another. There is, no doubt, a mystery at work here not unlike that of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the undivided unity of the one God who made heaven and earth, redeemed all humanity and will renew the justified in the new creation. Nevertheless, even as we confess these great

<sup>3</sup> The docetists were a heretical group in the ancient church who denied the true humanity of Jesus. They held that He only appeared to be human.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the situation in Corinth which occasioned Paul's correspondence with that congregation had no precise parallel in any other congregation in apostolic times. If that particular situation had not occurred, Paul's letters to the Corinthians might not have been written at all or, at least, they would have had a different complexion.



mysteries, we also affirm these undeniable truths. As for the *communication of attributes* (*communicatio idiomatum*), we Lutherans have always confessed that which the Word of God makes clear:

1. What is true of each individual nature — the human and the divine — is true of the whole Christ, for He is one divine person (FC SD VIII 36). So it is that we confess the incomprehensible truth that in *the man* Christ Jesus, *God* died for us.
  2. The one Christ, in His office, works “according to, with, and through both natures” (FC SD VIII 46-47).
  3. In the personal union of the human and divine natures, the human nature of our Lord retains all its essential characteristics and traits, but alongside of them it has “special, high, great, supernatural, incomprehensible, indescribable heavenly prerogatives and privileges” both now and into eternity (FC SD VIII 51). And, with regard to this third point, we confess that we cannot limit or define the extent to which Christ’s humanity shares in His divinity.
- ii. With the Church through the ages we confess: The divine and human character of the Scriptures relate to one another in similar ways.
1. The Bible is fully human and fully divine — in its entirety. So we do read and study it, seeking to understand it as we would other historical documents. We also read it expectantly, for we believe its prophetic and apostolic character means that it is ever profitable to us in every way.
  2. God is at work in Scripture — indeed, He is present and most profoundly present in the Person of the Son about whom all Scripture testifies (Luke 24). God is present wholly in His humanity and divinity wherever the Word is rightly preached and taught. This is of deep comfort, for Jesus has promised Christians “that not only His mere divinity would be with them (which to us poor sinners is like a consuming fire on dry stubble). But Christ promised that He — He, the man who has spoken with them, who has experienced all tribulations in His received

human nature, and who can therefore have sympathy with us, as with men and His brethren — He will be with us in our troubles also according to the nature by which He is our brother and we are flesh of His flesh” (FC SD VIII 87).<sup>5</sup>

3. Our God’s humble work in this divine-human book — a book as open to ridicule as was the Lord whose humility made Him the suffering servant of all — is nonetheless “special, high, great, supernatural, incomprehensible, indescribable.” So much so, indeed, that we gladly confess that this book, like our Lord, is without fault, truthful in all things and given for our salvation (see John 20:31).
4. An *inerrant book* — a book that is completely reliable

Another qualitative difference between the Scriptures and other literature is that the Scriptures — like the God who gives them — are reliable and completely trustworthy, or as the Christian church has often asserted, they are inerrant.

- a. We realize that the term “inerrant” (or terms like “infallible” or expressions like “completely reliable”) is itself open to “errant” understandings and definitions. Not all Christians who confess the inerrancy of the Bible view this inerrancy in the same way or in a way that can be affirmed here. It should not be understood as implying that the Bible’s complete reliability can be demonstrated on the basis of human reason, historical study, scientific evaluation and so forth, but as an article of faith that fully coheres with Scripture’s character as the Word of God.<sup>6</sup>
- b. Lutherans do hold that to declare the inerrancy or complete reliability of the Scriptures

<sup>5</sup> *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

<sup>6</sup> Lutherans are not “fundamentalists.” We note that fundamentalism, historically, is a movement within Reformed theology holding to five fundamental doctrines and asserting that the inerrancy of Scripture is the only foundation for faith. Lutheran theology would hold that faith results from the Word as it is heard and received sacramentally. So faith in Christ, created by the Spirit through the Word, precedes and is the basis for confidence in Scripture’s infallibility. Therefore, while denying that Lutherans are fundamentalists, we joyfully affirm that we confidently hold that the Bible speaks truthfully when it teaches such doctrines as the bodily resurrection of Christ or His virgin birth or God’s miraculous interventions in history.

is to declare that what the Bible teaches to be true in any area of doctrine or life is so, but without any assumption that we can thereby resolve every difficulty of interpretation.

- c. We may not simply reduce scriptural reliability to “spiritual” matters. To do so is to invite a Gnostic sort of faith that not only questions the Bible’s truthfulness in such matters as creation, but in the whole of redemption as well, for the same Bible that tells us God is Spirit (John 4:24) also tells us that He creates the entire material world and has become man, embodied in flesh and blood (John 1:14; Heb. 2:14). So also, a limitation of biblical reliability to “spiritual matters” undermines biblical authority in matters of morality and ethics. Therefore, we affirm scriptural reliability in every matter of doctrine and life.
- d. Lutherans believe that Scripture’s reliability and trustworthiness does not suggest that it employs the technological precision of modern scientific study or contemporary historiographic methodologies. Only an anachronistic interpretive method would impose upon the Bible methodologies that have been developed centuries after its composition or would require the type of precision demanded by modern positivism or scientism.<sup>7</sup>
- e. The Lutheran Confessions make a sharp distinction between the Scriptures and human literature: “no person’s writing can be put on a par with it” (FC SD Summary 9), and clearly affirm that the imperfections that characterize human writings are not found in the Scriptures (Ap XXIV 94-95). Rather, the Word of God is “pure, infallible, and unchangeable” (Preface to the *Book of Concord* [BC Preface], 16; see also paragraph 20).
- f. The Lutheran Confessions confess the truthfulness of the Scriptures with simple and forceful words: “They will not lie to you” (LC V 76; cf. also FC Ep VIII 13) and “God’s Word cannot deceive” (LC IV 57). The Formula of Concord refers to Scripture’s teaching on election as a “clear, certain, and unerring foundation” for faith (FC SD XI 12).

- g. Above all, Lutherans approach the Scriptures with humility, confessing with Luther: “The Pope, Luther, Augustine, Paul, an angel from heaven — these should not be masters, judges, arbiters but only witnesses, disciples and confessors of Scripture” (AE 26:58).

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## Part 3: Suitable Methodology of Interpretation

Lutheran theology has always recognized that because the Bible is written in human language, certain general principles of interpretation must be observed. Lutheran theology also recognizes that because the Bible is God’s Word, certain other principles are basic to a correct understanding of its message.

### *A Human Book: General Principles*

1. Because the Bible communicates God’s eternal truth in literature, written by human authors employing human terminology and idioms, and comprises literary forms common to other human literature, it is self-evident that the best and most thorough biblical exegesis requires the following:
  - a. A thorough knowledge of the languages in which the Bible was originally written;
  - b. Acquaintance with and recognition of the literary forms employed by biblical authors for effective communication (address, oracle, prayer, creed, hymn, proverb, parable, historical narrative, edict, treaty, prose and poetry).
2. Because the biblical literature dates from various periods of human history and was addressed to concrete situations characterized by the particularity peculiar to everything that is historical, biblical interpretation needs to take this “historical dimension” of the Bible into account.
  - a. The biblical literature cannot be treated as though every book and pericope was addressed to general situations, and as though everything that is said in every pericope is applicable immediately to every situation.<sup>8</sup>
  - b. The interpreter will therefore want to understand:

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<sup>7</sup> Positivism and its synonym, scientism, assert that only the sciences can establish a valid truth claim.

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<sup>8</sup> For example, concerning the Third Commandment, Luther said: “Therefore, according to its literal outward sense, this commandment does not concern us Christians” (LC I 82 [Tappert]). For a discussion of the specific application of specific texts to specific situations, see the Apology’s treatment of Matt. 19:21 in Ap XXVII 45-50.

- i. What the *original* situation was to which the words were first spoken;
- ii. What the words meant in that *particular* historical context;
- iii. What their *continuing* meaning is for subsequent times and circumstances.
- c. Lutheran theology, therefore, gratefully uses all the information made available by historical and archaeological research relative to the history of Israel and of all the other nations whose history touches Israel's. Lutheran theology gratefully uses the gains of faithful New Testament scholarship, which broaden and deepen our understanding of the apostolic writings.
- d. When Lutherans say that Scripture interprets itself, this is not to be understood as though historical research has no value for illuminating the meaning of a biblical text.

### ***Inspired by God: Other Principles***

While Lutheran students of the Bible gladly avail themselves of any light that historical research can shed on the Bible as a historical phenomenon, they never forget that the Bible is at the same time God's eternal, immutable Word given to us by inspiration of God to make us wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15).

1. Viewing the Bible in this way leads Lutherans to emphasize the following as they interpret the Scriptures:
  - a. The divine and saving wisdom that the Bible imparts can be understood and believed only as the Holy Spirit graciously empowers us to hear what God is speaking to us in His Word.
  - b. In His Word, God speaks to us His Law and Gospel, the Word that condemns and the Word that forgives. These must be carefully distinguished lest the Law be diluted and the Gospel perverted so that we receive from the Scriptures neither the knowledge of sin nor the assurance of grace. The central message of the Bible is the Gospel of God's free grace toward sinners in Christ Jesus — the Good News that through the cross of Christ, the condemning record of our sin has been erased.
  - c. God's Word is, therefore, always to be read and interpreted in light of the Gospel — its central message of Christ and His justifying work. Just as surely, only in the Bible's revelation of the Triune God and the Person and work of Christ can we know the Gospel authentically and truthfully.

The Bible must be understood in this way, or it will not be understood at all.

2. With these indispensable emphases in mind, Lutherans employ principles for interpreting the Bible that flow from the fact that it is a divine book whose primary Author is the Holy Spirit.
  - a. Since it is the Holy Spirit who bears witness in all the Holy Scriptures to God's actions in human history for the salvation of the world, this witness is consistent with itself and true to the facts. Therefore, a basic principle for interpreting the Holy Spirit's writings is that they are characterized both by *unity* and *truthfulness*.
  - b. Because there is perfect unity in the scriptural witness to God and His mighty deeds for our redemption, Lutherans operate confidently with the principle that *Scripture interprets Scripture*.
    - i. It is the Spirit's authorship of the Scriptures that makes a meaningful application of this principle possible. If the Bible were merely a human book written from a variety of human perspectives and reflecting only human attempts to talk about God and history, then the unity necessary in order to use one part of Scripture to interpret another would be totally missing.
    - ii. Since the Spirit of truth is the Author of Scripture, the witness of Scripture to the history in which God acted savingly is true. This is not to say that the Scriptures are mere chronicles, or that they were written in the first instance to be a history of Israel and a biography of Jesus. The Bible reports history to show what God was doing through Israel and Jesus to accomplish His saving purposes. The history reported in the Bible is selective. In the Bible, God has given us a theology of history.
    - iii. While the history the Bible reports is selective, it is also wholly reliable. If the history is negated, then what God was doing in the history is negated too, and the Bible is turned into a book of mythology — humanly devised legends with no basis in fact — about the doings of the deity that have nothing to do with human affairs.
    - iv. It is a principle for Lutheran biblical interpretation that the Bible is not mythology, but a revelation from God Himself about what He actually did in the arena of human history in order to carry out His eternal counsels of salvation.



- c. Lutherans hold that the Scriptures are clear in their saving truths (the perspicuity of Scripture). We must, with Luther, distinguish the inner clarity of faith and the external clarity of Scripture. No one — believer or unbeliever — can misunderstand the clear assertion that God created heaven and earth, for example. However, only faith believes this clear assertion. The Bible’s essential message is unambiguous, but only faith appropriates its truth (Deut. 30:11–14; Rom. 10:5–13). This does not deny that there are passages we cannot understand either in part or fully. For this reason, we read what is unclear to us in light of the overwhelming clarity of the biblical message, confident that God has made clear everything we need for life and salvation in Christ Jesus.
  - d. In interpreting the Bible, Lutherans remember that the Spirit has spoken through *human beings* whose words must be understood in the light of their historical context. They remember, too, that the *Spirit* has spoken through human beings. This fact means that historical, human words are at the same time divine, eternal words that speak the truth about God’s saving will and actions.
- a. These quotations from the Confessions leave little doubt about how they use the Bible, namely, as the *ultimate* and *absolute authority* for all that the church teaches in God’s name.
  - b. That is why the Symbols repeat over and over again such formulas as “Scripture teaches” (AC XXIV 28; Ap XXIII 11; FC SD I 46; FC SD III 30) and “it is written” (AC XXIV 26; XXVIII 51; Ap IV 263; SA III vii 1–2; III xiii 3; FC SD III 20, 57; VI 12; VIII 6; X 8 11; XI 7).
  - c. That is why the Confessions, without concern that some might accuse them of making a legislative use of Scripture, firmly insist that where “we have the clear, certain testimonies in the Scripture ... we should [*sollen wir*] simply believe” and “should not raise any objections” (FC SD VIII 53).
3. The sacred Scriptures are to the Lutheran confessors the source of doctrine.
    - a. In contrast to the authority of the church fathers, the Smalcald Articles (II ii 15) set up the invariable rule: “This means that the Word of God — and no one else, not even an angel — should establish articles of faith.” The Augsburg Confession (Preface 8; Epilog to XXI 2; XXI 4, German) and the Apology (I 2; II 32–43; IV 5, 166; XII 16; *et passim*) appeal to the sacred Scriptures as a whole as well as to individual passages as final authority.
    - b. The “summary and generally accepted concept and form” that the Formula (SD Summary 1) regards as essential for basic and firm agreement in the Church is to be drawn from the Word of God. The prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of both testaments are “the pure, clear fountain of Israel” (FC SD Summary 3).

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## Part 4: Proper Use of the Bible

1. Because Lutherans believe, teach and confess that the words of the Holy Scriptures are from the Holy Spirit (Ap IV 107–108; AC XXVIII 49), they therefore hold that the Bible is qualitatively different from all other human literature (FC SD Summary 9; Ap XXIV 94–95). They do not hesitate to call the Bible the “pure, unadulterated Word of God” and “infallible” divine truth (BC Preface 5, 20).
2. Confessional Lutheran theology, accordingly, declares that “we base our teaching on God’s Word as the eternal truth” (FC SD Summary, 13); “God’s Word alone ought to be and remain the only guiding principle and rule of all teaching” (FC SD Summary 9); “Holy Scripture alone remains the only judge, rule, and guiding principle, according to which, as the only touchstone, all teachings should and must be recognized and judged as good or evil, correct or incorrect” (FC Ep Summary, 7); “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 Summary, 1; cp. FC SD Summary, 3).
4. Lutherans think it is “rash” to teach something that passages of Scripture do not teach (Ap XII 138), and that it is “extreme impudence” to teach anything that is contrary to testimonies of Scripture (Ap XXIII 63).
  - a. Lutherans, therefore, hold “that it is only from the Word of God that judgments on articles of faith are to be pronounced” (FC SD II 8). We accept without reservation that the only norm for the church’s faith and practice must be the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, that is, the written Word of God.
  - b. Lutherans appeal to and use the sacred Scriptures as a whole, as well as individual passages of Scripture, as the sole and final authority in the Church.

- i. This means that biblical teaching about the foundational doctrines of Christianity such as the Trinity, the two natures of Christ and the justification of the ungodly by grace through faith in Christ Jesus — these great truths — is sure and certain.
- ii. Just as certain is the biblical teaching on God's ordering of human life within His creation according to the commandments.

We rejoice in our consensus in these truths. We pray that our shared understanding will be a sure and solid foundation for us to address future conversations and discussions, both in matters of agreement and areas where we do not share a common teaching or practice.

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## Resources for Further Study

- A Comparative Study of Varying Contemporary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*. St. Louis: LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations, 1973.
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