

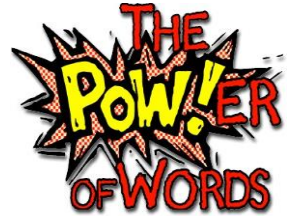
# Fundamentals of Christian Doctrine

## The Word of God – Lesson # 4



*The Bible is very important to us believers.* It is the **Word** of **God**, the living, inspired, **Word** of eternal life. When everything else in life fails, the **Word** of the **Lord** endures forever. It was written by humans who were inspired by the **Holy Ghost**, the **Ghostwriter**, the real author, the authority behind the writers, the final determining factor in what we believe & teach in the church, the revelation of **God's** will & **His** plan of salvation.

*While it was originally written in either Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek*, it has been translated into half of the known languages of the world. In the *Bible*, **God** speaks to **His** world thru the power of **His Holy Spirit Who** by *Grace* comes to us thru the words of the text as we read, and **He** goes to work & creates faith & good works in us. **He** is present & works whenever the **Word** is spoken; i.e. “Grace – Faith – Works.” Always in that order: “By **His** grace **He** feeds & sustains our faith and causes us to do good works.”



*So, how do we use the Bible?* – Since it is the **Word** of **God**, we use it in faith & faithfulness! Our teaching & living (*theology*) must always be based on the **Word** of **God** (Latin for **Word** of **God** is “*Theology*”). When our theology differs from the *Bible*, it develops problems, as seen by the religious groups who fought with **Jesus**; for example: 1) **Sadducees** – a religious group whose tendency was to the “*left*,” accommodating their culture & taking away from *Scripture*---that is, minimizing which parts of *Scripture* was applicable to their day. They only accepted the *Pentateuch* (1<sup>st</sup> 5 books of *Old Testament*); yet they didn’t even believe all that was contained in them; i.e., they did *not* believe in the *Pentateuch's* stories about *angels*.



*Today, a similar attitude exists in liberal readings of Scripture.* Some modern groups claim that the *Bible* only contains **God's** **Word**, therefore they are free to pick & choose which parts of *Scripture* they believe or reject; such as, they claim it doesn’t matter if women or gay persons are pastors; or, if they decide to *abort* their babies, even when **God** clearly forbids those issues in **His** **Word**.

2) **The Pharisees** were another religious group who differed with what **God** said in the *Old Testament*. Their tendency was to the “*right*,” opposing their culture & “*adding to*” *Scripture* (the **10 Commandments** became **613 commandments**) with the intent to “*put up a fence*” for extra protection;” i.e. To protect **God's** name from being misused they simply prohibited any use of **His** name – couldn’t even *bless* people with **His** name.



*Today, a similar tendency exists with “overly conservative” interpretations of Scripture;* i.e., some groups claim that communion wine can only be red; baptism must be full immersion; church music must *only* be organ music; *or*, must *never* be organ music. They forget that what really “*has to be*” is what **God** says “has to be or not to be,” in *Scripture*. They see their opinions or interpretations as superior to **God's** **Word**.

*Lutherans teach that the Bible is different from any other book.* While other books are mostly



mere collections of human thoughts, the *Bible* is a collection of *God's* directions to mankind transmitted to us thru human writers whom *He* inspired. The writings of all non *Christian* religions focus on how to be a good person & earn *God's* approval, but the main message of the *Bible* is the unfolding of *God's* plan to save us from our sins thru the suffering, death & resurrection of *His Son, Jesus*.

## Just the Facts

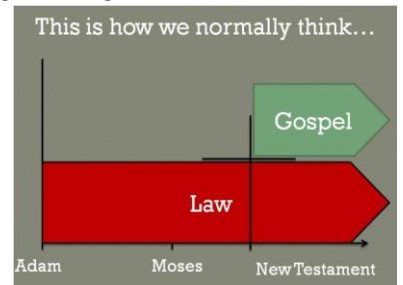
*The Bible stories are not manmade ancient myths or legends; rather they are historical facts of events that really happened.* Archaeologists have found remnants of cities which prove that the

Biblical people, events, & places actually existed. -- The *Bible* is a collection of 66 inspired books; 39 in the *Old Testament* and 27 in the *New Testament*. The *Old Testament* makes up 80% of the *Bible* (*God* slowly and repeatedly revealed the coming of *His Son* as our *Savior*).

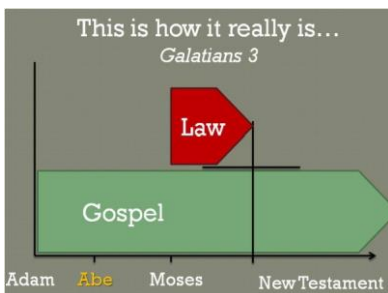
### Great Doctrines of the Bible

*Lutherans recognize two great doctrines (themes) of the Bible; namely, Law & Gospel*, which are contained in both the *Old Testament* & *New Testament* – *God* created the entire universe & all that is in it. Every *thing* & *person* belongs to *Him*. *He* has the right & authority to set laws for our behavior. *His* laws tell us what *He* expects from us. If we break *any* law, we would face a penalty. In contrast, *He* has also proclaimed *His Gospel*, the *Good News* of salvation thru the forgiveness of sins that comes to us because *Jesus* paid the penalty for our sins. In this context, the *Gospel* refers to actions of *God* that are closely related to *His* plan of salvation for us in *Jesus, His Son*, the *Messiah/Christ*. Lutherans believe that properly distinguishing between Law & Gospel is vitally important for studying, understanding, & interpreting Scripture.

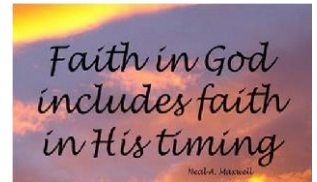
**Question:** “What is the purpose of the *Law*?” – The *1<sup>st</sup> use* of the *Law* is that *God* seeks to restrain (*curb*) wrongdoing. This is the basic effect of *natural law* on *all* people. – The *2<sup>nd</sup> use* of the *Law* is that it shows (*mirrors*) our sinfulness & shows that we need a Savior. The *Holy Spirit* works thru the *Law* to convict our consciences that we have transgressed/broken *God's* Holy Law, and the *Spirit* makes us ready to hear the *Gospel* that the *Almighty Creator God* is also “*Love*,” and that *He* has made it possible for us to believe & be saved & live as *His children* here *and* in eternity.



*The Law gets us ready for the Word* of the *Gospel*. The *Gospel* would not make sense if we did not know we have sinned & need a Savior. And so, throughout the *Bible* these two *themes* (*Law* & *Gospel*) run together to make sure that we actually hear the main message of *God's Word*, that we are sinners who can be saved because of *Jesus' death* on the cross for us! Sad to say, many people outside and even *inside* the church see *Christianity* as a religion of do's & don'ts, because they do not understand the distinction between *Law* & *Gospel*. Their hearts become burdened by the *Law* & fail to recognize that *God* is using the *Law* to produce deserved guilt so they will see their need for a Savior. If they keep listening, they will hear the *Good News* of *God's* love & *He* will heal their consciences & take away their sin thru the *Good News* of *God's* love thru *Jesus' death* on the cross.



*Applying Law & Gospel* takes time & wisdom. A common saying among pastors is “Afflict the comfortable & comfort the afflicted.” The Law & Gospel are inseparable; both are needed, especially in the area of Sanctification/the Christian life. Prior to conversion, both the 1<sup>st</sup> (curb) & 2<sup>nd</sup> (mirror) use of the law will apply; but, after conversion, a 3<sup>rd</sup> use of the law also goes into effect (show us how to live in a God-pleasing manner). Here is where it gets tricky, because both the believer & God are doing things at the same time. – Sanctification includes all effects of God’s Word & our spiritual growth that follows our justification (being brought to faith by the Grace of God thru our conversion by the work of the Holy Spirit). Now the believer is enabled by God’s Holy Spirit to cooperate; faith is increased daily, love strengthened, and the image of God renewed, but not perfected in this life.



Faith can move mountains,  
but don't be surprised if  
God hands you a shovel.  
~ Author Unknown ~

We have received many gifts from the Spirit for us to use & enjoy. Prayer & worship are two of the biggest gifts, but at times they may seem like burdens. Our old sinful nature still lives within us & may cause us to feel guilty by the implied Law that these are “things we have to do.” Fortunately, the Gospel has its voice & the new nature in the believer’s heart feels no condemnation (Romans 8:1), and we are able to enjoy these gifts. Even though these gifts involve our action, they are seen in the context of the Gospel as we focus on God’s action for us in Christ.

When we pray, the Holy Spirit is also praying & Christ is interceding for us. – So, also, when we worship, we are listening, meditating, singing; but, even more important are God’s actions in His Word & Sacraments to strengthen our faith.

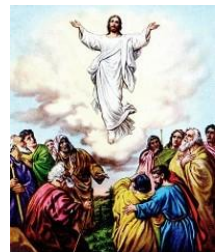
In our modern society some Christians focus almost exclusively on the Gospel and exclude the Law almost entirely. While they let the Law bring them to the Gospel, they then feel they don’t need to hear the Law anymore. This “Gospel Reductionism” often causes the new believer to feel “I like to sin; God loves to forgive.” But, Law & Gospel are out of balance. The Law still needs to work true repentance; we must confess sin, flee from it & follow the leading of the Spirit into sanctification of our new life in Christ.



On the other hand, some Christians are “Legalists.” They focus primarily on the Law and exclude the Gospel. They let the Law have the upper hand. This legalism allows the believer to think that his own good works earn him favor with God. Sin is not taken seriously, and the Gospel is ignored.

## The Sacraments

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave His disciples “The Great Commission,” commanding them to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & the Son & the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). – In Holy Baptism, the Lord promised the forgiveness of sins & the gift of the Holy Spirit. “Holy Baptism is a Sacrament” because Christ established it & commanded us to do it, and because it delivers the forgiveness of sins which He won on the Cross. He suffered, died, and rose again to save us from the eternal death brought about by sin. Thru His loving actions, He purchased & won salvation for all people. Baptism delivers & bestows the benefits of His redemption.



Luther’s explanation of baptism in the Small Catechism explains how water can do such great things. Luther says, “Baptism is certainly not just water, but the Word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this Word of God in the water.” God Himself



stakes **His** honor, **His** power, and **His** might on it. Baptism is *not* magic. Without faith, *Baptism alone* has no promise of salvation; for **Jesus** said, “*Whoever believes & is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe, will be condemned.*” (Mark 16:16). The key to baptism is the promise of **God Who** attaches **His Word** of promise to the water, where **He** gives & strengthens the faith of those receiving baptism - -even little infants.



**Question:** How should we baptize? -- The word “*baptize*” simply means “*to apply water.*” We have the freedom to apply water in a variety of ways. We can either pour, sprinkle, or immerse. Most Lutheran churches administer **Baptism** by pouring water over the head of the one being baptized. During the Reformation some *Protestants* insisted on full immersion; but, while it is acceptable, it is something the **Lord Himself** did not insist upon.

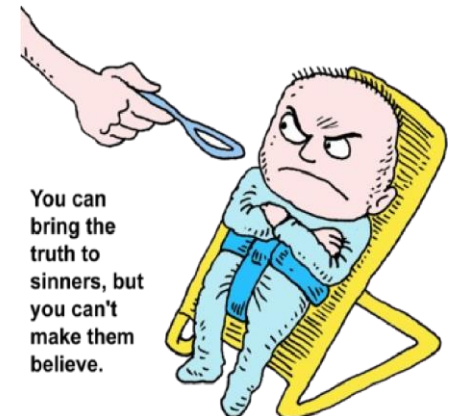


## Confession



**The word “confession” usually refers to two things that go together;** namely: *confession & absolution.* Confession is the act by which we admit or confess our sins & the guilt of sin. Absolution means “*to set free from sin.*” The pastor by virtue of his office forgives those who repent of their sins, affirm their faith in **Christ’s** merits, and want to do better (Matthew 16:19; 18:18; John 20:19-23). Repentance, confession, & absolution go hand-in-hand. They are the means by which a **believer** continually identifies & rejects a rebellious life, and *in faith* longs for & resolves to live in harmony with **God’s** will.

**Repentance is a two-step process:** 1.) recognizing the reality of our sin; and 2.) turning to **God** in faith for **His** mercy. Someone who does not believe he or she is a sinner *cannot be repentant*, because - -what’s to repent of, if you are not doing anything wrong? So, the *Law* needs to do its accusing work. We need to hear what **God’s Word** says so we can recognize ourselves as sinners and experience contrition or remorse over our sins. The *Law of God* will show us our sins and prepare us to hear the **Gospel** message of **God’s** love & mercy. It’s not enough to know we are sinners. *Without the Gospel*, the Law will lead to shame, fear, despair & anger towards **God**.



**The second part of repentance is faith:** believing **God’s** promise in **Christ** that we are forgiven and can have new life; namely, a life of turning away from sin with **God’s** help. Repentance helps us see that there is only one way out - -**Jesus!** That’s why **God’s call to repentance** is an act of love.

It is the call of **Jesus Himself** whose love was so great that **He** told us the truth that we needed to hear: namely, by ourselves we are *dead in trespasses & sin*, but **He** loves us & has paid the penalty for our sins. Our pastors’ job is to convict us with **God’s Law**; then show us our *sins*...plus, show us **our Savior**. Either *privately* or *corporately* in church, we hear them say: “**I** forgive **you** *all* your sins, in the name of **God** the **Father**, and the **Son**, and the **Holy Spirit**.” Those words do not just comfort us; they effectively *change us* so that we grow more into the likeness of **Jesus**.

**“FAITH  
IS TAKING THE  
FIRST STEP  
EVEN WHEN YOU DON’T  
SEE THE WHOLE  
STAIRCASE.”**  
- MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

**We can fake an apology, but we cannot fake repentance.** It’s not just saying we are rotten sinners, but it is *leaving the life of sins we* love so much; giving up our *sinful thinking, speaking, & habits.* Repentance is not a one-time thing, because *sin* is not a one-time thing. We sin daily, hourly. So, *every day* we live in repentance; in our *prayers, worship, private & public confessions*; in our *thoughts, words, & deeds.* We are repenting *constantly*, throwing ourselves on the *mercy & love* of

our **Savior**. With **His** help we turn away from sin again & again, knowing that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 3:2).

**A good way to prepare for confession is to ask ourselves:** “Have I kept the 10 Commandments perfectly in thought, word, & deed?” This is never comfortable. We may even compare ourselves with others, thinking I’m not as bad as *they* are. Perhaps a better way is to think of myself as standing before **God** on *Judgment Day*, with no one there to turn to except **Jesus**, my **Savior**, **Who** paid for my sins. Thank **God** for **Jesus**! - -A tendency in our society is to try to redefine sin & lessen **God**’s *standard of perfection*. But **God** will not be mocked! We can only be released from the punishment we deserve if we *honestly acknowledge our situation & throw ourselves on the mercy of God*. - -**That’s confession!**



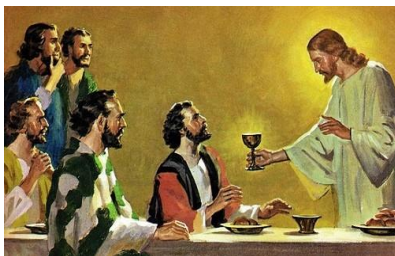
**Of course, we cannot list every single sin we have committed;** it’s impossible; it’s not even demanded by **God**. **He** is looking for a heart that is genuinely sorry and is seeking **His** forgiveness. We must beware that our hearts can become hardened & calloused over time, and we need the **Holy Spirit** to *tenderize* us with **His** Law on a regular basis so we will be able to confess all our guilt, *not just our guilty feelings*.

We can be confident that the pastor’s words of forgiveness are from **God**, because **Jesus** promised that would be so.

**Of course the pastor does not possess any special power within himself to absolve sins.** **God** alone has the power to forgive; the pastor acts strictly as **His** servant. While other trusted **Christians** can hear our confession & genuinely pronounce **God**’s forgiveness, the pastor is special *only in the sense that he has been appointed by God thru the Church to the official role of pronouncing Absolution*. It is *as if we hear it from the mouth of God Himself* (Luke 10:16; John 20:22-23).



## The Lord’s Supper

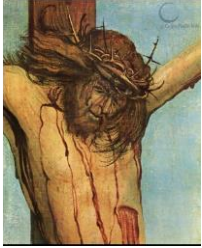


**In the Lutheran church, the Lord’s Supper is a sacrament;** namely a *sacred rite instituted by Christ Himself*; it contains a *physical element & promises forgiveness of sins*. It is a *mystery*; there are things about it we believe *even though* we do not *understand* it. *This is a problem for our scientific age* because we want to be able to *explain everything*. But, thank **God** that **Jesus** taught everything that we need to know in **His** words of institution when **He** started & established **His** Supper.

**Jesus** instituted **His** Supper as **He** celebrated the Passover with **His** disciples on the night **He** was betrayed, less than 24 hours before **He** died on the cross; therefore, it is closely related to **His** death for the sins of the whole world. **Jesus** used *bread & wine* which **He** blessed with **His** Word, telling them to *eat the bread & drink the wine*. But, **His** meal had a benefit that is not seen in the food of *bread & wine*. The Supper was for the *forgiveness of sins*. (Medicine is for the *sick* who want to be healed. The **Lord’s** Supper is for *sinners* who *desire to be forgiven for their sin*.)





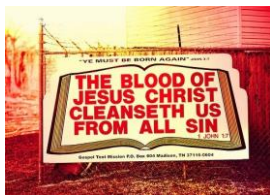


The purpose of the *Supper* is to *recall & proclaim Jesus'* death on the cross for the sins of the world (1 Corinthians 11:26). The *Lord's Supper* is a delivery of the *Gospel*. It is a gift that cost *Jesus* the *punishment for the sins of the whole world*; yet, it comes to us *without cost*! *Jesus* calls *His* Supper a "testament" (last will & testament) by which *His* followers receive the inheritance *He* leaves for them; namely, *His* body & blood, *forgiveness of sins, life & salvation, & strengthening of their faith*.

*We have explained a lot, but we're still missing the big mystery* - -the shed blood of *Jesus* lies at the center of the *Christian* faith. Through *His* death on the cross, *God* offers us salvation from our sins (1 Corinthians 1:19-20). *Jesus* said, "This is *My* body which is given for *you*." - -"This cup is the new testament in my blood which is shed for *you* for the forgiveness of sins." [Note: wine is not shed; blood is shed.]



**Note also:** *Jesus* said "is;" - -The bread is *His* body! The wine is *His* blood!



*This is the big mystery at the heart of the Lord's Supper. In, with, or under* the bread & wine *we* receive *Jesus'* body & blood; the *same body* that was nailed to the cross and the *same blood* that was shed for our sins. If *Jesus'* body & blood are there, *Jesus* is certainly present in the eating & drinking of the *Lord's* Supper. This "real presence" is also called the *Holy Communion*, the

joining together of the *body & blood* with the *bread & wine*. We cannot explain how. But *Jesus* says so, - -therefore *it is true!*

*We celebrate Holy Communion often "in remembrance" of Him.* The Greek word for "remembrance" is "*anamnesis*," which refers to something that is offered to *God* as a memorial of *Jesus'* death, asking the *Father* to answer our prayers and grant us *His* forgiveness and give us *His* blessing. It is believed by many that this is when the *body & blood* is *joined* with the *bread & wine*. These same words are spoken by the pastor over the bread & wine whenever it is celebrated (Matthew 26:26-28; Markk.14:22-24; Luke.22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25).



*Nevertheless, this has not stopped people from trying to explain it in rational terms, -* for example: 1.) The Roman Catholic Church teaches "*transubstantiation*," claiming that when the priest blesses the elements they are "*changed in substance into body & blood*" and they are no longer bread & wine. 2.) Another theory is called "*consubstantiation*," taught by the *Anglican/Episcopal Church* claiming that *Jesus'* body is present along with the bread. Both are there, and *together* they form a "*third substance*." 3.) Another theo-

ry is that of "*spiritual presence*," held by many *Protestant churches* (*Methodists, Presbyterians, etc.*) who claim that when *Jesus* said "*This is my body*," *He* meant "*This symbolizes (or represents) My body*." To such *Christians* it sounds more reasonable, because logically they figure that *Jesus* can't be in the bread if *He* *bodily* sits at the *right hand of the Father*, and that the *infinite Son* of *God* can't be contained in a *finite* piece of bread. (*While these examples refer primarily to the bread, they also apply to the wine.*)

*One more example* is 4.) "*communion in one kind*." At the time of the *Reformation*, the *Roman*

Catholic Church taught that *only priests* were to receive both bread & wine, while the laity received only the bread. They were concerned that the wine in the cup (*priest had changed it into **Christ's** blood*) might be spilled, so the priests did not distribute wine to the laity; they rationalized that the laity received **Christ's** blood with **His** body (*consecrated bread*). Whatever the reason, the practice denied **Christians** what **Jesus** wanted them to receive: “For as often as you eat this bread & drink the cup, you proclaim the **Lord's** death until **He** comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Luther summed up the *Biblical* truth of all this, saying: “The **Lord's** Supper is the true body & blood of our **Lord Jesus Christ** under the bread & wine, instituted by **Christ Himself** for us **Christians** to eat & drink.”



## Dinners With Sinners



*Mark tells us that **Jesus** had just called **Matthew** to be a disciple* (Mark 2:16). Matthew was a tax collector & had friends who were tax collectors. **Jesus** was at Matthew's house to eat a meal with him & his friends. The *Pharisees* took offense and cried out “*Why does He eat with tax collectors & sinners?*” The Pharisees viewed them as dishonest extortionists, sinners, & outcasts from the *Temple* & local synagogues.

So, if **Jesus** was a true *Rabbi* who claimed to be the **Messiah**, why was **He** spending time & eating with sinners? **Jesus** heard their complaint and answered: “*Those who are well have no need of a physician; but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but the sinners.*” (Mark 2:17). **Jesus** is making a division here. The *Pharisees* viewed themselves as righteous, not needing forgiveness.



*Today, the Lord still attends meals with sinners*; only **He** is not a guest, but the host. Our question is “Who is worthy to receive the **Lord's** Supper?” Being worthy & well-prepared involves believing the **Lord's** words “given & shed for **you** for the forgiveness of sins.” To not believe **His** words makes us unworthy & unprepared. We must be repentant of our sins and trust that **Jesus** gives us **His** body & blood for the forgiveness of our sins. This is the work of the **Holy Spirit** working thru the **Word**.

*Preparation is to meditate on our sinfulness*; on **Jesus's** promise of **His** presence; and that **He** is ready to offer us forgiveness. *Holy Communion* is the Supper where **Jesus** is present with us “tax collectors & sinners” until **He** comes again in glory. **He** is present, giving us **His** body & blood for the forgiveness of sins. And, where **He** is present, there is life & salvation!



Color Code:

-  (Purple) Royalty - *God*
-  (Red) Blood - *Jesus*
-  (Green) Living - *Holy Spirit*
-  (Blue) True - *Christians*

## RESOURCES

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