

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN TO:

**Dr. F Pieper's Seventh Lecture of
"Lectures on the Evangelical Lutheran Church, The True Visible
Church of God on Earth"**

Scripture Explains Scripture

(Based upon C.F.W. Walther's Thesis 16):

***"The Evangelical Lutheran Church accepts
God's Word as it interprets itself"***

REASONS WHY CHRISTIANS ARE UNCERTAIN ABOUT SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE

There are many reasons why also some people who have Holy Scripture, use and study it diligently, yet for all that, they never become certain of their faith, that is, of the Christian doctrine, but always remain in uncertainty. One reason can be this that either publicly or privately they *serve sin* or *do not want to be serious in putting their Christian life into practice*, but rather in their *hearts* they are still on the *side of the world* hankering after it.

Christian certainty has quite a unique characteristic. It *never* dwells in a heart in which the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life rules (1 John 2:16), in short, where *sin rules*. Why not? Christian certainty is never the product of the natural heart, also it is never a product of mere human effort and of mere human study, but *it is act brought about by the operation of God the Holy Ghost*. Wherever, therefore, the indwelling and the efficacy⁴⁹ of the Holy Spirit is prevented by the service of sin, *there Christian certainty can never be produced concerning doctrine*. How amazing it is then that no certainty of Christian doctrine dwells in those who serve sin, even though they have Holy Scripture in their hands and have studied it diligently! Oh, how many there are and how many there have been who have doubted the true doctrine and finally have completely fallen away from it, because *they were the servants of sin and did not want to stop being servants of sin*.

In this truth there lies for you, as students of theology and those who desire to be theologians, an extremely serious admonition, namely, the admonition *to devote yourselves to be sincere in your Christian conduct before God and all people, to avoid scrupulously every grieving of the Holy Spirit by sinning*, otherwise in spite of all your meditation on the Holy Scriptures, in spite of diligent study, you would nevertheless never obtain this precious thing: *“a steadfast heart”* in regard to doctrine, but always remain in uncertainty.

However, there are also yet other reasons for uncertainty. Many also never therefore come to a joyful certainty on the basis of Holy Scripture **because they have entirely false ideas about the exposition of Holy Scripture**. They think a person can find out the sense of Holy Scripture only by the *art of human interpretation*. Such people use all kinds of light from the outside in order to see the light shining in the Scriptures. Hence, in reality they are always in a **foreign** country; they are always, of course, searching for the means of exposition **outside** of Holy Scripture. Hence, they themselves never venture into Holy Scripture itself and never properly let **the Word of Holy Scripture itself** operate on themselves. How amazing it is that they never there come to certainty in doctrine on the basis of Holy Scripture! The method which they follow, however, is *entirely perverted*. Rather it stands thus: *all means for the exposition of Scripture are found in Scripture itself*. Yes, this rule⁵⁰ must be *absolutely* adhered to: *Holy Scripture expounds itself*, and only **that** church is a true Church, that is, *an orthodox Church*, which so accepts God's Word as it expounds itself. That is the position of the Lutheran Church over against the Papacy, the Reformed and all fanatics⁵¹ and because of this the Lutheran Church is the orthodox Church.

⁴⁸ This is Lecture 7 by *Dr. F Pieper* on Thesis 16 of Walther's book entitled "The Evangelical Lutheran Church The True Visible Church of God on Earth." **Walther's Thesis 16 reads: "The Evangelical Lutheran Church accepts God's Word as it interprets itself."**

⁴⁹ Efficacy: power to convert.

⁵⁰ Or principle, axiom.

⁵¹ The German word is "**Schwaermer**." Literally translated it means "enthusiasts". This word comes from two Greek words: *en+ theos* which means "a person filled with a god." It originally meant someone who was so filled with an idea that it was like a "god in his head" driving him mad. He became so zealous for an idea that he was fanatically absorbed in it so that it was impossible or almost so to dissuade him. In Luther's day this word was used over against the Anabaptists and all those who falsely and fanatically claimed that the Holy Spirit worked directly, outside the Word of God and did not need any means to convert people.

Let us meditate further on this matter on the basis of *Thesis 16*: “**The Evangelical Lutheran Church accepts God’s Word as it interprets itself.**”

BIBLICAL PROOF THAT SCRIPTURE EXPLAINS SCRIPTURE

That this is the position which is commanded by Holy Scripture we have already seen⁵² in the discussion on 2 Peter 1:20, “**Knowing this first that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation**”.

Also we have already brought to mind Luther’s explanation of this point. In the same sense also the Lutheran Dogmaticians speak.

Kromayer⁵³ writes: “*Scripture interprets itself*, either immediately⁵⁴ or mediately⁵⁵.... **Immediately**, when the explanation is added at once as in John 2:19, where Christ says: ‘**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**’ In v. 21 there is added the *explanation* ‘**But He spake of the temple of His body.**’ Again, when in John 12:32 the Saviour says: ‘**And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me,**’ the *explanation* of these words is appended immediately in v. 33: ‘**This He said, signifying what death He should die.**’ Similarly in Rev. 5:8 the odours in the golden vials are explained to mean *the prayers of the saints*. **Mediately**, when *Scripture presents to us the means of interpretation*, namely, the *original languages*, the preceding and the subsequent *context*, the *purpose*, the *parallel passages*, the *analogy of faith*, and the *general purpose of the whole Bible* — all of which are found in Scripture, though their use comes from without... The Holy Spirit is the best Interpreter of His words.” (Theol. positivo-polem., II, 15).

In John 2:18 ff the Jews demanded *an authoritative sign* from Christ which showed that He had the right to drive them out of the temple and the Lord made reference to such a sign. He said: “**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**” (John 2:19). These words of destroying and building up again, the Jews did not understand, for they spoke in astonishment: “**Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?**” (v.20). The disciples also certainly had not understood these words. But now *Holy Scripture itself explains these words of the Lord*, since it adds: “**But He spake of the temple of His body**” (v.21). Christ spoke also of His death and resurrection. And this exposition everyone must now accept as the correct exposition, if he does not want to reject the authority of Scripture.

THE EXPOSITION OF SCRIPTURE MUST CONFORM TO THE RULES OF GRAMMAR.

⁵² In Lecture 6 **Pieper** had stated: “Scripture itself says in 2 Pet. 1:20 that *no one may explain Scripture with his own interpretations*. In his Commentary on this passage **Luther** writes: ‘Here (2 Peter 1:20, 21) Peter attacks the false teachers. He says: Because you know that we have God’s Word, continue in it, and do not let yourselves be deceived by other false teachers, though they may come and pretend to have the Holy Spirit. ‘Know this first... that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.’ Be guided by that and do not think that you will interpret Scripture by your own reason and sagacity (wisdom, Ed.). ...Peter has forbidden you to interpret (Scripture) of yourself; the Holy Spirit must interpret, or it shall remain uninterpreted. If, then, any of the holy fathers can prove that his interpretation is noted in Scripture, which verifies that it should so be interpreted, it is all right; if not, **I should not believe him**.... Here, then, all teachers and fathers, no matter how many there are have failed in interpreting Scripture. When, for example, they refer the words of Christ, Matt. 16:18: ‘**Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church,**’ to the pope, that is a *man-made interpretation*, spun out of their own mind, and hence we must not believe them; for they cannot prove from Scripture that it ever calls Peter the pope. **But we can prove that according to Paul Christ is the Rock of faith**. This interpretation is correct, for we know for sure that it has not been invented by men, but has been taken from God’s Word.’ (Sermon on 2 Peter 1:19-21 [1523], IX, 857-859; SL IX, 1361 ff.)”

⁵³ A faithful Lutheran teacher: 1610-1670.

⁵⁴ Direct explanation in plain words.

⁵⁵ Where the use of means like Hebrew and Greek grammar, etc. are necessary.

Among the **means of exposition** the first is a knowledge of the *original languages*⁵⁶. This is necessary if Holy Scripture is to be expounded according to the original text. However, we must also obtain the knowledge of the original languages from Scripture itself. Yes, we must say: *No grammatical rule may be used in the exposition of Holy Scripture according to the original text which is not deduced from Scripture itself*. A rule which has been taken from only Homer⁵⁷ or Herodotus⁵⁸ must not have any decisive character in the exposition of Scripture. Now it indeed occurs that the same rules in general are employed in the exposition of the New Testament which also apply to the exposition of the so-called Classical Greek. But that we employ these rules in the exposition of Holy Scripture with certainty occurs in this way, that *we find these rules also employed in the Scriptures of the New Testament*. If anyone would use a grammatical rule in the exposition of Holy Scripture which has not been adopted by Scripture itself, *then a false, rationalistic principle has entered into the exposition of Scripture*⁵⁹. This is quite obvious. I cannot explain Homer according to the rules which have only been found in Herodotus, and vice versa. *Every passage of Scripture must be understood from the text itself*.

THE CONTEXT DETERMINES THE MEANING.

As a second means of expounding Scripture we have the preceding and following words, that is, the context. The context of course **determines** the meaning of the individual words and the ways of speaking⁶⁰ in Scripture. Outside of the context most words and ways of speaking have **multiple meanings**, but as soon as a word or a way of speaking occurs in a defined context, the multiplicity of meaning, ambiguity disappears. For example, it is stated in John 3:16: **“For God so loved the world⁶¹, that He gave His only begotten Son.”** **Kosmos** has further meanings depending on the context. **Kosmos** can mean the *universe*, the *entire world* and the *world of men (human beings)*. Here the context decides at once that the last meaning of the word is the one for this text, for it states: **“that everyone who does not believe in Him shall be lost.”** “Faith” can only be ascribed to the world of men (human beings), not to the universe.

AN EXPOSITION MUST AGREE WITH THE PURPOSE OF THE CONTEXT.

Further consideration of the **purpose** or the scope, as we usually say in Hermeneutics⁶², serves the exposition. When, for example, it is stated in the words of the Apostle to Timothy (1Tim.4:16): **“For in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee,”** then, outside of the context, that sounds papistical as if a man is righteous and is saved by works. But when we look at the *scope*, then any misunderstanding disappears at once. The Apostle here does *not* intend to teach how it is that *a person is justified*, but he gives instruction in regard to the **life** of a servant of the Gospel; such a person shows that he walks on the way of salvation only then when he attends to his Office, when he perseveres in teaching, admonition and so forth.

Parallel passages are those passages of Holy Scripture which deal with one and the same matter. Therefore a person can explain what is said to be a dark or short passage by other passages of Scripture where the same doctrine has been stated more clearly and in greater detail.

AN INTERPRETATION WHICH DISAGREES WITH THE ANALOGY OF FAITH IS WRONG.

The **Analogy of Faith** is also not something **outside** of Scripture, but *Scripture itself*. By this expression we understand *the sum total of all the doctrines which are revealed in Scripture, as they have*

⁵⁶ The original Hebrew and Koinee Greek (Greek of the common people).

⁵⁷ An ancient Greek poet who possibly lived somewhere between the 7 th and 9 th Centuries BC.

⁵⁸ A Greek historian who lived in the 5th century BC (about 484 BC– about 425 BC).

⁵⁹ What Pieper means is then human reason is ruling instead of Scripture itself.

⁶⁰ For example phrases, idioms, etc.

⁶¹ Κοσμος: this is the Greek word Kosmos.

⁶² The principles of expounding Scripture.

been completely laid out in all the clear passages of Scripture. Thus the Chiliasts⁶³ have been refuted by the Analogy of Faith. Right throughout Holy Scripture, where it describes the state of Christians here on earth until the last day, it says that Christians *must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God*, that when Christ returns to earth on the last day He will scarcely find the faith on earth and that before the return of Christ the falling away will be more universal than ever before. Thus the Chiliast cannot state the truth when he misapplies Revelation 20 for the purpose of saying that a 1000 years before Christ's return the Church on earth will find itself in a position of glory.

GENERAL PURPOSE OF SCRIPTURE.

Also the general **purpose** is a means of exposition. The general purpose of Holy Scripture is to reveal Christ and to lead men to salvation by faith in Christ. Therefore when an interpretation of Scripture has been brought forward which conflicts with this scope, then by this very fact itself it shows the evidence that it is false.

Gerhard⁶⁴ speaks as follows about the rule: *Scripture interprets Scripture*: "Since Scripture (1) is perfect, containing all things necessary for faith, morals, divine worship, and so to the attaining of salvation, it is not necessary to patch on to it unscriptural teachings. Since Scripture (2) is clear, using proper, clear, and lucid words in presenting the articles of faith, it needs no light from without because what is obscure is illuminated by that which is clear. Since (3) the rule of faith⁶⁵, a comparison of the passages, the consideration of what precedes and what follows, the examination of the sources, and the like, are not outside Scripture, therefore the proper interpretation of Scripture is that which is done from it and by it." (Loc. de interpr. S.S., par. 126).

Be on guard: *Whoever brings an interpretation which has not been taken from Scripture, he adds something to Holy Scripture*; he also overthrows the perfection of Holy Scripture. Therefore every exposition must again be **Scripture itself**, not something invented outside of Scripture. Furthermore: when anyone brings an interpretation which has not been taken from Scripture itself, then he brings additional **light** which is not contained in Scripture itself; *then he actually thereby denies that Scripture is bright and clear*. Now, however, just as certainly as Scripture is clear, *so certain it must be that wherever a dark passage is found, Scripture will be able to enlighten it with its own light*, so certain must every exposition be taken from Scripture itself.

Hence a very important rule now however follows to which we have to hold fast also over against especially modern theology. *If Holy Scripture explains itself, then we must accept every exposition as infallibly correct which agrees with Holy Scripture*. This presupposes, of course, the acceptance of the **inspiration** of Holy Scripture, the belief that the **entire** Holy Scripture is **not man's word**, but **God's Word** and that therefore also when Holy Scripture itself explains itself, this exposition is not of a man, but the exposition is of God Himself. Modern theology has indeed abandoned the doctrine of inspiration as an out of date⁶⁶ doctrine, as a doctrine which no one any longer holds to with the best of intentions. Consequently, one speaks of the exposition which the Apostle Paul in Gal. 3:16 gives of Gen. 22:18, and so forth, as of a Rabbinical exegesis. Yes, many recent theologians have gone so far that they have said that the Lord Christ Himself has not correctly expounded the Old Testament, but has been ensnared in errors at times. *Of this abomination we will have nothing to do with. Woe betide us* if the attitude should spread among us that we no longer want to accept as infallibly correct the exposition which Scripture itself gives us. It is *truly alarming* that people who no longer accept as infallibly correct the exposition of the Old Testament contained in the New Testament are wanting to give us a revised translation of the Bible.

WHAT LUTHER, BRENZ AND RAMBACH TEACH ON THIS.

⁶³ Those who falsely believe in a 1000 year earthly rule of Christ.

⁶⁴ John Gerhard who lived 1582 to 1637 was an outstanding, faithful Lutheran teacher of God's Word.

⁶⁵ This is another expression for the Analogy of Faith.

⁶⁶ Obsolete.

Let us listen further to Luther, Brenz, and Rambach on this point, that an exposition which the Scripture itself gives must be valid as infallibly correct without dispute.

Luther writes: “Jerome mentions among others, besides this one, that in the psalms there is this fixed usage that always ten psalms following one another belong to the author whose name is mentioned in the one named first. This perhaps he has taken from the Rabbinic tradition. But I do not doubt that this one psalm (Ps.90) should be assigned to Moses and not the following which are without a title; for the Epistle to the Hebrews (4:7) declares expressly concerning the words Ps. 95:7,8: ‘**Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart,**’ and so forth, that God spoke them through David. Hence we must assume that at this point Jerome followed the fables of the Jews.” (Exposition of the 90th Psalm [1534], V, 1086, SL V, 736).

Brenz: “If Paul interprets this psalm (Ps. 18) of Christ, no other interpretation, not even that of an angel, is to be recognised.’ (Ad Ps. 18).

Rom. 15:9 of course applies Ps.18:49 to Christ. These are the words: “**For this cause I will confess to Thee among the gentiles, and sing unto Thy name**” (Rom.15:9). [Ps.18:49, “**Therefore will I give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and sing praises unto Thy name.**”⁶⁷]. First of all, there are in Ps. 18 the words of David as it proceeds from verse 1, but then such matters which have been stated by David are true only in Christ, the Son of David. These words (Ps.18:49) having been quoted in Rom.15:9 remove all doubt for us.

Brenz says further (on Psalm 2): “Since we have the testimonies of the apostles, who are the foundation of the church, that this psalm (Ps. 2) must be understood of Christ, the Son of God, no angel is to be listened to, not to mention an unbelieving rabbi, who teaches something else.” (Ad Ps.2. Tom. III, fol. 199).

The second Psalm belongs exclusively to the Messianic Psalms. In the second Psalm the words are spoken *only* by Christ and they have no reference to David. Of this we are quite certain, because the second Psalm has been expounded as referring to Christ in five places of the New Testament, Acts 4;25; 13:35, and so forth. Certainly, one can already also from the second Psalm itself recognise that it applies only to Christ. So, for example, when in verse 8 a Kingdom which covers the entire world is being ascribed to this King: “**I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession.**” That cannot be said of any earthly king. The rationalists have guessed that this refers to the entire line of the Israelite kings of David until Alexander Jannaeus, but they have nowhere at all found a foothold, and in addition must then, when a suitable person was believed to have been found among the Israelite kings, do violence to the individual words of the Psalm, for example, the words concerning universal rulership. At the conclusion of the Psalm all the blessed are praised who place their trust in this King. It says: “**Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.**” (verse 12). Now, however, it is stated in Holy Scripture that no one is to place his trust in a human being. Therefore, when in the Psalm all people are required to place their trust in this King’s Son and to kiss Him as their Lord, then this King’s Son is none other than the Son of God, the Saviour. So already also from the Psalm itself it follows that the Psalm deals of Christ.

Rambach says: “An interpreter of Scripture must carefully choose for himself skilful guides in whose footsteps he may walk safely and surely. But he will find none more skilled than Christ Himself and His infallible Apostles who in the New Testament interpret many passages of the Old Testament which according to the intention of the Holy Spirit Himself, speak of Christ, and so give us the key rightly to understand innumerable others.” (Institut. herm, Lib. II, chap. 4, par. 6, pp. 154 f.)

⁶⁷ The Messiah speaking through the mouth of David praises the wondrous things which God has done to the Gentiles for their salvation.

May you be convinced: whoever studies texts in the New Testament which expound the texts of the Old Testament, that person thereby obtains so much light concerning the Old Testament that he now also understands other passages of the Old Testament which have not been expounded directly in the New Testament. Therefore my advice to you on this is: *if you want to occupy yourself correctly, productively with the Old Testament, if you want to be rightly established in the understanding of the Old Testament, then study, above all, all the passages of the Old Testament which have been expressly expounded in the New Testament.* You will find a considerable number! If you have understood such specific passages of the Old Testament, then the entire Old Testament will be a light for you.

[Delivered by F. Pieper on 10 Jan., 1890] (To be Continued.)

[Headings and emphasis in italic are added; that in bold type is Pieper's. All Bible texts have been bolded in italics for emphasis. Larger paragraphs have been broken down into shorter ones. Quotes from Luther, Rambach, Gerhard, Brenz and Kromayer are taken from the translation of Walther's True Visible Church by Dr. J.T. Mueller.]