

# WHAT IS “DOCTRINE” ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE AND THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS?

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The question “What is doctrine?” is a rather recent question among us. In years past we were more likely to ask: “What is true doctrine?” or: “What is false doctrine?” However, the question actually is as ancient as the entrance of sin into human existence. It was the basis for the first question recorded on the pages of Holy Writ, the question of Satan, “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” By giving the wrong answer to this question, Adam and Eve fell away from God, destroyed the blessed fellowship they had enjoyed with their Lord, and caused Him in turn to ask some penetrating questions: “Where art thou? ... Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? ... What is this that thou hast done?” Our answer to the question “What is doctrine?” may also disrupt our fellowship with our God and our fellowship with one another, if it in any way limits the authority of Holy Writ or creates doubts in our minds as to what we are actually permitted or bidden to teach and preach on the basis of Holy Writ and the Lutheran Confessions. For us, though, the question is safeguarded by the words in the assignment “according to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.” We, therefore, want Scripture itself to speak out on this matter. The statements of our Lutheran Confessions will then bring added assurance, proving that our Lutheran Church in its confessions takes a thoroughly Scriptural stand. Only if we ask and answer the question from this point of view will our discussion glorify the Name of our God and lead to a faithful proclamation of eternal salvation in Christ Jesus.

## **Our Approach to the Question, and Its Importance**

Surely, this indicates that for us the question is never a theoretic or academic one. We are not interested in doctrine for doctrine’s sake, for we are not and dare never be religious scientists, seeking to build up harmonious doctrinal systems by our own reason or perceptive powers. Those who do that usually wrest the Scripture to their own destruction and endanger the eternal salvation of those who hear them. As preachers we would be failures if we became the kind of preachers described in the Apology in these words: “In their sermons they do not teach the Gospel, they do not console consciences, they do not show that sins are freely remitted for Christ’s sake; but they set forth the worship of saints, human satisfactions, human traditions, and by these they affirm that men are justified before God, And although some of these traditions are manifestly godless, nevertheless they defend them by violence. If any preachers wish to be regarded more learned, they treat of philosophical questions, which neither the people nor even those who propose them understand. Lastly, those who are more tolerable teach the Law, and say nothing concerning the righteousness of faith” (*Triglotta* 399:43).

The question therefore is important—very important! —for you and I want to know what we shall say to a man who, like the jailor at Philippi, cries out: “What must I do to be saved?” To a young man seeking to control the passions of his body and asking, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” To parents standing at a small grave and asking, “Why did God permit this? What has now happened to our baby?” To the woman on her hospital bed who has just been told that she will never walk again, and now asks: “Does God hate me? Is He punishing me for my sins?” To the criminal whose conscience finally fully awake cries out: “Is there forgiveness for me?” To my little boy, who, having watched the science fiction programs, asks, “Who made all these things? How old are they?” How futile our answers, unless we can say: “Thus saith the Lord!” or: “According to the Scripture!” We need the answer to the question “What is doctrine?”—need it for our ministry and for our own person. And the teachers in our schools who prepare young men for the ministry also need to be sure, as the introduction to the Book of Concord points out: “We most earnestly exhort that especially the young men who are being educated for the holy ministry of the churches and schools be

instructed in this” (that is, Holy Scripture, the Creeds, and the Augsburg Confession) “faithfully and diligently, in order that the pure doctrine and profession of our faith may, by the help of the Holy Ghost, be preserved and propagated also to our posterity, until the glorious advent of Jesus Christ, our only Redeemer and Savior” (*Triglotta* p. 21). But in the meantime, while we await His coming, each of us finds himself in the position of Jude, who, writing “to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called,” yet stated: “It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

## Holy Writ

Where is this faith to be found? Where is it recorded? In Holy Writ. Our religion therefore most definitely is a religion of a book. We do not apologize for that, nor do we look upon it as bibliolatry—as it is so often decried. We happen to be in good company. Jesus overcame Satan by quoting from a Book; He took His text from a Book when preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth; He referred the Pharisees and Sadducees to a Book; He instructed His apostles from the Book, for we read in Luke 24:44–47—and they are words of the Lord Jesus Himself: “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Moses is commanded by God to write His laws in a Book. Peter and Stephen quote the Scripture. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: “I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren” (I Thess. 5:27). Peter places Paul’s Epistles on a par with the rest of Scripture, saying “Even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (II Pet. 3:15b–16). If I want to know what I shall believe, in whom I shall put my trust, what I ought to impart to others, I simply ask: “What does Scripture—this Book, the Bible—say?” What it says will be my doctrine. For me it is as simple as that. Naturally, I do not deny that we must follow good hermeneutical rules, otherwise we ourselves might become guilty of wresting the Scripture. More of this later.

## The English Terms

What then does this Book tell us about “doctrine”? In defining the terms, it might be well first to consult a dictionary, to know how the terms are used and understood in common everyday language. *Webster’s Unabridged* will do, even though it isn’t a theological work. It defines “doctrine” as “that which is taught; what is held, put forth as true, and supported by a teacher, a school, or a sect; a principle or position or the body of principles, in any branch of knowledge.” “Dogma” it defines as “a doctrine or body of doctrines of theology and religion formally stated and authoritatively proclaimed by a church or sect.” Comparing the two, it states: “In its general sense, *doctrine* applies to any speculative truth or working principle, especially as taught to others or recommended to their acceptance; a *dogma* is a doctrine laid down with authority; as the doctrine of Pythagoras; the Monroe doctrine; theological dogmas. In their ecclesiastical application, it is usual to distinguish between *doctrine*, any teaching, and *dogma*, such teaching as is part of the confession of a church; as the *doctrines* of the New Testament; the *dogma* of the Trinity.” It also adds the remark: “Dogma frequently suggests an arrogant insistence upon authority.”

The Lutheran Confessions are not consistent in distinguishing between the two terms. They speak of doctrine in a wide sense and in a narrow sense, and speak of it as being true or false. Thus we read of “doctrine,” in the wide sense (that is, as the whole body of doctrines): “We include in the Confession almost the sum of the entire Christian doctrine” (*Triglotta* 289:27). In the narrow sense we usually find the term in the

plural: “doctrines,” that is, individual points of doctrine; and again referring either to that which is true or to that which is false: “We receive and embrace with our whole heart the prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged” (*Triglotta* 851:3). “Dogma” is used similarly. Thus we read: “OF THE SUMMARY CONTENT, RULE, AND STANDARD according to which all dogmas should be judged, and the erroneous teachings that have occurred should be decided and explained in a Christian way” (*Triglotta* 777:Title). And: “On the other hand, we also reject the false dogma of the Manichaeans ...” (*Triglotta* 783:19). In our Confessions, the word “dogma” is more apt to be found in connection with false teachings than is the word “doctrine.” We note therefore that the Confessions are not too helpful in answering the question of our theme, since they employ the individual terms “doctrine” and “dogma” in a rather indiscriminate way. Positive and unmistakable, however, is their position when we ask what we as Lutherans are permitted to teach or ought to teach.

### The Greek Terms As Used In Scripture

Pertinent to our theme is also a study of the various terms as used in the Scripture, especially the various Greek terms employed in the New Testament: *διδασκαλία*, *διδασκαλία*, *δόγμα*, and *διδάσκω*.

The usual Greek lexicons offer very simple, unphilosophical definitions. Thus Thayer defines *διδασκαλία* as: “1. teaching, namely, that which is taught, ... doctrine; 2. the act of teaching, instruction.” His definition of *διδασκαλία* reads: “1. teaching, instruction; 2. teaching, that is, that which is taught, doctrine.” Under *διδασκαλία* he also gives his opinion about the relation of the two terms, saying: “On the *supposed* distinction between the two words and their use in the NT” see so and so. *Δόγμα* Thayer defines as: “an opinion, a judgment, doctrine, decree, ordinance: 1. of public decrees ... 2. of the rules and requirements of the law of Moses ... 3. of certain decrees of the apostles relative to right living.”—Arndt-Gingrich, the new translation of Walter Bauer’s lexicon, defines *διδασκαλία* as follows: “1. teaching as an activity, instruction; 2. teaching, of what is taught.” His definition of *διδασκαλία*: “1. the act of teaching, instruction; 2. of that which is taught, teaching.” *Δόγμα* he defines as: “1. decree, ordinance, decision, command,” adding from the literature of the early church a meaning not found in Scripture: “doctrine, dogma.”—These two lexicons therefore make no special distinction between the words *διδασκαλία* and *διδασκαλία*. Both mean either the act of teaching or instructing, or the contents of that teaching, that which is taught, and do not touch on the matter whether anything which Scripture contains is to be excluded from the body of doctrine. This must be decided on the basis of the context in which these words are found in Scripture and on the basis of pertinent Scripture passages.

It is when we turn to another lexicon, the *Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Volume II), edited by Gerhard Kittel, that we meet with an attempt to define exactly what the contents of this teaching ought to be, what is therefore to be understood by doctrine. I want to say from the start that I am not convinced nor overly impressed by this attempt, and that chiefly because of the context in which the various words are employed by the holy writers in the various passages.

Since this lexicon bases its definitions of *διδασκαλία* and *διδασκαλία* on its interpretation of the verb *διδάσκω*, we ought to consider that first. Here again the difference between Thayer and Arndt on the one hand and Kittel on the other is very obvious. Thayer says of *διδάσκω*: “to teach; to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them, deliver didactic discourses; to be a teacher; to impart instruction, to instill doctrine into one; to teach, that is, prescribe a thing; to explain, expound; to teach one something.” Arndt-Gingrich states: “teach; teach someone something.” These are simple definitions that do not attempt to go beyond the obvious, simple, ordinary meaning of the word. —Kittel (actually Karl Heinrich Rengstorff of Tuebingen is the author of this section) uses thirteen large pages to discuss the meaning and use of *διδάσκω*. He begins by taking up the

distinction he finds in the use of this verb in profane Greek literature and in the Septuagint, stating: *An diesem Punkte zeigt sich der Unterschied zwischen dem profanen Sprachgebrauch und dem Sprachgebrauch der Septuaginta; er besteht darin, dass in der Profangraezitaet von einer Beanspruchung des ganzen Menschen durch den διδάσκων nichts zu spueren ist. Das Ziel ist hier die Ausbildung von Anlagen und unentwickelten Faehigkeiten, in der LXX (AT) dagegen die Erfassung des ganzen Menschen und seine Bildung im tiefsten Sinne ... vor allem an den Willen wendet* (p. 140, 8–12; p. 139, 49). Translation: “It is on this point that a difference becomes apparent between the profane use of this word and its use in the Septuagint; it consists in this, that in profane use there is no trace of a claim by the διδάσκων on the whole man. The aim is the training of talents and undeveloped abilities—in the LXX (OT) on the other hand a laying hold on the whole man and his education in the deepest sense” ... “especially his will.” On the same page (p. 139, 40–41) he states: *Vor allein hat aber διδάσκειν doch als Objekt den Willen Gottes in seinen Aeusserungen und Zielsetzungen*. Translation: “Above all, however, διδάσκειν has as its object (content) the will of God in its utterances and in the goals that it sets.”—Since this particular point will come up again and again, permit me to interject this thought: that there actually is no difference between the use of the word in profane literature and in the LXX or NT, but that the difference lies in the subject matter which is taught. That is where the difference in the effect upon the person taught is to be sought, not in the διδάσκειν itself.

Turning to the New Testament use of the word, we find that the writer first tries to distinguish between διδάσκω and κηρύσσω and that in a manner so that the meaning of one almost totally excludes the meaning of the other. He states (p. 141:27–30): *Matthaeus 4:23 (and other passages) steht in dem zusammenfassenden Bericht ueber seine Reisetätigkeit in Galilaea an erster Stelle die Angabe, dass er in den Synagogen ‘lehrte’; erst dann folgt die Mitteilung, dass er die frohe Botschaft von der βασιλεία verkuendigte und ueberall die Kranken gesund machte*. Translation: “In Matthew 4:23, the summary account of Jesus’ traveling-activity in Galilee, the remark is first made, that he ‘taught’ in the synagogues; then there follows the information that he announced the glad tidings of the βασιλεία and healed the sick everywhere.” To make a distinction of that kind is rather artificial, since what He taught certainly also includes what He proclaimed, as is evident from Acts 1:3: “To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

In discussing διδάσκειν Rengstorf finds the basic thought to be this, that a completely new will, namely, God’s will is being formed in the person taught. He writes on page 143 (1–5): *Jesu gesamte Lehre ist abgestellt auf die Ordnung des Lebens im Blick auf Gott wie auf den Naechsten* (Matth. 22:37ff. par; vgl. 19, 16ff. par). *Datum enthaelt seine Lehre stets im Appell an den Willen den Ruf zur praktischen Entscheidung ruer oder gegen Gottes Willen*. Translation: “Jesus’ entire teaching is designed for the purpose of ordering our life with a view to God as well as with a view to the neighbor. Therefore in its appeal to the will his teaching always includes the call to a practical decision for or against God’s will.” And he describes the attitude of the early church to Christ and His teaching thus: *Seine Lehre war fuer sie Lehre schlechthin, weil er in jedem Worte seine Hoerer mitten hineinstellt in den Willen Gottes, wie er in seinem Worte geoffenbart ist and sich in der Geschichte staendig offenbart* (p. 143:39–41). Translation: “His teaching, doctrine) was for them teaching (doctrine) in the absolute sense, because in His every word he placed his hearers face to face with God’s will, as it is revealed in His Word and constantly reveals itself in history.” Rengstorf thus practically restricts διδάσκειν to matters of sanctification. As far as I am concerned, here is a case of confusing the act of teaching with the effect of the subject matter taught. The difference lies in the subject matter taught—secular matters on the one hand and God’s Word on the other, of which we read in Hebrews 4:12: “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart,” and in Romans 1:16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”

It is true, διδάσκειν is found in many passages where an appeal is made to man's conscience and man's will; but there are also passages in which διδάσκειν simply means teaching, the imparting of the facts of salvation. Rengstorff's explanation of these passages is rather labored. He states: *Es handelt sich um eine beschränkte Anzahl von Stellen... Von ihnen bedarf wenigstens ein Teil einer kurzen Sonderbehandlung, nämlich die Stellen, die mit einem besonderen Akzent von einem Lehren durch Gott oder durch den Geist sprechen.* (p. 145:40–44). *In allen Faellen handelt es sich somit um die Begabung mit einer διδαχή aus einer hoheren Welt. Das ist ein Gebrauch von διδάσκειν, den wir bei den Synoptikern vergeblich suchen* (p. 146:12–14). Translation: "This concerns a certain rather limited number of passages... At least a few of them demand a (brief) special treatment, namely, those passages, which with special emphasis speak of a teaching by God or by the Holy Spirit." ... "In all cases it concerns the granting of a διδαχή from above. That is a usage of διδάσκειν, which we seek in vain in the synoptic gospels." In support of his own usual definition of διδάσκειν he adds this remark in his discussion of Matthew 28:20, suggesting first that Matthew 28:19 may contain an early interpolation: *Der Inhalt des διδάσκειν ist πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν, also nicht die Heilsverkündigung von Jesus, sondern die Verkündigung Jesu, seine διδαχή* (147:39). Translation: "The content of διδάσκειν is πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν, therefore not the saving message about Jesus, but the teachings (announcements) of Jesus, his διδαχή." This is a rather philosophical distinction, when we notice that Jesus in his teaching asks his opponents: "Whose son is he?"; that he announces: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost;" and that it is said of our Lord, "And he began to teach (διδάσκειν) them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." Mark 8:31. In connection with two passages, Acts 18:25 and Acts 28:31, which state: "He (Apollos) spake and taught (διδάσκειν) diligently the things of the Lord," and "Teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus." Rengstorff, to safeguard his explanation, states: *Man darf also auch hier nicht meinen, es handle sich um die Mitteilung von Heilstatsachen; wohl geht es auch um sie, aber nicht im Sinne ihrer Mitteilung, sondern im Sinne ihrer Darbietung in einer Weise, dass nur die Moeglichkeit bleibt, sic anzunehmen oder in Widerspruch mit der Schrift zu geraten* (148:39–42). Translation: "Even in these cases one therefore dare not suppose, that it concerns an imparting of the truths of salvation; it's true, it concerns them, but not in the sense of imparting them, but rather in the sense of offering them in a manner, that only the possibility remains of accepting them or of finding oneself in opposition to Scripture." This opinion is something Rengstorff reads into the text, and which neither the passages nor the context support.

Rengstorff in his presentation makes διδάσκειν concern itself almost solely with the will of God and therefore with matters of sanctification, sometimes in the wide sense of the word, most usually however in the narrow sense of the word. According to him, therefore, "doctrine" would concern itself almost solely with matters of "faith and life," similarly to those who wish to restrict the inspiration of Scripture also only to matters concerning "faith and life," the latter in the sense of ethics, in which field, however, they seem to be ready to grant only a relative authority to the Word of God. It is interesting to note that Rengstorff opens his second last paragraph on διδάσκειν (150:12) with the remark: *Ist diese Skizze richtig, ...* Actually, in trying to uphold the results of his investigation, Rengstorff finds himself out of harmony with many plain statements of Scripture, a thing which we avoid when we abide by the simple meaning that Jesus "taught," or the disciples "taught," or we "teach." The verb διδάσκειν in itself says nothing definite about the content of the teaching, about that which is taught.

Rengstorff's discussion of διδάσκειν naturally colors his explanation of διδαχή and διδασκαλία. Of διδαχή he states: *Wenn die Synoptiker von der διδαχή Jesu mit oder ohne Erwähnung ihres erschuetternden und aufwuehlenden Eindrucks auf die Hoerer sprechen, so meinen sic nicht eine besondere Dogmatik oder Ethik,*

die er verkuendigte, sondern sein ganzes διδάσκειν, seine Verkuendigung des goettlichen Willens nach der inhaltlichen wie nach der formalen Seite (166:36–41). Translation: “When the synoptics speak of the διδαχή of Jesus, with or without reference to its soul-stirring effect on the hearers, they do not mean a special dogmatics or ethics, which he proclaimed, but his entire διδάσκειν, his proclamation of the divine will according to its content as well as according to its formal side.” But he is forced to admit exceptions in the case of Hebrews 6:2 and 13:9. He says: *Hier ist 6, 2, διδαχή in der Formel βαπτισμῶν διδαχὴν ἐπιθέσεώς τε χειρῶν mehr als διδάσκειν und meint eine feste, formulierte Lehre* (167:10). Translation: “Here, in 6:2, διδαχή in the formula βαπτισμῶν διδαχὴν ἐπιθέσεώς τε χειρῶν goes beyond διδάσκειν and denotes an accurately formulated doctrine.” Even then we wonder whether Rengstorff would not rule out everything that does not definitely and immediately touch upon the Will of God. Wider than his definition is e.g. the expression “doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees” in Matthew 16:12. Not that we in any way want to rule out the Will of God (cf. John 7:16–17), but that we must safeguard the total contents, as in John 18:19–21: “The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine (διδαχή). Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world, I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said.” There διδαχή is simply defined as “what I have said” (τί ἐλάλησα). That’s about as broad as it can be made, and permits of no restrictions, especially when one reads the gospels to check on what Jesus actually said.

This point that doctrine has to do especially and particularly with the Will of God, and that that is inherent in the word itself has also crept into the latest definition of the Missouri Synod (April 10, 1956), especially in the first two “Comments on the Definition.” They read: “I. *A doctrine*. In the Lutheran Church the term ‘a doctrine’ is used to designate the church’s formulation of a part of the Scriptural revelation of the will of God. II. *Is an article of faith*. Every doctrine must be organically related to the intention of the holy and gracious God for the faith and life of man as revealed in His Word.” It certainly must be evident how this definition limits the field to which one can then apply the term ‘doctrine’ or, in other words, what one may include in the term.

We now turn to Rengstorff’s discussion of the term διδασκαλία. He defines it as *Lehre, die als solche Gottes Willen bringt*. (164:28)—“Teaching which as such conveys God’s will.” Certainly this limits the subject matter which we may teach from Scripture. Διδασκαλία, however, also has a wider sense in Scripture. In II Tim. 4:3–4, for example, we read: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine (διδασκαλία); but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” Sound teaching is thus equated with the truth.

The Greek terms themselves therefore seem to offer little of constructive value in determining what is doctrine according to Scripture. On the one hand, they speak of imparting a certain content; on the other hand, of the act of instruction itself. The words certainly do not limit the content of that which may be taught; they do not say: This in Scripture is not διδαχή, and: This is not διδασκαλία. That they have something, in fact, a great deal to do with our sanctification is clear from the purpose for which Jesus came on earth, namely, to destroy the works of the devil, to rescue us from sin. But, as stated previously, that does not determine the content of the διδαχή or διδασκαλία or tell us what we may διδάσκειν. Has Scripture, then, anything to say on that point, or, for that matter, have the Confessions?

## What Scripture and the Confessions Rule Out

When it comes to answering the question “What is doctrine?” it is much like asking “What is life?” or “What is religion?” It is much easier to state what it is not, than to state what it is. Perhaps that would be a good

place to begin. Scripture itself rules out certain matters, and the Confessions support it therein. Here is a number of pertinent passages. II Peter 1:16: “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” Colossians 2:8: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” Matthew 15:9: “In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” Matthew 7:15: “Beware of false prophets.” II Peter 2:1: “There shall be false teachers among you.” I Corinthians 2:13: “Which things also we speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.” I Timothy 4:1: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” The Confessions speak the same language. They speak of “false doctrines conflicting with God’s Word” (*Triglotta* p. 9). Again and again they state that the Pope has no right to frame articles of faith, since that abolishes Scripture (*Triglotta* 235:23). They speak of reason as blind reason which gropes about in matters pertaining to God (*Triglotta* 483:18). Among many similar statements we find this one on tradition: “If bishops have the right to burden churches with infinite traditions, and to ensnare consciences, why does Scripture so often prohibit to make, and to listen to, traditions? Why does it call them doctrines of devils?” (*Triglotta* 91:49).

Ruled out, therefore, is any point of doctrine or teaching devised by man, whether it be a pure fabrication of man’s imagination, the product of man’s natural religious bent, the outgrowth of tradition, the claim to inspiration outside Scripture, or the answer of man’s reason to questions which Scripture leaves open, does not answer. These matters cannot be doctrine according to Scripture or the Confessions. Ruled out for us, therefore, are many of the dogmas proposed and accepted by the Roman sect and by the Reformed groups.

### **The Source of Doctrine**

But to come back to the question: What is doctrine? Or to formulate it differently: What in Scripture is doctrine, and what, if anything, is not doctrine? What does Scripture teach, and what does it expect us to teach? From the very wording of these questions it is evident we take the position that Scripture alone establishes what we are to teach. And that is true! Though we are Lutherans, Luther does not establish what we are or are not to teach. Nor do our Confessions establish doctrines or teachings where Scripture does not. Dr. Hoenecke in the first volume of the *Quartalschrift* states with reference to the Confessions: *Wenn wir uns auf die Bekenntnisse unserer Kirche verpflichten, so verpflichten wir uns zu allen darin vorgelegten Glaubenslehren, aber darum nicht zu allen geschichtlichen, archaeologischen, literarischen Bemerkungen, selbst nicht zu jeder exegetischen Ausfuehrung, und ebenso wenig zu einer etwa angewendeten exegetischen Methode, oder auch dazu, dass wir einen Spruch immer gerade in derselben Weise als beweisend ansehen muessten, als dies im Bekenntnis geschieht*” (Vol. I p. 113). Translation: “When we bind ourselves to the Confessions of our church, we bind ourselves to all articles of faith contained therein, but not to all historical, archaeological, literary remarks, not even to every exegesis, and just as little to a certain exegetical method employed, nor always to consider every passage as proof in the very way in which this is carried out in the Confession.” All of us perhaps have certain examples in mind, some of which are well known. Two remarks in the Apology struck me just recently. The one: “Granting that the blessed Mary prays for the Church, does she receive souls in death, etc.” (*Triglotta* 349:27). That is certainly a concession that has no Scriptural support. Another: That a certain monk of Eisenach in Thuringia, who had predicted many things, had thirty years previously in a commentary on certain portions of Daniel predicted: “But another one will come in A.D. 1516, who will destroy you (that is, the monks), neither will you be able to resist him” (*Triglotta* 419:1–3). It is surprising, to say the least, to find such material in our Confessions. But it’s there; and certainly we dare not base our teaching thereon, nor are we held to accept this as a true prophecy. Doctrines are not established by the Confessions, nor by Luther, nor by his associates. The Confession itself says: “It is undeniable that many topics of Christian doctrine whose existence in the Church is of the greatest moment have been brought to view by our theologians and explained” (*Triglotta* 103:17). “To bring to view” is, however, not “to devise.” We might add that not even the apostles or the other men of God who wrote Scripture devised any doctrines, for they spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Nor is this a right of Church or Council. Our Confessions state: To establish an article of faith “is the prerogative of God alone” (*Triglotta* 467:13—Smalcald Articles). And in the next paragraph: “The rule is: The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel.” (467:15). The Scriptural doctrine of repentance and confession is called in the Smalcald Articles (*Triglotta* 491:41) “a doctrine from heaven, revealed through the Gospel.” Nor may we rightly see a contradiction between the statement that establishing an article of faith is a prerogative of God and the statement that the Word of God establishes articles of faith. The Word is God speaking. If we then want to know what doctrine is, that is, what we are to teach, we must go to Scripture.

*[The preceding was the first installment in the Quarterly. An editorial footnote prefaced the second installment, included here. –WLS Library Staff]*

*Comments from readers after the appearance of the first installment of this essay raised the question whether in asserting that all that Scripture says is doctrine the author might not be losing sight of the fundamental theme of Scripture. In response to these comments Pastor Wicke writes: “My article also acknowledges that Christ is the theme of the entire Scripture: page 91, line 24ff. It was, however, not my intention to show the relationship of all portions of Scripture to its central and all-pervading theme, but rather to answer the question how much is included in doctrine and whether this or that or some other point in Scripture is not to be included under the term doctrine.” Thereby we were confirmed in our understanding that the essay acknowledges what the recently adopted Synodical Conference Statement on Scripture asserts with the words: “All Scripture is written because of Christ and has a connection with the revelation of God in Christ, some passages directly, some more remotely. Every word of Scripture is therefore an organic part of the Scripture’s witness to Christ.”—Ed.]*

### **How Much of Scripture Is Doctrine?**

When our Confessions state that our teachings are “derived from the Word of God” (*Triglotta* p. 11), or when we speak of Scripture as the source of our teachings and as the judge of all dogmas and teachers, does that mean that certain parts or remarks or statements or episodes in Scripture are not doctrine and are not to be presented by us to our people as matters which they should believe? This is perhaps the crux of the matter for some in the question “What is doctrine?” That some parts of Scripture are more important than others for our eternal salvation is a fact with which we have no quarrel. We are, for example, saved by faith in Christ—not by faith in what God reveals in Scripture about the Antichrist. The question, however, is: Is anything in Scripture expendable? May I, under the influence of so-called science, look upon the first chapters of Genesis as a poetic effusion, or must I teach them as fact, and continue to confess: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth”? Of course, there is no one in our midst who would take exception to the Genesis account or classify it as legend, and, therefore, as we stated before, not a basis for doctrine nor something to be taught. But is this true in like manner with those statements of Scripture which we are apt to look upon as incidental or personal remarks? What about the conversation between Balaam and his ass in Numbers 22? Would you say that that is presented as a fact we are to accept and to teach? Or do you think it unnecessary to accept this? For many so-called theologians Paul’s cloak, which he left at Troas (II Tim. 4:13), is on the blacklist. They claim he wrote that merely as a man, and that whether we accept it or not makes no difference. This item, of course, is usually brought up in a discussion of verbal inspiration. But it also applies to our question. Actually, it is a most comforting remark for all those who, like the apostle, must through much tribulation walk the road that leads to heaven, especially so, when we in the same passage note Paul’s longing for his books and parchments, his copies of Holy Writ. Nor was there anything in Holy Writ which Paul cast overboard as unfit for doctrine. See what he does with Agar and Ishmael in Galatians 4. Everything in Scripture has spiritual value, even that remark in Genesis 12:6: “And the Canaanite was then in the land,” which Dr. Reu in his essay “What is



Scripture?” classifies as not being profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, etc. (p. 62). Leupold in his Exposition of Genesis (p. 419) points out: “This is stated in preparation for the promise about to be given to Abram. For no one can fully realize the greatness of the things promised to Abram until he remembers that the land promised to the posterity of Abram was already occupied by the Canaanites. But Abram’s faith is not daunted by this seeming difficulty.” Then there is the story of Melchisedek in Genesis 14. See what Hebrews 7 makes of that!

The passage which for me is decisive in this discussion is the passage usually employed in presenting the matter of inspiration: II Timothy 3:16–17: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine (*didaskalia*), for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” Various translations have been offered for this passage, none of which, however, affect the point to be made. Whether we say: “All Scripture,” or individualize: “Every Scripture,” that is, every Scripture passage—all of it and each passage in it is profitable for doctrine. So says Paul, moved by the Holy Ghost, not speaking with words of man’s wisdom. The word for “doctrine” here is *διδασκαλία*. This word according to Thayer and Arndt can mean either “the doctrine taught” or “the act of teaching the doctrine”—meanings that are also given for *διδασχῆ*. When both words are employed in the same passage, as for example in Titus 1:9, their relationship is well defined by Lenski in his commentary: “Note the difference between ‘the doctrine’ (*διδασχῆ*) and ‘the teaching’ (*διδασκαλία*). The latter presents the former, and all admonishing or exhortation to faith and Christian living is in most vital connection with ‘the teaching,’ the substance of which is ‘the doctrine’; all other exhortation is without inner basis, although so many pulpits today offer nothing better.”\* If you are inclined to agree with the Kittel Lexicon and claim that all “teaching” must have a bearing on sanctification, and that that determines what is doctrine and what is not, this passage still holds, for it says that all Scripture is profitable for doctrine ... that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works. The *πᾶσα*, whether it is “all” or “every,” simply leaves out nothing. Those who might like to compartmentalize Scripture and say: Yes, this is good for doctrine, but that is good for reproof, etc., should note that God in this passage does not do so. He places no “or” between doctrine—reproof—correction—instruction in righteousness; not even an “and.” “All” or “every” Scripture is profitable for each one of these. As far as I am concerned, therefore, “doctrine” and “Scripture” are synonymous: we can eliminate no statement in Scripture from having the character of or from being “doctrine.”

To cite a few other Scripture statements, in which the Lord Jesus or His Holy Spirit tell us what we are to teach, preach, announce, impart. There is the word of our Lord in Matthew 28:19–20: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching (*διδάσκοντες*) them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Some may criticize the use of this passage because of the word *ἐντέλλω* (command, enjoin) and claim that that limits what we are to transmit, to teach; claiming that even John does so in I John 3:23: “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.” Let us not forget that his commands (if we insist on that limitation), even as all his teachings, were always based on Holy Writ. He pointed his disciples and the people to Moses, the Psalms, the Prophets. Jot and tittle were authoritative as far as the Lord was concerned. Shall we accept less? It would be valuable to count how often the Lord himself points to or appeals to the written Word. I’m sure it would amaze us. Are we ready to disavow the example of Paul, who in his defense before Governor Felix stated: “But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing *all things which are written* in the law and in the prophets”? For Paul all things there written were his doctrine and the subject of his faith. That reminds us of his “whatsoever” in Romans 15:4: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning (*διδασκαλία*), that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” Nothing in Scripture is expendable. It is all profitable for

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\* *Interpretation of Titus* by R. C. H. Lenski, p. 911.

teaching, although we ourselves at times may not be able to say how. Someone else, at some other time, under different circumstances, will, we may be sure of it, be strengthened in his faith by a passage which today does not mean as much to us, or by one we may not even be aware of.

Not directly related to our specific topic, yet touching upon it, is the fact that in employing Scripture for our teaching we must follow legitimate rules of hermeneutics. Scripture passages dare never be torn out of their connection, out of their setting, divorced from the way the holy writer himself uses the passage, or made to mean something which the words themselves cannot mean. We are admonished by Paul, even as was Timothy: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing (cutting straight) the Word of truth,” (II Tim. 2:15), a passage which the *Apology* (*Triglotta* 173:67) applies to the proper division between Law and Gospel, but which need not be restricted to that. Keeping this in mind, we can understand how even those statements in Scripture, which bring us the words of Satan or the false statements of men and women, for example, the evil advice of Job’s wife or the lies spoken by Ananias and Sapphira, can be and are profitable for doctrine. They clearly teach us that Satan is a deceiver and show us the corrupt nature of man’s natural heart, —thus are not even very far removed from that central of all Scripture teachings: salvation through faith in Christ. Scripture therefore—all of it—is profitable for teaching, and what it states is doctrine. To teach otherwise would be to assail the authority and the reliability of Scripture.

### Doctrinal Statements

In our work of teaching and preaching in the Church, we do, however, make a distinction between Scripture and statements of doctrine. We say that Scripture teaches these and these doctrines. That is neither improper, nor are we attacking the authority of Scripture or trying to eliminate this or that portion or statement of Scripture thereby or saying that it makes little difference whether we teach a particular point or not. Actually this matter of confessions and statements of doctrine is a very simple thing. It comes about quite naturally, for example, in answer to the words of our Lord: “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? ... But whom say ye that I am?” (Matt. 16:13, 15). How else can we confess Christ than to tell what the Scripture says of him, —the Christ who said, “Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven”? Such a confession, when made by an individual or a larger group, will finally lead to doctrinal statements. Peter tells the Christians of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (I Pet. 3:15). Should not we Christians of Wisconsin be ready to do the same? That will then lead to doctrinal statements, confessions of what we believe and teach. Our statements, however, must always be in answer to Paul’s question in Romans 4:3: “For what saith the Scripture?” The results for us are embodied in the three ecumenical creeds and in the special Confessions of the Lutheran Church, all of them found in the *Book of Concord*.

How do we arrive at such doctrinal statements? The choice of individual doctrinal statements has usually been forced upon the church, and that by two considerations. First, there are teachings without faith in which we are not children of God, e.g., the man who knows nothing of and does not put his trust in the saving work of Jesus Christ will be eternally lost. These teachings we must confess so that others may also come to the saving knowledge of Christ. Secondly, there are those matters which must be clearly stated because of controversy, because of the attack of those who have left the position of Scripture. This is true of most of the Confessions which we of the Lutheran Church have accepted. Those who say that Confessions are not needed, but that Scripture is their Confession, perhaps forget that the Pope uses Scripture to prove that he is the vicar of Christ, and that the Jehovah’s Witnesses claim to follow Scripture, but deny the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

How do we formulate these doctrinal statements? The answer will tell us why F. Bente in his “Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books” (*Triglotta* p. 256) would write: “Nor can the *Formula* ever be refuted, for its doctrinal contents are unadulterated truths of the infallible Word of God. It confesses the doctrine which Christians everywhere will finally admit as true and divine, indeed, which they all in their hearts believe even now, if not explicitly and consciously, at least implicitly and in principle.” How is that possible? Because the

Confessions in their doctrinal statements simply present a summary of what Scripture says. Thus the Formula says of the three Ecumenical Creeds: In them “of old the true Christian doctrine, in a pure, sound sense, was collected from God’s Word into brief articles or chapters against the corruption of heretics” (*Triglotta* 851:4). Of the *Augsburg Confession* it states: “Since in these last times God, out of especial grace, has brought the truth of His Word to light again from the darkness of the Papacy through the faithful service of the precious man of God, Dr. Luther, and since this doctrine has been collected from, and according to, God’s Word into the articles and chapters of the *Augsburg Confession* against the corruption of the Papacy, and also of other sects, we confess also the First, *Unaltered Augsburg Confession* as our symbol for this time, not because it was composed by our theologians, but because it has been taken from God’s Word and is founded firmly and well therein” (*Triglotta* 851:5). From what part of Scripture was it taken? We say: From all of it; although we are quite aware that some details of parables, some details of prophecy, obviously figurative language, are not made the basis for doctrinal statements. Still they are not excluded, for they do not teach any other doctrine than that which the manifestly clear and simple passages in the Word of God teach, which we call the *sedes doctrinae*, because they are the passages in Scripture where certain teachings are especially and distinctly expounded. That is what is meant when our Confessions say: “Scripture clearly says” (*Triglotta* 109:12). Actually then, the sum of the *sedes doctrinae* determines our doctrinal statements, or, if you want to use the term, our dogmas.

It is in formulating these doctrinal statements or dogmas that our reason does play a certain role. It does not create or reveal the doctrine, for reason is not God. But, as a servant of God, it draws from the Scripture the clear statement of those things which we believe and stand for. Reason will remain God’s servant only if our spirit and attitude are that commended by James (1:21): “Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” We need the admonition and prayer of Paul, speaking to Timothy (II Tim. 2:7): “Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.” In the *Formula of Concord* we find two statements that clearly define the role that our reason plays in these matters, both of which are in the sections dealing with the Lord’s Supper. In the *Epitome* (*Triglotta* 817:42) we read: “As in all other articles of faith our reason is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,” a statement that is based on II Cor. 10:5. And in the *Thorough Declaration* (*Triglotta* 987:45): “We are certainly in duty bound not to interpret and explain these words” (the Words of Institution) “of the eternal, true, and almighty Son of God, our Lord, Creator, and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, differently, as allegorical, figurative, tropical expressions, according as it seems agreeable to our reason, but with simple faith and due obedience to receive the words as they read, in their proper and plain sense, and allow ourselves to be diverted therefrom (from this express testimony of Christ) by no objections or human contradictions spun from human reason, however charming they may appear to reason.” We may employ all the rules of logic, in fact, should; but with this limitation: never dare we come up with something which Scripture does not say, or which will contradict Scripture. When we then, on our part, find something in Scripture which to our logic seems a contradiction (we think here particularly of the doctrine of predestination or election), we are not privileged to attempt harmonizing or reconciling the seeming contradiction, for whatever solution man’s reason may offer, it always violates clear words of Scripture. We may establish our doctrinal statements by means of true inferences, deductions, enumeration, comparison, conclusion, summarization, identification, direct quotation. If in so employing our reason we are faithful to Scripture, these statements have the same force as Scripture, because they are but Scripture faithfully reworded. But we dare never go beyond Scripture. That which Scripture has not answered (e.g., details about our resurrection body and our heavenly home) or does not touch upon (e.g., whence the various races) is not a proper subject for doctrinal statement. However, formulating, stating that which Scripture clearly teaches, never changes the doctrine. If we were to change, to add, to subtract, to omit, we would indeed be distorting that which God teaches us and wants us to teach others. Then we would come under the condemnation voiced in the words of the *Apology*, where it clearly shows how Rome arrived at its false dogmas: “Thus far we have reviewed the principal passages which the adversaries cite against us, in order to show that faith does not justify, and that we merit, by our works, remission of sins and grace. But we hope that we have shown clearly enough to godly consciences that these passages are not opposed to our doctrine; that the adversaries wickedly distort the Scriptures to their opinions; that most of the passages which they cite have been garbled; that, while

omitting the clearest passages concerning faith, they only select from the Scriptures passages concerning works, and even these they distort; that everywhere they add certain human opinions to that which the words of Scripture say; that they teach the Law in such a manner as to suppress the Gospel concerning Christ. For the entire doctrine of the adversaries is, in part, derived from human reason, and is, in part, a doctrine of the Law, not of the Gospel” (*Triglotta* 201:165). That is surely not the way to arrive at Scripturally correct doctrinal statements.

Does doctrine change? Even as God is changeless, so is His Word. Even those Old Testament regulations, which were abrogated in the New Testament, have not changed. From the very beginning they were meant to be temporary, preparatory, —shadows of that which was to come. The way to salvation, the moral law, the facts of creation have never and will never change. Though this is true, yet there is room for change in the formulation of doctrinal statements. But the purpose must always be to eliminate any false conceptions or interpretations that in the meantime have crept in, never to negotiate doctrine or effect a compromise. As evidence we adduce the *Formula of Concord* in its relation to the *Augsburg Confession*—especially its detailed treatment of the false dogmas to be rejected. Another example that might be adduced is this, that before the Election Controversy some in the Missouri Synod at times described election as being *intuitu fidei*. The use of this expression, however, was dropped, when it became apparent that false doctrine could hide behind it. Actually, no change in doctrine took place. This also explains how an article could be published in our *Quartalschrift* some years past, entitled: “The Development of the Doctrinal Position of the Wisconsin Synod During the Century of Its History” (January, 1950). A doctrinal position may become purer and more Scriptural, but any theory of development in doctrine, as held and practiced, for example, by the Roman Church, can only lead to a destruction of Christian doctrine.

A discussion of fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines will scarcely add anything substantial to this presentation. The terms are not found in Scripture, nor do they as a rule turn up in our sermons. Where they have played a role is in the various church union negotiations. Some have sought to equate non-fundamental doctrines with open questions, and to declare differences in them non-church-divisive. The point is that a non-fundamental doctrine, that is, a doctrine which is not intimately connected with our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, is a doctrine nevertheless, inasmuch as it is found in Scripture. We have no right to teach on any point otherwise than Scripture teaches. On the other hand, real “open questions,” points not mentioned or answered in Scripture, are to remain unanswered. To elevate our answers to the position of doctrinal statements would be to place man’s opinion on par with Scripture.

There are others who are tempted to restrict doctrine to that in Scripture *was Christum treibt*. Whatever specific meaning we may give to the terms *διδασχῆ* or *διδασκαλία* in Scripture, this is certain that they do not support that contention. We merely call attention to the fact that in Mark 4:2 Christ’s entire Sermon on the Mount is included in His *διδασχῆ*. It is true that the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, is the supreme doctrine of Holy Writ from Genesis to Revelation, —Jesus is the sum and substance of Holy Writ, —and, like unto the Apostle Paul, we are determined neither to know nor to preach anything save Jesus Christ and Him crucified,—yet that does not, for example, make the Law of God something less than a doctrine of God’s Word. Jesus also taught, and proclaimed, and applied the Law in his sermons and discourses. Though the Law cannot justify, yet Paul acknowledges in Romans 7:12: “Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good,” and adds verse 14: “For we know that the Law is spiritual.” Thus the *Formula* is correct when it states: “We believe, teach, and confess that the Law is properly a divine doctrine, which teaches what is right and pleasing to God, and reproves everything that is sin and contrary to God’s will” (*Triglotta* 801:3).

Another term sometimes misused is the expression “Article of Faith.” At the 1888 Synodical Conference meeting Dr. F. Pieper correctly defined this term in these words: “Strictly speaking the moral commandments, precepts, and narratives are not to be regarded as doctrines of faith... The expression ‘article of faith’ designates a very specific conception: the doctrines of the Gospel in distinction to the Law.” The distinction is well taken, but notice that Dr. Pieper is very careful not to say that all matters which cannot be classified as “articles of faith” are not Scripture doctrine. However, with regard to most of these terms we must remember that they are

man-made, and we dare not use them to eliminate certain portions or statements of Scripture from being included in that which God teaches. Whether we include this or that individual item or this or that individual statement in a confession of faith or doctrinal statement, which we as Christians set up and adopt, does not decide whether it is a divine teaching or not. The issue is whether it is part of the inspired Word, for that is profitable for doctrine. As far as the term “article of faith” is concerned, it does not answer the question “What is to be believed?” as much as the question “What teachings are necessary for or closely related to saving faith?” Even then, Walther spoke of non-fundamental articles of faith, of which a person might be ignorant or which he might even deny without thereby subverting the foundation of faith. The Confessions also speak of Articles of Faith, but are not very clear as to just what they mean thereby. Christian ethics is usually excluded from the Articles of Faith, also from that branch of theology which we call dogmatics, but that does not mean that it is not part of God’s doctrine. I Timothy 6 includes part of the “Table of Duties” in God’s doctrine, for Paul commands Timothy in verse 2: “These things teach (διδασκε) and exhort.”

### **Are We Limited in Any Way by the Confessions?**

In this connection it would be well to ask whether our doctrines perhaps are limited to those which we find set down in the *Book of Concord*, and that as a result we have freedom to teach as we please on those points not definitely decided by the *Formula of Concord* or expressly stated therein. Scripture, of course, knows nothing about our Confessional writings. It simply says through the Apostle Paul: “Preach the Word” (II Tim. 4:2). And he himself confesses (Acts 20:27): “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” Nor did Paul, as is so evident from his Epistles, restrict himself to those teachings which we are wont to call the fundamental doctrines. In II Thessalonians 2 he reminds the Thessalonians of that which he had taught them about the Antichrist during the few weeks he had been in Thessalonica gathering a new mission congregation.

If we were restricted to the doctrines presented in the *Book of Concord*, we would, of course, have no doctrine of inspiration, nor could we say that any particular form of this dogma must be unacceptable to us. But then we would really be at a loss to determine what Scripture says or does not say, for we would first have to determine what is Scripture, what is God’s Word. Then, of course, we could not deny the hand of brotherhood to anyone, certainly not to one who did not hold with what the BRIEF STATEMENT, for example, says of the Holy Scriptures. We also would be helpless in our defense against the many sects with their chiliastic doctrines, for all they would need to do is to deny that their special brand of chiliastic notions are the Jewish opinions of *Augustana* Article XVII. No, our Confessions do not have the last word when it comes to determining what we are to teach. That belongs to Scripture. When, therefore, the matter of the inspiration of Scripture becomes a contested doctrine in the Church, as it has, God expects us to state what Scripture states. It is not necessary to call a council of all Lutherans to determine what the Lutheran stand will be: Scripture has already settled that. We are not restricted to those doctrines laid down in our Confessions.

This is the very procedure followed in the Confessions themselves. The *Augustana* did not restrict itself to those points treated in the *Apostles’ Creed*. The *Formula of Concord*, in turn, did not restrict itself to those doctrinal statements found in the *Augustana*, the *Apology*, or the *Smalcald Articles*. It went beyond them, because the framers of this document considered it wise to do so. This is especially true of its Article on “God’s Eternal Foreknowledge and Election”: “Although among the theologians of the *Augsburg Confession* there has not occurred as yet any public dissension whatever concerning the eternal election of the children of God that has caused offense, and has become wide-spread, yet since this article has been brought into very painful controversy in other places, and even among our theologians there has been some agitation concerning it; moreover, since the same expressions were not always employed concerning it by the theologians; therefore, in order, by the aid of divine grace, to prevent disagreement and separation on its account in the future among our successors, we, as much as in us lies, have desired also to present an explanation of the same here, so that every one may know what is our unanimous doctrine, faith, and confession also concerning this article” (*Triglotta* 1063:1). What Scripture has spoken, we are allowed to, yes, compelled to teach, whether the point has been

treated extensively in our Confessions or not at all. This is in accord with the qualifications Scripture has set down for the elders: “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught (κατὰ τὴν διδασκαλίαν), that he may be able by sound doctrine (διδασκαλία) both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9).

But what if we are convinced that our Confessions are wrong on certain points or present the truth incompletely? First of all, let us face it: no pastor or teacher in the Church is entitled to such a thing as academic freedom over against the Word of God. He is called to be a slave, a δοῦλος of God, and in this follows not only in the footsteps of Paul, who in Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1; and Titus 1:1, calls himself a δοῦλος, yes, glories in it, but also in the footsteps of the divine Savior, who in his earthly ministry in answer to the Jews, who marveled at his learning, once said, “My doctrine (διδασκαλίαν) is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine (διδασκαλίαν), whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him” (John 7:16–18). Pastors and teachers, following in the footsteps of Christ and his Apostles, will preach and teach God’s Word faithfully, for only thus can they glorify God. That means they will also preach and teach in complete conformity with the Confessions, where these have spoken, and that because they have accepted the Confessions on a *quia* basis, not on a “quatenus” basis, namely, because the Confessions themselves agree with the Word of God. Are we then not permitted to speak if we have serious doubts whether the Confessions actually present the truth, or if we are convinced that the Confessions do not go far enough in the treatment of certain doctrines? Certainly. And our first court for speaking ought to be our pastoral conferences where we can expect to find the knowledge of Scripture which will help solve our misgivings. If then we are also constrained to speak up in groups where our laymen are present, the laymen before whom we swore an oath to teach according to these Confessions, we ought to give them fair warning by clearly stating that we are questioning the position of our Confessions, so that these men too may be alerted to judge properly. “To test the spirits” is the divine right of all Christians. But good words and fair speeches have often deceived the hearts of the simple.

### **Recent Definitions**

What is doctrine? There have been two recent attempts at a definition within the Missouri Synod. In 1944 the Missouri Synod Convention at Saginaw adopted the following statement: “A Scriptural doctrine is a truth contained in, expressed by, or properly drawn from, Scripture,” as an answer to the question: “What is a Scriptural doctrine?” In the 1953 convention the question: “What is a doctrine?” was given into the hands of a committee, consisting of Missouri’s Committee on Doctrinal Unity together with the faculties of its two theological seminaries, which gave the following answer, dated April 10, 1956: “A doctrine is an article of faith which the church, in obedience to her Lord, and in response to her specific needs, derives according to sound principles of interpretation from Scripture as the sole source of doctrine and sets forth in a form adapted to teaching.” Actually, this answer constitutes an answer to the question: What is a correct doctrinal statement? The definition raises more questions than it answers. What do they mean by an “article of faith”? Even the special comments raise questions, some of which we dealt with in this paper. Is a doctrinal statement, according to them, only the formulation of that part of Scripture which reveals the will of God? Just how restrictive are the words: “Every doctrine must be organically related to the intention of the holy and gracious God for the faith and life of man as revealed in His Word”? Just what is the purpose of including the words “and sets forth in a form adapted to teaching” in a definition of doctrine? We ask finally: How would the acceptance of this definition affect our understanding of Romans 16:17: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine (διδασκαλίαν) which ye have learned; and avoid them”? I personally prefer the findings of the 1957 panel which studied this passage and summarized its findings thus: “By doctrine

is meant the entire body of Christian doctrine. We believe that for practical purposes the terms ‘doctrine’ and ‘Scripture’ may be considered synonymous.”

## Summary

Let us attempt a summary. Doctrine includes everything in Holy Writ, for Holy Writ is God’s Word—all of it in every particular profitable for doctrine. Our doctrinal statements are summaries of that which Scripture states on the points in question. These may be fundamental or non-fundamental—both are binding inasmuch as they are God’s Word. Scripture doctrine never changes; doctrinal statements have changed. They are valid only if they accurately reflect Scripture. Which doctrinal statements are to be included in our public confessions is determined chiefly by two points: the necessity of confessing the saving truths of Scripture, and the necessity of defending God’s Word against the attacks of reason, and unreasonable men, also Satan himself. However, doctrine is not restricted to that which is laid down in the Confessions. Whatever Scripture states is that which we may and must teach. Paul writes: “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning (*διδασκαλία*), that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). And of this Word Jeremiah, speaking for God, says: “He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully” (Jer. 23:28). Not to forget Peter, who says: “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (I Pet. 4:11).