The Bible And The Lutheran Church

Text: 2 Tim 3:15-17

Suggested Hymns:
195, 332, 273, 260, 609

1) How The Lutheran Church Regards The Bible
2) How The Lutheran Church Uses The Bible
3) How The Lutheran Church Seeks To Accomplish The Chief Purpose Of The Bible

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Timothy 3:15–17, ***from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. [16] All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In the ancient city of Worms, in Europe, there is a magnificent monument which has been described as *"the noblest artistic impersonation of moral grandeur in the world."*[1]

Dedicated in 1883, this monument was erected to commemorate one of the great events in the history of the Reformation. This event took place in that city in the year 1521 when Martin Luther appeared before the highest dignitaries of Church and State to answer the charge of heresy which had been made against him.

In that august presence Martin Luther made that grand confession: *"Unless I am overcome and convinced by proofs of the Holy Scriptures, I cannot and I will not recant. … Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen."*

This monument consists of a group of massive figures cast in bronze, with the figure of the great Reformer, towering high above the rest, as the central figure of the group. There he stands with his rugged face turned toward heaven and with his strong hands clasping a Bible to his chest. The artist's conception of

the great Reformer is true to fact. His trust was in God, and His Word was his stay.

The two go together, the man and the Book. The Book made that man what he was, above all a sincere Christian, a believer in the great Redeemer, Jesus Christ, of whom that Book testifies, and then also the ardent and fearless champion of the faith which was in the Book once delivered to the saints.

The man, on the other hand, did much for the Book. He brought it forth from under the rubbish heap of papal decrees and human traditions under which a corrupt priesthood had buried it, and gave it back to the people in the language of the people, in a translation that has never been surpassed. Martin Luther restored it to its rightful place in the Church as the sole authority in all matters of faith and life.

He expounded its doctrines in their truth and purity, especially that doctrine which is the very heart of the inspired Revelation, the doctrine of man's justification before God not by the works of the Law, but by grace, through faith in the merits of the great Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Without this Book that man could never have been what he was; on the other hand, it was owing to that man's labours, under God, that this Book was restored to its rightful place of supremacy in the Church of Christ and that its doctrines were again proclaimed in their pristine purity for the salvation of men.

However, if the figure of Luther in that great monument, standing there with the Bible clasped to his chest, beautifully symbolises the relation which existed between the man and the Book, it no less beautifully typifies the relation that exists between the Book and the Church that bears the great Reformer's honoured name.

Here also the two go together, the Church and the Book. The existence of the Lutheran Church is justified by her attitude toward that Book; nor does the Lutheran Church exist for any other purpose than that of spreading the truth revealed in this Book for the accomplishment of the gracious purpose for which it was given, that of making people "***wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.***"

Let us consider *The Bible and the Lutheran Church*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. How The Lutheran Church Regards The Bible.

How does the Lutheran Church regard the Bible? The Lutheran Church regards the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, and it does so upon the basis of the Bible's own declarations to that effect.

One of the many declarations of this character we have in the text before us in the concise statement of the apostle that "***All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.***"

In this brief, but weighty phrase the apostle ascribes to the Scriptures a unique and singular origin, the very uniqueness of which he indicates by the term which he uses to describe it, a term found only in this passage and nowhere else in sacred or secular Greek, a term which the apostle coined to give expression to the thought he sought to convey.

Translated in the English text by the words ***"given by inspiration of God,"*** its literal meaning is "God-breathed," so that the statement of our text, literally given, would read: "All Scripture is God-breathed."

This means that God Himself is the Author of the Bible and that the manner of His authorship was by inspiration. He breathed on and into the men who did the actual writing, moving them, impelling them, directing them, to write when and what they did.

Just as on the day of Pentecost the unlearned disciples declared in different languages the wonderful works of God as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance, so the men who wrote the Bible, impelled by the same Spirit, wrote as the Spirit gave them utterance.

They were not the authors, the originators, of what they wrote, but only the agents and instruments of God who inspired them. The real author of all they wrote whenever they were under that mysterious urge and impulse was God the Holy Spirit, and it was His Word, His message, which they transcribed on the sacred page.

That is what the apostle means when he says: ***"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."*** This same truth is expressed by Peter when he wrote: ***"holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."***[2]

Now, this statement of the Bible regarding its divine origin the Lutheran Church accepts without equivocation or qualification of any kind and hence regards the Bible as the divinely inspired and therefore infallible Word of God.

In her system of theology this is a fundamental article of faith that the Bible is the Word of God, an article, which, like every other article of faith, she bases upon the Bible itself.

As the Lutheran Church believes in the creation of the world by the mighty Word of God because the Bible teaches it; as she believes in the divinity of Christ, His virgin birth, His physical resurrection from the dead, the atoning merit of His suffering and death because the Bible teaches these things, so she believes and teaches and confesses that the Bible is the Word of God because the Bible says so.

Truly, there are many evidences both of an internal and external character that testify to the superhuman origin of the Bible, such as the sublime character of its contents, the fulfilled prophecies, the harmony and unity pervading the Book throughout, its vitality and indestructibility.

Yet it is not upon these evidences that the Lutheran Church bases her doctrine concerning the divine character of the Book, but she bases them upon the Bible itself. Because the Bible professes to be the Word of God, she accepts it as *"the Word that lives and abides forever."*

The position of the Lutheran Church in this respect is quite unique. It is not the position which is generally held in Christendom today, which, in essence, is this, that the Bible merely contains the Word of God. The idea is ridiculed that the Bible was inspired in the way described.

According to popular teaching the Bible is rather a mixture of God's Word and man's word, of divine wisdom and human error, and the great task of Christian scholarship, we are told, is to determine which portions of the Scriptures are divine and which are human in their origin.

With such views concerning the sacred Scriptures the Lutheran Church has no sympathy whatever. To her the Bible is not an imperfect record of divine revelation, but the inerrant Word of God, written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In the Bible, she asserts, we hear the voice of God Himself, and filled not only with admiration, but with profound reverence, her children, when they

approach the Scriptures, say with the prophet of old, ***"Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears."***[3]

2. How The Lutheran Church Uses The Bible.

How does the Lutheran Church use the Bible? How God who is the Author of the Bible wants people use it the apostle tells us in our text when he says that the inspired Scriptures are "***profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,*** [17] ***that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.***"

The meaning of this statement in substance is this, that from the Bible we are to learn what is right and what is wrong, what is to be believed and what is to be rejected, what is truth and what is error, what we are to do and what we are to avoid if we want to please God.

The Scriptures accordingly are designed to play a prominent part in the life of the individual Christian as also in the life of the Christian Church. They are to determine our faith; they are to govern and control our lives; they are to be the norm and standard for right believing and for holy living.

The sole and supreme authority of the Scriptures in all questions of faith and life has always been one of the fundamental principles of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

By this standard, the inspired Scriptures, she frames her creed, forms her theology, and shapes her system of ethics. In one of her great confessional documents this principle is laid down in the words: *"The only rule and standard according to which all doctrines and teachings alike are to be judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments."*[4]

In matters of faith and doctrine the Lutheran Church believes and teaches what is written, no matter whether the doctrine in question is involved in mystery or not, is compatible with human reason, or beyond its comprehension.

She believes, for example, that Baptism is the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit because the Bible says it is that. She believes in the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Holy Supper because that is the plain teaching of Scripture.

Nor does the Lutheran Church recognise any authority alongside of the authority of Scripture. It is not the Bible plus some other authority, but the Bible alone; not the Bible plus tradition; not the Bible plus human reason or human speculation; not the Bible plus the arrogant claims and unsupported theories of science falsely so called; not the Bible plus dreams and visions; not the Bible plus the book "Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures;" not the Bible plus the "Book of Mormon," — but the Bible, and the Bible alone.

In determining what is truth and what is error, what is to be believed and what is to be rejected, every authority outside of the Bible is ruled out of court as having no standing whatever.

And as the Bible is the sole authority in matters of faith, so it is also the norm and rule in matters of life. What the Bible condemns as sin the Lutheran Church condemns as sin; what the Bible does not regard as sinful, the Lutheran Church does not regard as sinful. She earnestly exhorts people to live godly, sober, temperate lives, but at the same time warns them against the traditions of men and exhorts them to stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made us free.

And so in matters of faith and life she acknowledges but one authority, the Word given "***for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.***"

As a result of her position in this respect the Lutheran Church has always been the ardent champion of purity of doctrine and the uncompromising foe of that spirit of indifference and laxity in matters of faith and practise which has always afflicted the Church, from the days of the apostles down to our time.

The Lutheran Church has always been out of harmony with the spirit and tendency which damages soundness and purity of doctrine. She has never subscribed to the popular slogan that one creed is as good as another. She has denounced every departure from the Scriptures as error and has earnestly contended for the faith once delivered to the saints.

On account of her uncompromising loyalty to the Scriptures as the sole authority in matters of faith and life she has been often misunderstood, criticised for her aloofness, and denounced for her narrowness and uncharitableness.

Yet, like Luther at Worms, she cannot do otherwise. The Word directs her course, and rather than seek the praise of men for broadness and charity, she desires to have the approval of Christ who said in John 8:31–32, ***"If you continue in My word, you are My disciples indeed. [32] And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."***

3. How The Lutheran Church Seeks To Accomplish The Chief Purpose Of The Bible.

How, finally, does the Lutheran Church seek to accomplish the chief purpose of the Bible? According to the text before us the Bible was given for a definite and specific purpose. The apostle states this purpose when he says of the Sacred Scriptures "***which are able to make you wise for <u>salvation</u> through faith which is in Christ Jesus***."

The Bible touches upon a great variety of subjects; yet, however diversified its contents, its ultimate aim and purpose is this, to ***"make men wise unto salvation,"*** to reveal to sinful men the one true and correct answer to the age-old question, *"What must I do to be saved?"* which question it answers, ***"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be <u>saved</u>."***[5]

The Bible accordingly has much to say about man's sin, on account of which he is in need of salvation, about Jesus Christ, through whom the world's salvation was accomplished, and about faith, by which this salvation, now offered in the Gospel, is accepted and appropriated by the individual.

The whole stream of inspired revelation converges in one point — the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, who is the Sum and Substance, the Sun and the Centre, of the whole inspired Volume.

It tells how God, in executing the gracious plan which He devised before the foundation of the world for the salvation of our sinful race in the fullness of time, sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law; how this Son of God and Son of Man became the Substitute and Sin-bearer of our race.

It tells how He fulfilled for us the whole will and Law of God; how He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities; and it offers the perfect salvation which the God-man wrought for our sin-cursed race by His holy life and sacrificial death without money and without price, and in offering men

this salvation, at the same time imparts the power to accept the offer so generously made.

So the Bible is able to make sinful man "wise unto salvation." It is ***"the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."***[6]

This supreme purpose of the Scripture the Lutheran Church seeks to accomplish by proclaiming this message of salvation which Christ told His Church to proclaim.

The Lutheran Church exalts Jesus Christ, His glorious person and His redemptive work. She confesses that He is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary, and on the basis of the Scriptures proclaims the message that He redeemed our race from sin, death, and the power of the devil, not with gold and silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.

The central doctrine of her theology is the central doctrine of the Scriptures, that man is justified before God as he by faith accepts the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Conscious of the one great mission which Christ has assigned to His Church, she seeks to discharge this mission by preaching the Gospel of the grace of God ***"in season and out of season."***[7]

She does not convert her pulpits into lecture platforms for discussing the topics of the day. She does not meddle in politics and does not busy herself with matters belonging to the sphere of the State.

Rather, she devotes herself to the one great task which the Head of the Church assigned to her in order that under the blessing of God the aim and purpose of the Sacred Scriptures may be attained and souls be won for God and heaven.

So the two go together, the Bible and the Lutheran Church. The Lutheran Church regards the Bible as the Word of God. The Lutheran Church uses the Bible as the sole and sovereign authority in all matters of faith and life. The Lutheran Church seeks to accomplish the purpose of the Bible by preaching the central message of the Bible for the salvation of sinful men. This position of our Church is our glorious heritage by the grace of God.

Let us cherish it and hold fast to it and thus prove ourselves worthy sons and daughters of the Reformation. Also in these days of doctrinal laxity and indifference let us be loyal to the Scriptures, and continue to spread the message which alone can bring hope to a perishing world. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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[1] The Lutheran Manual, John B. Remensnyder
[2] 2 Peter 1:21
[3] 1 Samuel 3:9
[4] See Book of Concord, Pt VII Formula of Concord, Pt I, Epitome, Tappert P 464
[5] Acts 16:31
[6] Romans 1:16
[7] 2 Timothy 4:2