

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES AS SOURCE AND NORM
FOR DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE
IN PASTORAL COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGY

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PREFACE

The inspired and inerrant Scriptures are the Word of God. By the grace of God this is an accepted truth in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. We recognize that God speaks to us in the Scripture. He tells us what to teach and what to do. He sets our limits and charts our path as we carry on our daily activities whether as Christians or as Christian pastors. We are servants of the Scriptures because we are servants of God. The Scriptures rule and direct everything we teach, believe and do. This doctrine with the comfort and assurance it gives undergirds this thesis, which discusses specifically the application of Scripture as source and norm for doctrine and practice in pastoral counseling and psychology.

Our commitment to the Holy Scriptures is well-known; the doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy makes Scripture our standard both in doctrine and practice. At times, however, we need to focus our attention on our doctrinal position to be sure that we still have a clear and correct understanding of that doctrinal and Scriptural position.

Scripture itself must be the basis for the definition of source and norm for doctrine and practice. In this thesis we will study the applicable passages in detail. The Lutheran Confessions, because they are a clear exposition of the Word of God, assist in establishing our definitions. Martin Luther and other Lutheran writers can assist in establishing workable and practical definitions. Only with such clear definitions will we be able to make proper use of terms such as biblical and Christian in our doctrine and practice.

Once we have established a scriptural definition for source and norm in doctrine and practice, error and deception become visible. Not all who use words like biblical and Christian define this in the same way Scripture does. Anyone can use them. The question is whether the terms are being used legitimately.

Our particular concern is with the field of pastoral counseling and psychology. In this field as well as any other we work with, Scripture limits the amount of acceptable material available to us. Our commitment will leave us unwilling to accept many things that are called biblical and Christian, because they do not satisfy our carefully thought out and often-defended doctrines of Scripture. At the same time, we still have the responsibility to make material available to our people that is faithful to Scripture whether we can find that material among other writers or whether we are obliged to produce it ourselves.

Emphasis on the work of pastoral counseling and psychology in the ministry is increasing. The material available to read, watch, hear and absorb proliferates for both pastors and people. We need to evaluate what these counselors are telling us and whether they really have a basis worthy to be called biblical and Christian. Does the material speak from a scripturally determined base as Scripture itself teaches? Is it what we have promised to give our people?

The purpose of this paper then is twofold: (1) to define what Scripture means when it speaks of itself as source and norm for doctrine and practice and (2) to warn against those who abuse the truths of Scripture by failing to keep that commitment. We will consider practitioners from the field of Christian pastoral counseling and psychology on the basis of their use of Scripture. We will evaluate their commitment to Scripture as well as their practice of that commitment.

I pray that God will bless this study and our practical work of pastoral counseling as we give our people what we have promised to give them, namely, the Word of God.

I acknowledge and appreciate the help, encouragement, practical experience and educational profit I have received from a number of sources that do not appear in the bibliography of this paper. Professor Armin Schuetze and Professor David Valleskey have given generously of their time to listen to my concerns and to help focus them. Terrence Moisan, M.D., has given valuable consultation and important insights into the relationship between the fields of medicine and psychology as they relate to our work as Christian counselors. His assistance has been given as a fellow Christian, medical professional and friend. The Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service has been a great help both in the seminars the agency has conducted on pastoral counseling and in the cooperative work I have had occasion to do with staff members. Ben Joshel, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, not only has allowed me to cooperate in therapy in many cases but has selflessly offered advice, direction and encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1

HOLY SCRIPTURE: THE WORD OF GOD FOR DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE

Before we can seriously consider the Word of God in doctrine and practice, we need to establish what the Word of God is. We need to ask whether we have the right to claim that the Bible is the holy Scripture and whether the holy Scripture is the Word of God. By no means is there universal agreement on that subject. Some consider the Word of God to be only the second Person of the Trinity to the exclusion of Scripture. Some believe that the Word of God is contained in the Bible but not that the Bible can be equated with the Word of God. Still others with a neoorthodox presupposition believe the Scripture becomes the Word of God only when it makes its way into an individual's heart and life.

The Bible itself, however, speaks as the Word of God. Consequently, by its own authority, it is the source and norm for our doctrine and practice.

SCRIPTURE AS SOURCE AND NORM

When Jesus gave his great commission, he spoke of his authority, his tools and the work of his church.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age. (Mt 28:18-20)

The responsibility of Christ's church is to make disciples, μαθη - τεύετε, loyal student-followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Since the work takes more than human capability Jesus equipped his disciples fully. He assured them that the authority to give this commission was his ἐξουσία. They had his promise to be with them, to give his divine blessing to their work and to the tools also. He told them βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος and to τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν. They had the Word and sacraments that he gave them. They had the Holy Spirit to empower them as they used Christ's means of grace.

Matthew 28 clearly refers to what the disciples had learned from their Old Testament studies. The Old Testament spoke of Jesus and his work. As part of their training as disciples, Jesus revealed himself to his disciples as the one who fulfilled the Old Testament. That is what he told them to communicate. By communicating that message of prophecy and fulfillment by the power of God according to his will, they would make disciples anywhere they carried the message in the world. They had Christ's word on it. The promise was in complete agreement with what the Old Testament had already proclaimed. "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return unto me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Is 55:11). Christ had promised his disciples the Holy Spirit to carry out his great commission. Acts 2 tells how Christ kept the promise on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit equipped his believers with his power.

Scripture records the history of how Christ's disciples carried out Jesus' commission. "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and

spoke the word of God boldly" (Ac 4:31). Wherever there were people who would listen, the disciples were ready to speak. Their witness depended on the command and promise of God, not upon whether the message would be accepted on delivery. "Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: 'We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles'" (Ac 13:46).

St. Paul said, "I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness" (Col 1:25). In Romans 1, St. Paul says the message made him a debtor, an ὀφειλέτης. "I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish" (Ro 1:14). The obligation St. Paul had to preach the Gospel came from St. Paul's own salvation. He realized that God intended it for him and for the world. A person who knows the gospel is a person who has work to do.

The early church took seriously Christ's command to preach his gospel. The apostles refused to allow anything to stand in its way. Whether they faced persecution from the Sanhedrin (Ac 4) or were distracted by other responsibilities, the disciples carried out their commission from Christ first. "So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables'" (Ac 6:2). In spite of opposition to the gospel that the apostles faced almost everywhere they went, they had the assurance of God's blessing and faithful promise. "So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God" (Ac 18:11). To the Corinthian congregation he spoke of the all-important purpose of his work and the authority he had. "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins

according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4). St. Paul spoke well for all the apostles when he said, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). His authority was that he had received his message from Christ. That was his source. His purpose was to proclaim the message that was his own salvation. That was his norm.

Inappropriate motives for preaching the Word of God appeared at the time of the apostles. Some preached for profit and St. Paul expressed his disappointment at that. "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God" (2 Cor 2:17). Evidence of selfish motives and unbecoming competition was present when St. Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians. But for St. Paul, love for his Savior allowed for no false motives. Confidence in his commission allowed him no other tool than the Word of God for doing his work as an apostle. "I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness" (Col 1:25). Preaching the gospel was all that really mattered. Philippians 1 tells us about some of St. Paul's disappointment at what he saw around him, but even there we have no indication that those false motives corrupted the message or dampened St. Paul's joy that the Word was being preached.

The first apostles give us a beautiful example of faithfulness to the Word of God. They clearly understood the importance of what they were doing. As they worked to make disciples, they had constantly before them the divine purpose of saving souls. Paul was never disappointed, οὐ γὰρ ἔταλον ἔχοντες by the equipment Christ entrusted to him to do that work.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Ro 1:16-17)

St. Peter expressed the same confidence. "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pe 1:23). We have examples here of believers who had only one tool: the Word of God. They had only one purpose: to be God's instruments for the salvation of souls. They always had eternal glory in the presence of God before them.

Nothing can benefit sinners that does not maintain the same goal and utilize the same tool. All of our work requires the same commitment. Stress, depression, anxiety and other cares of this life are certainly real and very much a part of our lives and the lives of our people. Solving those problems to the best of our ability is part of our responsibility as pastors. Solving those problems is not our primary goal. The goal always remains eternal peace with God and the glory of his heaven. This fact is difficult to keep before our people in the midst of their suffering. That focus, however, is what separates us from secular counselors and shallow Christian writers. Some may believe they have completed their Christian duty by relieving some human difficulty. We, as servants of Christ and holy Scripture, cannot consider our work to be finished if we have neglected the spiritual welfare of the troubled soul in addition to his or her earthly needs.

The apostles took the gospel to the world. According to God's will and purpose the gospel was the power that saved people then just as it does now. We have both the same command of Christ and the same promise. When Christ's command and promise are the source and norm for all of our work, we cannot fail as God counts success and failure.

Without them, we cannot succeed as God counts success and failure. If we do our work, all of it, with the same goal and the same tool the apostles had, we will also be sure of the same blessing the apostles had. When our work is done with any other goal or tool, we can expect no such blessing. We need to examine our goals and tools constantly to be as faithful as the apostles were in carrying out Christ's commission with holy Scripture as their source and norm.

THE WORD OF GOD FOR DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE

Few who claim the name Christian will admit to doing less than delivering the Word of God that saves sinners. Not all deliver on what they have promised. It is easy to substitute something else for the gospel Christ commanded us to preach. We can substitute the law for the gospel and destroy God's intentions by turning salvation by grace into salvation by works. Christ has promised to hear the prayers of his people but prayer is not a means of grace or a substitute for preaching the gospel. We can replace Christ's promise of eternal peace with a false notion that the peace and joy of heaven are things we can look for now or soon in an earthly millennial reign. The results are disastrous.

The central message of the Word of God is the message of sin and grace, law and gospel, salvation by grace through faith. Everything in the Word of God applies to that central plan of salvation by preparing the way for it, delivering it or applying it. The apostles would allow nothing to deter them from their goal. We are committed to the same goal. Without question, God's message of sin and grace is our message, and Scripture is the tool for its proclamation. This unchanging fact is

central to our definition of holy Scripture as source and norm. As obvious as this commitment may seem, we know all too well that it is not a universal concern among theologians or the people they serve. Not all eyes focus on the glory of eternity with God. Those who do not maintain this commitment to a scriptural source and norm and to the terms biblical and Christian ultimately eliminate the authority of Scripture altogether. The apostles were familiar with attempts to undermine Scripture's authority. Those attempts only served to strengthen their determination to say, "Thus saith the Lord." We are committed to the same faithful proclamation because we profess the same commitment they held. By the grace of God the commitment was present at the time of the inspired writers and by the grace of God we acknowledge it as our commitment.

On the basis of what Scripture has to say about itself we hold that the Word of God can and must be primarily associated with the written Word, the holy Scripture. Sound exegesis of appropriate passages demands this. In addition, God the Holy Spirit works through the the living Word to create the faith that believes the truth. In the final analysis, we believe the Bible is the Word of God because it says it is the Word of God for our salvation. It is the tool by which God creates that faith. Scripture is our source and norm because God creates the faith to accept it as such through the Word itself. The holy Scripture governs what we teach and what we do, because God's Word, Scripture demands that position.

While speaking to the Jews at the Feast of Dedication, Jesus attested to the authority of Scripture when he said, "If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came--and the Scripture cannot be broken--" (Jn 10:35). Jesus' statement has the tone of an assumption. He

is sure that his hearers will not disagree with him even though they made themselves his enemies. The Jews held that God communicated with them through his Word.

The Jews had some mistaken ideas about the Scriptures. Jesus addressed them when he said, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (Jn 5:39). The Jews had no trouble recognizing the authority of Scripture. The Scribes and Pharisees knew Scripture well. Scripture was their heritage. The problem was that they had the same attitude toward the Scripture as they had toward their place in God's kingdom because Abraham was their forefather. They believed they held the right to be sons and daughters of God merely because of their heritage. They also believed they had the key to eternal life because they had the Scriptures. Christ's place in Scripture did not occur to them nor could they accept the fact that Scripture spoke of Christ. They robbed Scripture of its central message. They eliminated the central doctrine.

Even though the Jews and their leaders were Bible people, they robbed the Bible of its central purpose by refusing to see Christ in it. They did not teach Christ or salvation in the Messiah to their people. The Bible always testifies of Christ and his saving work. This principle stands for anyone whose work is biblical or Christian. Before anything else, the Scriptures testify of Christ and his saving work.

The authority of Scripture spoken of in John 10 is in perfect harmony with what St. Paul has to say about it in the sedes doctrinae for the inspiration of Scripture and the authority of Scripture for doctrine, 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become

convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Timothy's mother and grandmother had been faithful in their responsibility for his religious training. They taught him the Word of God. Although St. Paul acknowledges many purposes of Scripture, he maintains the proper priority by putting salvation at the beginning. For St. Paul salvation is by the gospel, by the Word of God, by the Holy Scripture. He equates them all.

In addition to appealing to Scripture as the basis for Timothy's hope, St. Paul also removes all doubt about what part of Scripture he has in mind. He is speaking of all of it, Πᾶσα γραφή. He sees no need and no right to pick and choose what is or isn't the Word of God. All of it falls into the same category. It is all θεόπνευστος. The New English Bible perverts the text and the doctrine with the translation, "Every inspired scripture has its use for teaching the truth." The word order and Πᾶσα γραφή without the article do not allow this translation. Paul is clearly answering the question of authority in this verse, not raising more questions.

St. Paul's words in this sedes doctrinae give us the complete assurance that on any page of Scripture we are hearing God speak to us. From beginning to end Scripture is God-breathed. No question exists about what can be considered divine and what must be considered human. By his almighty power, God used the thoughts and the words of human beings to convey his message to the world. In his own unique way God controlled the thoughts and words of his chosen writers so they could use their own style, their own circumstances, their own figures of speech, poetry or prose to convey exactly what God wanted the world to

know about him and his relationship with mankind. As long as that assurance remains intact, we have no problem determining what the Word of God is. All of Scripture is the Word of God. Once the assurance of complete scriptural authority has been removed, we must question what part of Scripture is God's and what part is man's. At that point the battle for the Bible has been lost, no matter how insignificant the doubt may appear at first.

After solidly establishing Scripture's authority, St. Paul goes on to state its usefulness. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tm 3:16-17). Teaching, rebuking, correcting and training all fall into the realm of pastoral counseling and discipline. For that reason St. Paul also says, "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tm 4:16). He also admonished Timothy, "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you - guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in you" (2 Tm 1:13). We can do no better than to sit as Timothy at the feet of St. Paul to heed his admonitions. He had good reason for giving the encouragements he did. "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Tm 4:13). St. Paul did not have access to dozens of Christian bookstores, Christian radio stations and television programs that intend only to satisfy what itching ears want to hear. He was certainly correct when he warned that such a time would come. We are living in that time.

St. Paul also follows the priorities the Lord sets for our work that Scripture establishes. Our work is to bring people to their Lord and his salvation. No amount of teaching, rebuking, correcting and training is of any value if it leaves the person ignorantly condemned to hell. Paul is talking about the σοφία ἐς σωτηρίαν and the πίστις ἐν Χριστῷ God produces in them. Faith comes first and then the works follow.

St. Paul had Scripture's central purpose and authority in mind as he confronted the problem the Corinthian congregation had understanding the resurrection. "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4). St. Paul delivered the simple and historical account of Christ's redemptive work because that was what God wanted him to deliver. That resurrection history was the foundation of the Corinthians' faith and life. Consider the impact of denying that history, as Paul points it out in verses 12 to 19.

The Scriptures not only have God's stamp of approval, they also have God's command to preach them. God expected Paul to preach the message, and he expected his messenger to give the message ἐν πρώτοις, top priority. All of it was ὅ καὶ παρέλαβον, received from God. As he stated in his second letter to Timothy, salvation is the message of Scripture, all Scripture. Scripture cannot have a secondary purpose that nullifies this primary purpose. Nothing can be called biblical or Christian that ignores Christ or substitutes anything for God's saving work in Jesus Christ.

The primary message of Scripture is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul says,

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Ro 1:16-17)

The reason Paul could say that he was οὐ γὰρ ἔταλα χύεσθαι, not ashamed of the gospel, is that the gospel never fails to deliver what God promised it would deliver. Again there is perfect harmony between what the apostle did and what Christ commanded. By delivering the gospel, St. Paul was carrying out Christ's command. That way Christ's promise was intact, the just live by faith. None of the concerns of our daily lives are more important than that. No wonder St. Paul exhorted St. Timothy to stand firm in the same gospel. As a preacher he was to preach the Word of God. "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (1 Tm 4:13). Christ provided the Scripture because people need it.

The work of the preacher does not end when he has faithfully preached the Scriptures, the Word of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ. The example of the Bereans shows that Paul encouraged these people to look into the Scriptures to see whether the message of the apostles was in harmony with the Word of God. They carried out the responsibility. "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Ac 17:11). Paul did not hesitate to encourage the people to compare his words with Scripture's teaching. He expected it. He was teaching the people themselves to be satisfied with nothing less than the Word of God.

Jesus spoke of faithfulness to his Word and said, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before

my Father in heaven" (Mt 10:32-33). In John 12:48 Jesus adds the fact that the Word of God itself is the judge of those who reject it. He says, "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day." The Word is and remains the truth whether it is heard and heeded or ignored and rejected. Christ never disappoints his people when they are faithful to that command to be faithful to him and his Word. On the other hand, Christ never allows us any basis for peace and hope anywhere other than in him as he is revealed in the Word.

In his Revelation, St. John saw the blessedness of those who heeded Christ's directive to the church at Smyrna.

Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. (2:10)

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. (6:9)

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (20:4)

Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book. (22:7)

Above every other blessing he gives, Christ wants eternal salvation for the people of the world. His commission to preach the gospel corresponds directly with the blessings he wants his people to have.

I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. (Re 22:16-17)

As long as this world stands, the Word of God stands as the only authority for God's people. He has delivered the same message and the

same command and promise to us as he delivered to the apostles. Again St. John says in his Revelation, "Then he told me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near'" (22:10) And a few verses later, "'Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood'" (22:15). Obviously we need to guard against imitations and substitutes.

The apostles took that responsibility of faithfulness to the Word of God seriously. St. Paul says,

Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God (2 Cor 4:2).

ΒΟΛΟΥΝΤΕΣ brings out the idea of making some kind of a change in the content of the Word that would nullify the intent of it and make the message false. In his Revelation St. John speaks of making additions or subtractions that would alter the intent and purpose of the message proclaimed.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (22:18-19)

Christ's direction for his church is: Don't add to the Word, don't take away from the Word, don't alter the Word.

All this serves to establish the fact that the Word of God is his holy and inspired Word, the Scripture. The primary purpose of Scripture is the proclamation of the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ by grace through faith in him. Nothing can alter that plan and purpose of God. No message is truly faithful that does not begin and end with the teaching of redemption in Jesus Christ revealed in God's inerrant Word.

Only that which faithfully sets forth the Word of God as inspired and inerrant deserves to be called biblical. Only the message of salvation in Jesus Christ deserves to be called Christian.

CHAPTER 2

SCRIPTURE'S CLAIM TO BE THE SOURCE AND NORM FOR DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE

Now that we have considered the Bible as the Word of God and the central message of salvation it proclaims, we will study what the Bible says about itself as source and norm for doctrine and practice. Our study will help us define our work in pastoral counseling as pastors of Christ's flock.

People have an endless variety of problems to deal with in daily life. People have also provided an endless variety of answers to those problems. Some of those answers are called biblical and Christian answers. If the answers Christian counselors give are truly biblical and Christian, the people who listen to those answers will end up closer to their God in the hope of salvation. If they are not, these people will end up closer to a god that does not exist and offers no eternal hope. They will be farther from the one true God who does exist. For this reason those answers deserve the serious attention and close scrutiny of those who have the responsibility of doing pastoral counseling.

We have an undeniable responsibility to make such a critical evaluation simply because we are committed to the Word of God. Our ministry itself is committed to saying, "Thus saith the Lord." The practice of our ministry, whether in preaching, teaching or counseling, must also reflect that same commitment. Our people expect to hear Christ crucified from our pulpits, and we have sworn to give them that message. They expect their children to be taught that message in the church's instructions, schools, Sunday Schools. They can expect the same as we

lead them to handle the problems of their daily lives.

HOLY SCRIPTURES AS SOURCE

In his high priestly prayer Jesus prayed, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message" (Jn 17:20). In these words Jesus brings out three important points. First, his concern is that people believe in him. Second, it is through the message of the disciples that people will come to that faith. Third, Jesus intended for that message to extend beyond the time of the disciples to the end of this present age to those who would yet believe. On the basis of this passage alone no faithful minister of Christ can question the work he has to do or the tools he has for doing it.

The disciples heard Jesus express in prayer his concern for them and their work just before he went to the cross to fulfill the gospel he wanted them to preach. He even gave his enemies instructions on the position Scripture holds and his place in the Scriptures. He said, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (Jn 5:39). People, friends and enemies alike, needed to learn about Jesus and his work. The Scriptures are the source.

St. Paul had an exclusive source for his preaching. He said, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Ro 10:14). Lest there should be any question as to what preaching he was talking about, Paul

says in his letter to the Corinthians, "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). The reason he held this conviction is the universal problem of mankind, sin and its universal solution, Jesus Christ.

Mankind has no capabilities for creating a working plan of salvation. God must pull back the veil to reveal Jesus Christ, who did accomplish the only plan that brings temporal and eternal peace with God. The Word of God, Scripture, accomplishes this revelation. "However, as it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him'" (1 Cor 2:9). God has given us no other way to understand the plan of salvation. His Word reveals it. We know God's plan of salvation by grace through faith because God has told us the plan and created the faith to believe it.

All this is done through the medium of his Word. "But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe" (Gal 3:22). Scripture gives the universal answer to the problems of eternity as well as those of life in this world. "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Ro 15:4).

Scripture establishes a definite procedure for dealing with the problems of this life. Jesus told his followers in the Sermon on the Mount, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt 6:33). God's order is clear. Above all, we need a blessed relationship with him. We have the Scripture as the source of our knowledge and assurance. "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with

us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3). Once that relationship has been established by grace and is kept intact through the Word and sacraments, then we can look to what the almighty and gracious Triune God has to say about the direction of our lives as Christians. If the order is reversed there is no assurance of a blessed relationship at all. There is, in fact, no assurance that a person will bother to think about his eternal life and relationship with God. Why bother to think about heaven when all your goals are on earth? That is not God's way. "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (He 11:6). God always teaches us to begin with consideration of our relationship with Christ and then deal with all the other things we face in life.

All of us as pastors begin all our work with the presentation of our saving relationship with God in Jesus Christ. With that beginning we can be sure of God's blessing on his Word. Every pastor of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod mounts his pulpit or begins his class with the thought and the prayer that when he is finished he will be able to say truthfully what King David said at the end of his reign in Israel. In spite of his sinfulness that was often all too obvious, David could still say "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue" (2 Sm 23:2). God blessed David's faithfulness to the Word of God. Without the Word he could provide no such blessings to the people of God. He could claim no faithfulness to God at all if he had not been faithful in shepherding Israel with God's Word.

In our work as Lutheran Christian pastors, the Bible is always the source. The pastor openly invites his hearers to join in the study. "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care" (1 Pe

1:10). Together the pastor and his people share a study of the Word of God just as the prophets who recorded the words God inspired them to record. The prophets searched the truths of God's Word that they wrote themselves. The reason we study the Word is clear. "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Ro 10:14). We, together with our people, need to be like the Mary who sat at Jesus' feet listening intently to what he had to say. It was the one thing she needed to hear. We give our people the Word as the lifelong source of their faith and hope, and, we pray that they will be like another Mary, who "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart (Lk 2:19). The Word was the one thing she needed to hear too.

No matter what the size of our congregations and no matter what the scope of our ministries, pastors in our circles face numerous different responsibilities on a daily basis. In some of those responsibilities the ways and means for doing our work are obvious. For example, no matter how many different books we might use, the Bible will still be the source for our preaching. No matter how much resource material we have for teaching our instruction classes, the source will still be the Bible because we hold that the Small Catechism of Luther is merely an accurate presentation of the basic truths of Holy Scripture.

But the same people to whom we preach eternal salvation may have financial problems, marriage problems and problems with emotions. They may doubt their self-worth and self-esteem. They may have problems raising their children, with communicating with each other, and with alcohol, drugs, peer pressure and any number of other things.

A growing library of resource material is available for dealing

with such problems. It may or may not have anything to do with Scripture and the essential hope of salvation. Some of the material may be called biblical and/or Christian. But is that, in fact, what it is? Are we more ready than we should be to use it as source material without evaluating it in the same way the Bereans evaluated Paul's words? Faithfulness to our ministry demands that we make such evaluations and claim to know nothing other than Jesus Christ and him crucified. Any substitutions for Scripture constitute a new source. When our people are in pain either physically or emotionally we can easily treat them as if relieving their pain is our only goal. That is not the case. Pain may be used for a good purpose by our gracious and almighty God. Relieving the pain is not our first responsibility. Pain is a symptom and not the actual root problem. The root problem is always sin in our nature and in our actions. The law and gospel always apply to us and our people. Sin is always involved in our problems and grace is always involved in God's answers. To illustrate, a surgeon does not remove an appendix merely because it hurts. He performs the surgery to remove an infection. Our work as pastors is not primarily to remove the pain either. That is a by-product of our real work. We deal with the infection of sin. When we minister to that person who faces an appendectomy we present the Word of God to assure him or her of the love and power of God to bless the person and the doctor's work. Little else that we might know matters. The same is true when we are dealing with emotional pain. No matter how sophisticated we might be understanding emotional problems, that knowledge has small relative significance when compared with what we do know, namely, the Word of God.

Any time we face a problem, that problem seems big, perhaps bigger than anything else. Material is available within the Christian

marketplace that both allows and encourages that belief. When we see books that are intended to give new hope to those suffering in various ways, people may be left with the idea that everything will be fine if they can get this one problem under control. That problem may be financial, emotional, physical or psychological. It may be a problem of youth or of old age. It may have to do with working or with not working. It may involve marriage or divorce. All too often the problem, whatever it might be is addressed in a way that has nothing to do with sin and the solution is addressed in a way that has nothing to do with grace. How can we as Christian pastors ignore the most obvious fact of all, namely, that the problem is sin and the solution is grace? Law and gospel may be applied in special ways according to special needs, but no other solution ever excludes the law and the gospel. Specialized material may aid us in finding ways to apply the law and gospel, but the specialized material cannot replace the law and gospel or make the Word of God more effective than it already is.

HOLY SCRIPTURE AS NORM

Webster defines a norm as a standard, model or pattern for a group. The word is derived from the Latin norma, meaning a carpenter's square. It is interesting that St. Paul encouraged Timothy to be a worker who does not need to be ashamed of his work, because he correctly handles the word of truth (2 Tm 2:15). ὀρθοτομεῖν, the word in question, literally means to cut straight. The picture is one of hewing to a line. In that way Scripture truly is our norm. St. Paul takes the analogy one step farther. He reminded the Ephesians that they

were "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph 2:20). Everything that bears the label Christian must have Jesus Christ as its cornerstone to establish all the directions the building will take. Everything that bears the name biblical must be of the apostles and prophets, the inspired messengers of God who proclaimed Jesus Christ.

A Lutheran pastor is thankful when his people recognize that he is a spokesman for God. He is not in the pulpit to deliver his opinion or current events. He is there to speak God's Word. The faithful pastor has good reason to thank God when his people receive the Word of God he brings them. His people, likewise, have reason to thank God when it is faithfully delivered to them.

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Th 2:13).

We begin and end our relationship with the people of God under the rule of his Word. Our people have come to expect that guidance from us. That lays a tremendous responsibility on those of us who handle the Word in the public ministry. If our people trust us to give them the Word, it is up to us to be sure we are giving it to them. To that end the Scriptures themselves give us a number of directions relating to the preaching of the whole counsel of God.

From the time the gospel was first presented to mankind it met with opposition. From the time God's law was written in the human heart Satan has attacked it. At times ignoring something the Bible says to us would be easier than preaching it. The words of Moses are an appropriate reminder to us. "Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you" (Dt 4:2). Every word we speak should bear the same stamp that

David placed on his own messages to the people of Israel, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue" (2 Sm 23:2). In Revelation 22 adding to and subtracting from the Word of God carries the curse of God on those who would dare to tamper with the norm he has established.

St. Paul carries this responsibility of obedience to the Word of God as the Christian's norm into the lives of hearers as well as preachers. "If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command" (1 Cor 14:37). Likewise the writer to the Hebrews says, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (He 13:17).

Jesus makes two important points when he says, "Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that" (Mk 7:13). First, the traditions Jesus spoke of were handed down by the elders to the people of Israel. Second, he says those traditions actually nullify the saving truth of the Word. Jewish traditions were an attempt to exceed God's commands and teach the people how to be "super-Jews." In their raw form, however, those traditions were acts of work righteousness. Instead of bringing the people closer to God, those traditions drove the people farther away into an unfounded confidence in their own works. The law that was intended to show people their sin seemingly became their savior but actually it was no savior at all.

The result was that those traditions nullified the Word of God. The Word was of no value to the people because they saw their salvation in their traditions (law); they had no need for the gospel. Indeed,

the people had ample reason to avoid forgiveness, because forgiveness required that they first had to admit sinfulness. Sinfulness meant they had failed in living by that law which they looked to as their salvation. Their hope left them in hopelessness, and their "salvation" left them condemned.

God commits us totally to his Word. Adding to it, subtracting from it, perverting it, do not make us partly faithful and partly unfaithful. We are either faithful to the Word of God completely or we are unfaithful to it. Whatever is not of God is of men; whatever is of men nullifies the plan and purpose of God. The scribes and Pharisees did not invent a supplement to God's gospel. Their teaching left no gospel at all. It was law, and it came under God's condemnation along with the people who tried to live by that norm. St. Paul was not only speaking emphatically, he was speaking absolute truth when he said,

But if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (Ga 1:8-9).

The dangers of adding to or subtracting from the Word of God show clearly in a study of the theology of Rome. When we apply Mark 7:13 to our pastoral responsibilities, we are not merely talking about faithfulness to the Word of God because this is the sworn mark of the Lutheran pastor. We are also bound to renounce any theology that places the traditions of men, popes, councils or anyone or anything else on the same level with Scripture. At the same time we need to be on guard against any doctrines which are really the words of teachers who are wolves in sheep's clothing. It is easier to confront an illness than it is to confront a sin. People are more likely to accept the fact that they are depressed than that they are sinners. All of us are more

willing to accept easy answers to problems than to accept those answers that bring us face to face with our sin and our need for God's grace. If we as Christian counselors do not bring about that confrontation on the basis of what the Word of God teaches, how can we expect people who have less theological conviction to do it for us?

Our loyalty to Christ is the motivation for doing everything to the glory of God to the best of our ability. Christian counseling with competence is clearly our responsibility. Faithfulness to the Word does not excuse incompetence. But how are we to carry out this work competently? Very likely specialists in the counseling field will be needed. Perhaps some with a special interest in counseling will desire to expand their working knowledge in this area of the ministry. Two problems exist. First, will the counselor be adequately trained theologically to do his work in faithfulness to the Word of God? Second, where will a person who is theologically trained expand his knowledge without undermining his own theological convictions?

The ideal answer to these problems would be to begin with a complete theological training that includes practical experience with the Word of God as source and norm. We need to be convinced that the law and gospel address the essential needs our people have. With that conviction, additional training merely provides different approaches to problems. We continue to work with the same solutions we have come to know and trust, namely, the law and the gospel. While the counseling field will treat its procedures as answers in themselves, we will treat them as means to the end God has established. He wants us to be in a relationship with him that grows closer day by day.

As soon as you open a book on Christian counseling, you are sure to find that the writer claims to be a Christian, perhaps a pastor or

former pastor. In the same sentence you may also see that he is a counselor, perhaps a psychologist. Which of those statements makes you confident that you can read the book as a Christian? It will probably be the fact that the author claims to be a Christian. (Perhaps he is. We cannot doubt the man, but we must examine what he says.) Which statement makes you believe that you will find answers to your problems in the book? Very likely it is the fact that the man is a counselor or a psychologist.

The crucial question is whether there is a relationship between psychology and Christianity, both of which might be professions of the same writer. By putting too much confidence in a person's counseling abilities we could give the impression that we are looking to psychology for answers when we ought to be looking to our Bibles. A counselor is bound to try to provide solutions to the various problems of the people he serves. He may use whatever tools he has at his disposal. We can do that too. Our first responsibility, however, is to find the answers the Word of God gives. After that we can thank God for any assistance available to us to communicate the Word of God better. Our first responsibility, however, is to find the answers the Word of God gives. After that we can thank God for any assistance available to us to communicate the Word of God better. We may even be able to gain valuable assistance from the secular community, but God's Word has already answered our questions in the plan and purpose it presents. Human authorities, Christian or not, are not our norm. The findings of psychology and general counseling are not our norm. Any norm other than God's Word can nullify the central purpose God has in mind for us, namely, our eternal salvation. That would constitute unfaithfulness to our calling.

HOLY SCRIPTURES FOR DOCTRINE

The apostles' commission - and ours - was to teach God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The Scriptures are the only source. For that reason the doctrines of God's Word are critical. St. Paul pointed out to Timothy that the Scriptures are ἡ ἀλήθεια for ἐκείνη ἡ ἀλήθεια. We can look to them to teach us what to teach. "For in Scripture it says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame'" (1 Pet 2:6). Because we have the sure Word of God as the source for our doctrine, believers of all times are "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph 2:20). The doctrines of God's Word stand as solid as rock. That solid rock foundation is God's eternal plan and purpose for salvation in Jesus Christ. The Word of God proclaims it with inerrant inspiration by God. Nothing can change it. No one can improve on it. Nothing can replace it.

In his most doctrinal epistle St. Paul said,

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. (Ro 10:14-17)

Paul's simple and clear message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ came both as a blessing and as a curse, depending on how it was received. Some did not believe it. Yet the condemnation of those who reject it is proof of the validity of the doctrine. The much more comforting truth is that it does work for the salvation of those who receive it in faith. St. Paul was never disappointed in that reali-

zation (Ro 1:16).

St. Peter points out that even the prophets who wrote by the inspiration of God desired to understand the truth and fulfillment of the doctrines they recorded; even the angels of God look into the beautiful truths of it. The doctrines of God's Word are a lesson in the fulfillment of God's plan and purpose. They are not merely interesting evidence that what God says will actually happen. His purpose is that people of all times and all places see that he is a God of free and faithful grace. Jesus Christ is the proof. St. Peter says that even the prophets searched their own writings to understand the plan of salvation they were proclaiming.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (1 Pe 1:11-12).

No matter what circumstances we the people of God face in this life, the Word of God has something to say to us. It centers always in the grace and power of God in Jesus Christ. It teaches us to trust him no matter what. It teaches us to recognize ourselves for what we are and God for what he is. It allows us to face suffering, sorrow or death without fear. It teaches us to put all the other blessings God gives into the perspective God wants them to have. It teaches us to learn from the history of God's people, both from the point of seeing blessing on their faithfulness or sad consequences of their unfaithfulness. "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Ro 15:4).

The Corinthian congregation had its problems with the many gifts God had bestowed upon it. They forgot God's unity of purpose in providing them with their special gifts. They lost sight of the motive of love in using the gifts. Nevertheless, because St. Paul did not lose sight of God's essential plan and purpose. He did not discourage the use of those gifts. "Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor 14:39-40). Instead of telling the Corinthians they didn't deserve the blessings they had and shouldn't use them at all, St. Paul put those gifts back into their proper perspective. Any and every gift, whether preaching, speaking in tongues or whatever was beneficial as long as the people proclaimed the truth of God's Word to edify the hearers.

Although there is much for us to learn from the Word of God, Scripture never allows us to lose sight of the one essential fact that unless there is first a blessed relationship with God in Jesus Christ, nothing gives any real blessing. Even if human beings were able to solve the majority of the problems they face in everyday life (an impossibility because of our sinfulness and the world's), it would still be of no eternal benefit without Christ. What profit is there in gaining everything in the world if we have no hope for the world to come? The only end for hope and joy is Jesus Christ. For this reason St. John says, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:31).

Beginning with salvation in Jesus Christ as the essential goal and teaching, Scripture says, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Lk 11:28). Likewise, Scripture lays the same responsibility on those with the privilege of speaking the Word to

others. "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete" (1 Jn 1:3-4). Anything less is incomplete.

The Word of God is the doctrine for us to teach, and we are the teachers whether we are in a pulpit before many people or in an office with one person. The doctrines that speak to the needs of the people are still the same in both situations.

HOLY SCRIPTURES IN PRACTICE

Concluding the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of two men building a house. The building projects were about the same except that one house had a foundation on rock and the other a foundation on sand. Jesus clarifies his point: One man represented a person who heard the Word and did what it said; the other typified a man who heard the Word and ignored what it said. Practice is as important as doctrine because doctrine is a living, working part of our Christianity.

St. James makes an important point about practice. Practice bears witness to the fact that sanctification follows upon justification. Sanctification cannot precede justification and justification does not stand alone without sanctification.

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons

believe that--and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. (Jas 2:14-24)

James puts the relationship between doctrine and practice before us clearly. Where there is faith there must be works. Although we are saved by faith alone, faith is never alone. St. James makes it clear that there is no conflict between doctrine and the practice of it. Our doctrine is alive, and God intends for us to live it daily. Our use of doctrine in our congregations needs to be a living experience also. Our works are evidence that faith exists, and faith exists because the doctrines of God's Word have been faithfully taught and learned.

To say that we have correct doctrine is not enough. As we apply that doctrine to the lives of the people we serve, we are putting doctrine into practice. As our people respond positively to God's law and gospel they are putting doctrine into practice. The Bible is filled with encouragement to put doctrine into practice. For example, Joshua said to the people of Israel in his farewell address, "Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left" (Jos 23:6). Earlier in the chapter cited above, James says, "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right" (Jas 2:8). St. Paul encouraged the Philippians, "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you" (Php 3:1). To the Thessalonians he said, "So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter" (2

Th 2:15). We could also mention the entire third use of the law as an admonition and guide for putting doctrine into practice. We could mention wisdom as Solomon defines it. Wisdom, as Solomon defines it, is doing what God teaches us to do.

The matter of the practice of our doctrine involves two important factors. First, we need to deliver the doctrine of God's Word for our people to practice. Along with the directions, the Word contains the motivation for obedience. Second, we need to direct our people to practice the doctrine they are taught from God's Word as they are motivated by God's love for them. Doctrine without practice leads to or ends in "dead orthodoxy." Practice that is not based on scriptural doctrine is mere moralism. When doctrine and practice are combined as God's Word directs us, the result is a living faith that glorifies God both in its delivery and its vitality. No greater motivation or power for change in attitude or behavior, conflict or discord exists than the love of Christ for sinful mankind. That power that we have in the Word is what separates pastors from all other counselors. We can rejoice in the privilege we have to use it. We dare never apologize for it.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SCRIPTURE THAT APPLY TO ITS ROLE AS SOURCE AND NORM

All of the characteristics of Scripture apply to the use of Scripture as source and norm for doctrine and practice. These characteristics include authority, efficacy, perfection, sufficiency and clarity. Our purpose is to condense some thoughts on these subjects. They can be applied specifically to the doctrine and practice of pastoral psychology in addition to what has already been established as the general nature of the holy Scriptures. These characteristics also direct us in the use of Scripture in our practical work and warn us when there is unfaithfulness in carrying out that responsibility.

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

The Scriptures have their authority because they are the Word of God. When St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians to settle the matters that were causing division in the congregation, he said, "Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?" (1 Cor 14:36). The answer to his question was the resounding "no" found in the preceding verses. Paul applied the Word of God to the Corinthians in exactly the same way he applied it in all the churches of the saints. The Christians in Corinth had no rights as a special group with special rules. They had no special word of God.

The Word of God is not the word of men and therefore Scripture neither contradicts itself nor contains any errors. Scripture is not relatively error-free; it is absolutely error-free. It stands as the inerrant authority for God's people. We are servants of Scripture rather than masters over it. This is an important consideration. Many who claim Scripture as their source and norm actually work with it as masters over it rather than obedient servants of it. The result, as we will see, is that Scripture is not a norm at all for them.

Our confidence is based on what Scripture says about itself and on what we believe with the faith God worked through Scripture itself. Solomon speaks absolutely when he says, "Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him" (Pr 30:5). The same is true when Jesus says, "If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came--and the Scripture cannot be broken--" (Jn 10:35). This alone is sufficient to establish the authority of Scripture.

Holy Scripture possesses divine authority, that is, in all that it says it is entitled to the same faith and obedience that is due God. ...Christ and His Apostles took this position toward the Scripture of the Old Testament. And Christ and His Apostles demand that we give the same obedience to their own Word in the New Testament.¹

This is the so-called *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*. It is a mistake to assume that a person hears this testimony of the Spirit only when his emotions are stirred. It is already present in and with the Spirit-wrought faith in the Word of Scripture.²

It would be overestimation if we imagined that any one could be converted by such rational arguments. A man becomes a Christian, in every single case and until the Last Day, only in one way: by way of *contritio* and *fides*; that is, he must experience the divine judgment of condemnation, which the Law, speaking through Scripture, produces (*terrores conscientiae*) and believe in the remission of his sins through the Gospel, proclaimed in Scripture.³

1. Franz Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, vol. 1 (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia 1950), page 307.

2. *Ibid.*, page 308.

3. *Ibid.*, pages 310-311.

When Scripture is used as source material for solving daily problems with no view to a saving relationship with God, counselors are doing the very thing Pieper warns against. Christian writers like Dobson and LaHaye seem at times to try to add credibility to Scripture by saying that it does speak to our special daily problems. The Bible is not true because the ideas of these writers work. The Bible is true in and of itself. The Bible is the source of our doctrine and practice. Our doctrine and practice do not establish that the Bible as a worthy authority.

As he speaks of Scripture's authority, Pieper is speaking primarily of justification and conversion. The truths he speaks, however, are just as valid and essential for every aspect of Christian faith and life. If there is one place where Scripture fails as the authority, it fails completely. Scripture allows for no such failures. Scripture allows for no other authority.

Not only is Scripture the authority for the doctrine we teach, it is also the authority when we refute error. Christ lays the responsibility on his church to distinguish between sheep and wolves, between light and darkness, between what is false and what is true. Scripture is the authority for those judgments.

People like Gary Collins, Clyde Narramore, Bruce Narramore and Lawrence Crabb have made significant attempts to integrate theology and psychology. In some ways their work has been helpful. The work always leads readers to deal with counseling responsibilities more aggressively and competently. Techniques and insights may be helpful. Still, the relationship between psychology and theology remains confusing at best. Perhaps one of the reasons why there has been so little success in integrating the work of the theologian with the work of the psychologist

or counselor is that there are as many theological schools of thought as there are psychological schools of thought. Integration in the minds of these men seems to involve, with rare exception, the cooperative effort of equally significant fields of study. To them psychology is just as important as theology. The matter of integration would be complicated enough with one theological authority. The multitude of psychotherapies on the market today usually do not even integrate with each other. Add to that the fact that for most of these writers no unifying theological authority exists. The only possible result is a confusing mass of unacceptable material. In most cases there is no unifying authority even for those who claim Scripture as their authority. The Word of God, law and gospel are not the sole authority.

With our commitment to Scripture we can only allow an integration that begins with assumption that the Word of God rules. We can examine the various psychotherapies on the market and see where they can be applied scripturally. We must ignore everything that cannot be used in a Scriptural setting. That rule does not leave us with much. All psychotherapies are essentially humanistic leaving no room for God. For example, William Glasser in his Reality Therapy speaks emphatically about individual responsibility, but he does not say to whom we are responsible. Scripture, on the other hand tells us clearly that we are responsible to God. Perhaps we can use some of Glasser's techniques for teaching responsibility, but we as theologians must keep God at the center of our responsibilities. Glasser's principles alone are insufficient. The same evaluation must be made of all psychotherapies whether they claim to be Christian or not.

THE EFFICACY OF SCRIPTURE

The efficacy of Scripture refers to what Scripture does because it is the power of God for salvation. Scripture has efficacy both in law and gospel. The law has the power to convict sinners of their sins under the witness of their own consciences and, more importantly, before God. It has the power to leave sinners either crushed under the realization of their own sin or attempting to justify themselves pharisaically. In either case they may refuse to admit their sin when it is presented to them. In either case, the law leaves them condemned before God. On the other hand, the gospel "is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes" (Ro 1:16). The Scripture is God's tool for creating and preserving a saving faith. It is the tool God uses to produce repentance. No other book can claim such power. No other book has such a promise of efficacy from God attached to it.

The Word of the Law (VELOCITIVEGNATIVE), as it is revealed in Holy Scripture, has the inherent power to work such a knowledge of sin that man realizes his eternal damnation and despairs of all self help (contritio, terrores conscientiae). Rom. 3:20: "By the Law is the knowledge of sin." True, man may arrive at a partial knowledge of his sinfulness by virtue of the divine Law as it is written in the heart of natural man also after the Fall. But while this knowledge suffices to give man an evil conscience, it is not sufficient to effect a complete collapse of man before God and to cause him to despair of all self help. Natural man rather turns from one form of self help to another, even to suicide. For this reason Christ has commanded in Luke 24:47 that in His name not only "remission of sins" should be preached among all nations, but, preceding that, "repentance."

The Word of the Gospel has the inherent power to work faith in the Gospel. Rom. 10:17: "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Thus it creates in man the assurance that his sins are forgiven. ⁴

Pieper touches an essential counseling principle that is easy to overlook. Human beings have the law written in their hearts. The

4. Ibid., pages 315-316.

conscience bears witness to that inner law just as it does to the revealed law. When the law reveals and the conscience recognizes guilt, the recognition of responsibility for some kind of satisfaction follows. That attempt to make satisfaction can take any number of forms. Perhaps the most common is rationalizing the guilt. In addition to making rationalizations, some people, Christian or not, may try to pay for their guilt themselves. They can punish themselves with grief, depression, physical illness or even suicide. This process was used by Judas when he hanged himself because he could not undo what he had done to the Lord Jesus.

The steps involved in recognizing guilt and attempting to pay for it alone repeat themselves in our people time and again. The only genuinely Christian solution to the problem is a very specific presentation of the gospel, particularly that part of the gospel that shows Jesus Christ making the payment for sin on the cross. Only when a person realizes that his sins have been paid for by Jesus Christ as our Substitute can the problem be fully resolved. The matter of payment for sin by Jesus Christ is a significant matter that we are fully capable of presenting as pastors. We are not only teaching and reminding our people that their sins have been forgiven, we are showing them how they were forgiven. Sin has its cost and Christ alone could make the payment. No amount of self-inflicted punishment could accomplish what Jesus already did.

We have the command to preach both law and gospel because the Scripture is efficacious. St. Paul admits (1 Cor 1 & 2) that the gospel is foolishness to the unbeliever. Nevertheless, because of God's command and the promise associated with it Christ gave the commission to preach the gospel to his church.

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith (Ac 6:7).

Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus (Ac 8:35).

But the word of God continued to increase and spread (Ac 12:24).

So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God (Ac 18:11).

We find the efficacy of Scripture in the authority and power of the Word of God. We are told, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Ro 15:4). The Scriptures were written for us to learn and to learn from. Our hope comes after the law shows us our sin and the gospel shows us our Savior. "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4).

The term gospel deserves some special attention as it applies to the efficacy of Scripture. The gospel is not a vague word as Scripture uses it. It is the historical record of the historical acts of Christ that accomplished our salvation. The gospel is the story of God's love revealed in the promise of the Savior. It is the fulfillment of that promise in the life, death and resurrection victory of Jesus Christ. The gospel is redemption, atonement and justification producing repentance, conversion and sanctification. Christian psychologists almost unanimously ignore the historical content of the gospel, that is, the simple fact that Jesus lived, died and rose again to make the payment God demands for sin. Dobson speaks of forgiveness, but seldom, if ever, about how it was won. LaHaye's thought is to let the Spirit rule. That is more submission to God's authority and law than repentance motivated

by the gospel. Even Crabb speaks at length about the peace and fellowship we have with God without spending much time on how that peace was earned by Christ. This makes the efficacy of the material and treatment of the problem questionable at best. In later chapters we will deal with this point in more depth.

THE PERFECTION OF SCRIPTURE

The perfection and sufficiency of Scripture need to be handled together to get a full picture of what the Bible has to say about itself. The reason for treating them separately here is the special relationship Scripture has with the particular field of psychology.

Scripture does not treat everything a man can know, for example, the things pertaining to the sphere of earthly or civil life. Scripture is certainly not, as some have put it, "a general encyclopedia of human knowledge." It is not a textbook of agriculture or architecture or of medical science. It is not "a manual of history and geography." Natural reason teaches these things, as Luther often reminds us, if men will only use their reason. But remember: When Scripture incidentally treats a scientific subject, it is always right, let "science" say what it pleases; for πᾶσα γράφῃ θεοπνευστος. Thus Luther says concerning the chronological data of Scripture that the Bible is the only book in which historical errors cannot occur. ⁵

Pieper properly points out Scripture's limitations as a textbook for various sciences. God did not intend for it to be the only book in the world or the only source for all human knowledge. In the same sense, holy Scripture is not a textbook for psychology. The Bible says nothing in psychological terminology. There is no reason a trained theologian should also receive a degree in psychology because of his training. The theologian is not a psychologist because of his training,

5. Ibid., page 317.

nor is a psychologist a theologian because of his. At the same time, I do not believe that we can support the idea that a formally trained theologian knows nothing about psychology. The Bible clearly speaks about the existence of the soul, but not in a scientific way. This is perhaps one of the greatest problems psychology has to deal with. Psychology is a "study of the spirit," ψυχή and λόγος. Humanistic psychology does not allow for the existence of the soul or spirit it is supposed to be studying. Perhaps we as theologians are too ready to say that the Bible is not a textbook on psychology. Although that is certainly not the purpose of the Bible, it does speak about the central subject of the related field of psychology. It deals with the study of the soul and spirit.

To illustrate: The Bible gives a clear and accurate description of death as the separation of soul and body. But no one can measure the existence of a soul scientifically. Because of that fact medical science is unable to render a clear and lasting decision on when the universal phenomenon of death occurs. New technologies allow for different scientific measurements. The result is only more confusion about when and if death has occurred and who is actually controlling life. New advances will do nothing to eliminate the confusion.

The legal, ethical and moral problems created by a subject as obvious and normal as death are staggering when one fails to admit that God, not man is in control. One reason for the confusion is the inability to measure the existence of the soul scientifically. The Bible answers the question accurately but not medically. Similarly psychology is handicapped because of the denial of obvious biblical truths that relate to that field of study including the sinful nature of mankind.

It is our responsibility as Christians and particularly as theo-

logians to set forth what the Bible says about man as God created him. Because that includes man as body and soul we will simultaneously set forth truths that psychology claims as its own point of interest, whether we are doing it for that reason or not. In addition to stating the subject matter of psychology, we will also be setting forth what God has to say about it. Whether psychology wants to admit it or not, we will be speaking both theologically and psychologically, and we will have God's own authority and commission for doing so.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

The Scriptures do perfectly everything God intended them to do. As we have seen, they were not intended to be a textbook for various sciences, histories or what have you. Rather, Scripture is God's perfect revelation of himself; Scripture is able to make us wise unto salvation; Scripture is God's rule for sanctified faith and life. It is everything God intended for the world to have for a complete revelation of himself and his will. While God has revealed everything we need to know about him and his will, he has not revealed everything we might want to know, and he has given us information we might not think we need. For example, he tells us that an omer is a one-tenth part of an ephah (Ex 16:36). On the other hand, he withholds information we might like to have. For example, he tells us nothing about the history of the life of Jesus from age two to twelve.

We believe in the sufficiency of Scripture. This places us in a ministerial rather than magisterial position toward Scripture. We are not judges with the right to express disappointment over what God has

chosen to reveal and not to reveal about himself and his will. The Scripture is a norm for us in that we are bound to accept thankfully all that God has chosen to reveal and leave it at that. At the same time, we must accept the fact that this is not our choice but God's will. God provided Scripture for our edification. "I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (1 Jn 2:14). St. John told this part of his audience that the Word of God was a living part of their lives. God intended it to rule and govern their sanctified lives as Christians. In addition the writer to the Hebrews says: "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (He 4:12). The Word of God has normative authority for the deepest spiritual aspects of faith and life. In Colossians 3:16 St. Paul says that the Word of God is to dwell in the Christian as the Holy Spirit dwells in a believer to make him his temple.

God intends Scripture to be a blessing for the life of every human being. He tells us exactly what we need to know about ourselves and about him so we can live by his eternal truth in a world full of Satan's lies. "But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe" (Ga 3:22). God gave the world the Scripture so the world would have an unchanging and inerrant norm. "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you'" (Ga 3:8). The Word of God, especially the preaching of his gospel, stands for all time in direct opposition to the

so-called wisdom of man (1 Cor 1&2).

While every doctrine of Scripture ends in a mystery beyond our understanding, God's still meant for us to understand his Word. The deep things of God that surpass the rational human mind do not nullify the essential, simple, saving truth of the law and gospel. St. Peter says of St. Paul,

He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of the matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. (2Pe 3:16)

As long as we as ministers of the Word of God maintain a humble attitude toward the Word of God, it will always be sufficient as God's revelation of himself and his will for us. When, for any reason, we try to become masters over Scripture, it will become useless to us. We will not consult it and submit to it. We will replace it or reject it.

Pieper summarizes the sufficiency of Scripture for us.

But Scripture teaches perfectly whatever we need to know to obtain eternal life. It says concerning the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15) that they "are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Not only for Christians in general is Scripture a sufficient source of knowledge, but also for the teacher of the Church, who is perfect (20TIAS) through Scripture; he is "thoroughly furnished," fully equipped for his duty, 'for doctrine, for reproof,' etc, and so perfectly equipped that he is strictly commanded to continue in the words of Christ, which we have in the words of the Apostles (John 17:20), and not to take the liberty to change or add to these words (John 8:31-32, I Tim. 6:3f; 2 Tim. 1:13; Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:6-9). It is certain then, that the Scriptures, in order to attain their purpose of making men wise unto salvation, do not in any way need to be supplemented with any outside material. ⁶

As theologians committed to preaching God's Word we are responsible to be sure that we know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. This is especially true when dealing with problems in the daily lives of our people. On the one hand we must recognize that all

6. Ibid., page 318.

these problems are a result of sin and a weakness of faith. That is a foregone conclusion. But on the other hand, that does not complete our responsibilities. We must search the depths of Scripture to learn how God wants us to deal with sin by law and gospel and how he wants us to strengthen a weak faith. That is the real responsibility. As Pieper points out, we are equipped for both.

As pastors we know that God's Word speaks to "modern" problems. We need to keep that fact before our people constantly. We can do that by being sensitive to their special feelings, needs, weaknesses and pains. An individual relationship with the members of our congregations is essential. The counseling session is a valuable way to learn what some of those special needs are. Insensitivity can only leave our people to look for their special answers in other places. They will look to secular and Christian writings. They will listen to radio counselors. They will seek the help of humanistic psychologists. They might even seek help from other churches that are more sensitive to their needs but less capable of delivering the Word of God. But there is no such thing as a slightly more Christian or less humanistic psychology. Either our psychology and the resulting counsel is Christian because it is based entirely on Scripture, or it is not Christian because it is not biblical. It is either one or the other. We can create problems for ourselves by failing to search the depths of Scripture to apply them to the lives of our people. Humanistic psychology is always a ready replacement. If we allow that to happen, then it is no wonder that many modernists have accused us and our Bible of being irrelevant. Law and gospel are still the real answer. We must be ready to see the needs of our people as Scripture shows them to us and answer those needs as Scripture directs us.

THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE

One of the most important characteristics of Scripture as source and norm is its clarity, its perspicuity. Still, even within Lutheranism, theologians debate how much authority Scripture has, how much of it is the Word of God, who has the right to establish interpretation, whether we have the corner on pure doctrine and so on, to say nothing of what other church bodies add to the confusion. Debates like these would seem to indicate that Scripture is not as clear as it claims to be. The variety of attitudes toward Scripture produces the debates, however, not an imagined obscurity of Scripture.

A magisterial interpretation is diametrically opposed to a ministerial interpretation. Reason holds a varying place of honor among interpreters, particularly those who are followers of Calvin and Zwingli. The tradition of the Jews held as much sway among the Jews as the tradition of popes and councils does among Roman theologians. These theologies confuse the understanding of the Bible because they do not submit to it, but rather attempt to rule over it.

None of these unacceptable attitudes causes us to change our position on the clarity of Scripture one bit. "According to Scripture, the clarity of Scripture consists in this, that it presents, in language that can be understood by all, whatever men must know to be saved."

The confidence we have in Scripture's clarity is closely related to its purpose. In his high priestly prayer Jesus said, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (Jn 17:17). St. John says, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:31). Again he says, "I write these things to you who believe in the Son of God so that you know that you have eternal life" (1 Jn 5:13). St. John

states that the purpose of Scripture is to teach God's plan of salvation. Nothing but the Word of God reveals it. That Word is meant to be read, studied, understood and believed.

When tempted in the wilderness (Mt 4) and when confronted by the Jews about marriage and divorce (Mt 19), Jesus appealed directly to Scripture for his authority. Scripture gives us many other examples of the same appeal to Scripture. The Word of God is so clear that Jesus often told his hearers that anyone with ears to hear should be able to hear and understand them (e.g., Rv 1-3). Having heard, anyone could understand. Those who do not understand have not heard. Those who do not understand miss the truth because they refuse to hear it.

If a person has the ability to understand language, he can read and study the Word of God. Whether he understands and believes it or not, he will see the continuing proof that Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament that promised the Savior for the world's objective justification and the believers' subjective justification. As we hear the Old Testament prophets repeatedly proclaiming "Thus saith the Lord," so we repeatedly hear writers of the New Testament telling us that the Scriptures are fulfilled in Christ. "And he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'" (Mk 14:29). "Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes"?' (Mt 21:42). "But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" (Mt 26:54). Thus, the reason for the clarity of Scripture is obvious. "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pe 1:23).

Scripture can be rejected and it can also be purposely mis-

understood and misapplied. "Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition" (Mt 15:6). "Jesus replied, 'You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God'" (Mt 22:29). This fact is crucial in understanding that all that is called biblical may not necessarily be so. Jesus warned against wolves among the sheep (Mt 10:16). He said to watch out for false prophets (Mt 7:15-23). Rejecting the Word and failing to understand it not only affects the ones who reject, it also affects those whom they teach. In spite of the futility of it, the blind still try to lead the blind (Mat 15:14).

But the perspicuity of Scripture is not only presupposed as self-evident, but Scripture teaches it also very expressly; it most emphatically protests against ever regarding Scripture as an obscure book, as do not only the unbelievers, but also some within external Christendom; at times even devout Christians are disturbed. Scripture says of itself that it is "a light shining in a dark place" (2 Pet. 1:19) and that it "is a lamp unto our feet and light unto our path" (Ps. 119:105). It is clear even for the unlearned, "making wise the simple" (Ps. 19:7). Even children can understand it, for "from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures" (2 Tim. 3:15). Even the writings of St. John, which have been singled out as being particularly obscure, were understood not only by the "fathers," not only the "young men," but also by the "little children" (I John 2:12-13).⁷

"The clarity of Scripture is demanded by its inspiration. God is able to speak clearly, for he is the master of language and words. To say that the divine author of Scripture speaks in an obscure manner is to perpetrate blasphemy. What is more, Scripture tells us that it brings forth wisdom and understanding in children and unlearned people (Ps 19:9; 2 Tm 3:15). It reveals hidden mysteries (Rm 16:25; 1 Cor 2:9; Col 2:26-27). The purpose of Scripture is that men be brought to eternal life (Rm 15:4; Jn 20:31). Why are all commanded to read Scripture if it is not clear?"⁸

Since Scripture is clear in its teachings, it does not surprise us that many counselors will look to the Word of God for much of their direction. For example, the Ten Commandments are clear and encouraging people to follow them is good advice. The gospel of Jesus Christ is

7. Ibid., page 320.

8. Robert Preus, The Inspiration of Scripture, (Mankato, Minn.: Lutheran Synod Book Company), page 159.

just as clear as it shows his satisfaction for our sins and the resulting peace with God Christ won. The law, however, has a natural basis in people. It is written in our hearts. The gospel was not written in our hearts. The gospel must be revealed through Scripture. We cannot say that a counselor is being truly biblical in his work if he uses only the law. His words may have a biblical basis, but they have no Christian substance.

People consider Scripture to be obscure for many reasons. There is only one reason why it is clear. God makes it clear to those who will submit to him and his Word. Reason, pride and hardness of heart make it unclear to those who refuse to submit to him. May God give us the sanctified intelligence to apply the law and gospel just as well when we deal with our people individually as we do when we deal with them from the pulpit.