

Unanimity in the Doctrine of Inspiration, the Absolute Prerequisite for God-Pleasing Unity in the Church

[Delivered before the 18th biennial convention of the Minnesota District,
held at DMLC, New Ulm, Minnesota, June 16-20, 1952]

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When we say that there must be complete agreement in the doctrine of inspiration before there can be God-pleasing unity in the Church, it is, of course, self-evident that we are speaking of the doctrine of inspiration taught in Scripture itself: the doctrine that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God;” that all of the Bible is absolute truth; that “the Scripture cannot be broken;” that the Bible not only *contains* Gods Word, but that the Bible *is* Gods Word; that the Bible is the infallible truth “also in those parts which treat of historical, geographic and other secular matters.” It is the doctrine which we know as “verbal inspiration.” For that reason we can state our theme even more positively in this way, “A Unanimous Acceptance of Verbal Inspiration is the Absolute Prerequisite for God-pleasing Unity in the Church.”

In making this assertion we are well aware that the doctrine of inspiration does not deal as directly with the heart of the Gospel as do some of the other doctrines. We usually refer to justification by faith alone as the central doctrine of the Christian religion, the article on which the Church stands and falls. In our work as ministers of Christ we proceed on that premise. The pastor who is called to the bedside of a man about to face his Maker, a man troubled by the knowledge of his sin and guilt—that pastor does not preach verbal inspiration. He preaches justification; he points that troubled soul to the forgiveness that was wrought for him by the Christ of Calvary. The man dies believing that his sins were cleansed by the blood of God’s Son. Verbal inspiration wasn’t mentioned. Perhaps the man had never even heard the term. Yet in his heart he accepted verbal inspiration when he believed that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” Actually then, the personal faith of an individual that God has declared him righteous in Christ is not a matter of subjective certainty; even this fundamental article, as every other article of our faith, depends on the objective certainty of God’s infallible Word.

And when we now say that a unanimous acceptance of verbal inspiration is the absolute prerequisite for God-pleasing unity in the Church, we are not confronted with the immediate need of preparing a soul for eternity. We are now dealing with those who already claim to be well-grounded in the truth; we are speaking of synods who are attempting to achieve doctrinal unity so that they may establish fraternal relations and work together in the Lord’s vineyard. And here we contend that the acceptance of verbal inspiration by all parties is a must if such unity is to be achieved.

In carrying out this thought we emphasize especially three points:

- I. The doctrine of inspiration occupies a critical position in the union movement of today.
- II. A denial of verbal inspiration destroys the very foundation of doctrinal purity.
- III. A denial of verbal inspiration infects and corrupts the whole body of doctrine.

I.

The Doctrine of Inspiration Occupies a Critical Position in Today’s Union Movement

It has not always occupied such an important position. The fact, however, that it was not a doctrinal issue in former years was not because there has always been complete agreement here, but rather because such agreement was usually taken for granted and other doctrinal issues were projected into the foreground.

In support of our statement that the doctrine of inspiration has become an issue only in more recent years, permit me to recall a statement of Prof. John Meyer in his essay, “What is Required in a

Confessional Writing Today,” read before this body assembled in special convention last summer. He says, “There were differences between the Synodical Conference and the synods that twenty years ago were merged into the American Lutheran Church. There were, to mention only a few, differences regarding the very heart of the Gospel, the article on Justification; furthermore, on Conversion, Election, the Church and the Ministry, Open Questions and the Bible, the Last Things. In *recent* years also a difference regarding the inerrancy of the Scriptures developed.”

Dr. W. Arndt, writing in the *Concordia Theological Monthly* of January, 1935, makes this statement, “In the last decades there has arisen a new issue, indicated by the words “higher criticism” and “inspiration of the Bible” on which it seems the various Lutheran bodies are not occupying common ground. Any attempt to bring about agreement between the synods will have to take this issue into consideration.”

In his essay “The Problem of Lutheran Union,” completed early in 1935, Dr. Theo. Graebner likewise emphasizes the fact that the article on inspiration has become a major issue only in recent years.

P. E. Kretzmann writes in the same vein, “To all appearances, the systematic efforts to discredit, and rule out the doctrine of inspiration which were made in Germany and elsewhere during the latter half of the last century have been gaining in boldness and strength during the past two decades, until practically every denomination is infested with men who deny the truth of inspiration altogether or teach a form of inspiration which is so modified as no longer to resemble the clear truth which for centuries had been both the foundation and bulwark of the Church.” (Preface to *The Foundations Must Stand*, 1936.)

But if inspiration as a doctrinal issue has been suppressed in days gone by, it certainly is not being suppressed now. It is out in the open where we can all see it. Very graphically Dr. Engelder points out the real issue in the union movement of today, “The war is on. Are—we—prepared for the conflict? They are not prepared who fail to realize that the age-long battle of the Church for her life is today being fought on the question of inspiration. On this front the enemy is concentrating all his forces. He is still attacking the deity of Christ and other fundamental doctrines, but at present he seems to be chiefly concerned about getting the Church to discard Verbal Inspiration. This doctrine has always been attacked. The Anomoeans did not like it. Paine and the old rationalists hated it. But at no time has such a concerted and determined effort been made to remove it as in our generation. Here is where the Church must marshal her forces,” (*Scripture Cannot Be Broken*, p. 428).

But also those outside the Synodical Conference recognize the critical position which the doctrine of inspiration occupies in today’s union movement. It is a known fact that negotiations in the interest of church-fellowship between the United Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod came to an end because the representatives of the United Lutheran Church found themselves unable to accept the doctrine of Verbal Inspiration. The minutes of the 1938 convention of the United Lutheran Church bring this report, “A point of serious difference concerned the definition of inspiration, particularly the presentation of verbal inspiration as given by the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod.... Our commission was unable to accept the statement of the Missouri Synod that the Scriptures are the infallible truth ‘also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters.’”

Such resolutions on the part of the United Lutheran Church are not at all surprising in the light of the statement made by one of their leaders, Prof. E. E. Flack, of the Hamma Divinity School, Springfield, Ohio. He writes in the *Lutheran Church Quarterly*, 1935: “It may be confidently asserted that the achievement of closer unity among Lutherans in this country, and indeed throughout the world, will require, for one essential, a higher view of Scripture than is represented by the theory of inspiration by dictation.” To which we all hastily add, that we would be unable to extend the hand of fellowship to those who hold such a low view of Scripture as the denial of verbal inspiration implies.

This is still the greatest obstacle standing in the way of true unity among Lutheran synods in 1952. Consider a portion of the report of the Floor Committee on Church Union to the 1951 convention of the Wisconsin Synod, “Be it further resolved that we direct the attention of our sister Synod of

Missouri to the position which the American Lutheran Church has taken in the Friendly Invitation of March 4, 1947, with the remark contending for “an area where there exists an allowable and wholesome latitude of theological opinion on the basis of the teaching of the Word of God,” and that we indicate to the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod that this position of the American Lutheran Church challenges the clarity and therefore the authority of the Scriptures, (Ps. 119, 105). This can only cause confusion and disturbance in the church. Therefore negotiations should be suspended. That we further indicate to the sister synod of Missouri that not until the American Lutheran Church recognizes this as the basic problem which must first be considered and settled, will the obstacle to the renewal of doctrinal discussions have been removed” (Proceedings of the 1951 Joint Synod Convention, p. 147, 148).

The doctrine of inspiration occupies critical position in the union movement of today. The denial of verbal inspiration is the major obstacle in the way of true Lutheran union.

A unanimous acceptance of verbal inspiration is an absolute prerequisite for God-pleasing unity in the church, because:

II.

A Denial of Verbal Inspiration Destroys the Very Foundation of Doctrinal Purity

The Bible is intended to serve as a foundation for faith and doctrine. “Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,” Eph. 2:20.

Our Lutheran confessions likewise emphasize this God-intended purpose of the Bible, namely, to serve as a foundation for faith, the one and only norm of all doctrine. “The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel,” (Smalcald Articles, Article II, Paragraph 15). “We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with all teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testament alone, as it is written, Ps. 119, 105: ‘Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.’ And St. Paul: ‘Though an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you, let him be accursed,’” (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Paragraph 1). And again: “We receive and embrace with our whole heart the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged,” (FC, Introduction to the Thorough Declaration).

Let us not overlook the clear voice of the *Brief Statement* on this point, “We furthermore teach regarding the Holy Scriptures that they are given by God to the Christian Church for the foundation of faith, Eph. 2:20. Hence the Holy Scriptures are the sole source from which all doctrines proclaimed in the Christian Church must be taken and therefore, too, the sole rule and norm by which all doctrines must be judged.”

Now this book which God has given us as the foundation of faith and the source and norm of all doctrine, is not a book whose passages are dark and obscure; the Bible is clear. God does not want us to grope in the dark; God wants us to have certainty in matters of doctrine. He wants us to speak with authority and conviction. “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God,” I Peter 4:11. We are reminded of the words of Martin Luther, “A preacher should declare boldly with St. Paul and all the apostles and prophets: ‘*Haec dixit Dominus*, Thus saith the Lord, God Himself hath said this.’ After his sermon the pastor should be able to say, ‘In this sermon I have been an apostle and prophet of Jesus Christ.’ Here it is not necessary, nor even good, to ask for the forgiveness of sins. For it is God’s Word, not mine, and so there can be no reason for His forgiving me; He can only confirm and praise what I have preached, saying: ‘Thou hast taught correctly, for I have spoken through thee, and the Word is mine.’” (St. Louis Edition, Vol. XVII, p. 1343).

Speaking with such authority and conviction in matters of doctrine presupposes verbal inspiration. A man can proclaim the Word of God only when he knows what it is and where to find it. If verbal inspiration is denied then man no longer knows what is God’s Word and what is man’s word, and

doctrinal certainty has been destroyed. God's revealed Word is now no longer the final authority. Reason has taken the place of revelation. Man is now placed in the position of judge over Holy Scripture. It now becomes the business of man to sift truth from error. The foundation of the Christian Church and its faith has been overthrown.

The foundation of doctrinal purity has been removed as soon as we say the Bible merely *contains* God's Word instead of saying, the Bible *is* God's Word. If the Bible only contains God's Word, it now becomes the business of man to decide what part of the Bible is God's Word and what part of the Bible is man's word.

The foundation of doctrinal purity has been destroyed when we accept the doctrine or the "totality of Scripture," the doctrine that Scripture as a whole is God's Word, but not necessarily the individual parts. Yet how can the whole of Scripture be God's Word, if the component parts are not?

The foundation of doctrinal purity has been destroyed when we say that the Bible is God's Word only in those parts which pertain to our salvation. Who is now going to decide what parts of the Bible pertain to our salvation and which do not? Today I may feel that a certain verse does not pertain to my salvation; tomorrow it may be an anchor of hope. What may not seem to pertain to the salvation of one, may be sweetest Gospel to another. "Ask the good woman who was much comforted when she found the names of Rahab and David listed among the ancestors of Christ." Certainly my salvation is not affected whether or not the great fish ever swallowed Jonah, whether or not the sun stood still for Joshua. Even if these things didn't happen it does not affect my salvation but it does very seriously affect the foundation on which my salvation rests. For the story of Jonah and the story of the sun that stood still, and many other stories of Scripture which the moderns call "trivial," also these belong to that Scripture of which my Lord has said, "It shall not be broken." All of it is given by inspiration of God; all of it is absolute truth. For if I can't believe my God when he tells me that the fish swallowed Jonah, or that the sun stood still, can I trust Him any more when He tells me that the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanses me from all sin? As soon as you throw out verbal inspiration, you have not only undermined the foundation; you have removed it altogether.

As soon as you do away with verbal inspiration, the Church has lost its voice of authority. No longer can it say, Thus it is written, that mighty weapon with which our Savior fought the battle of the wilderness. No longer can it speak with a conviction and say, Thus saith the Lord: we will not depart from it to the right or to the left; we will not add to it or subtract from it. No longer can we heed the warning voice of Jeremiah's 28th verse of his 23rd chapter, "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my Word, let him speak my Word faithfully. But how can a man proclaim God's Word faithfully when he doesn't know what God's Word is or what it says. And he doesn't know if verbal inspiration is denied. No longer can the pastor say after the Scripture lesson, "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it," for alas, the portion which he has read from the Old or New Testament may not have been God's Word. No longer can the pastor say from his Pulpit, "We shall consider the Word of God recorded as follows," for after all if the Bible is not God's Word in all its parts, he may be preaching on a mere word of men without knowing it. No longer can we sing, "Blessed Jesus, at Thy Word, we are gathered all to hear Thee," for if verbal inspiration is denied, that statement simply is not true.

If verbal inspiration is denied, any attempt to achieve true doctrinal unity is a farce because there is no common basis for it, no common starting point, no common foundation. If verbal inspiration is denied, any attempt to unite church bodies on the basis of complete doctrinal agreement, would almost become ridiculous, if the fact that souls are involved did not make it so tragic. In practice it would have to work out something like this: Committees are appointed from two church bodies to draft a doctrinal statement which is to serve as a basis for establishing fellowship between those two bodies. Let us say that they are about to formulate the article on Redemption. A question arises concerning the person of Christ. The conservative members of that committee insist that He was true man and true God as the Scriptures clearly teach. When they are asked on what basis they support their doctrine, they appeal to

the word of Paul in 1 Tim. 3:16, “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh.” Or to the word of Paul in Col. 2:9, “In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” Oh no, say the liberals, you can’t bring those passages here. Paul was there speaking only as a man. What can you do? If the Bible is not verbally inspired, maybe they are right. Doctrinal certainty has gone out the window with the removal of the verbally inspired foundation.

Imagine the kind of doctrinal agreement that would be reached if there were no common foundation from which to proceed. And if by some peculiar quirk of chance these committees would reach an agreement, imagine what would happen if their document were placed before entire church bodies. Where reason has been substituted for revelation there would be no end to the opinions of men. No issue would ever be settled. It would be of no use to quote Scripture, to say “It is Written,” to say, “Thus saith the Lord,” for we could never be sure when and where the Lord speaks in the Bible and when and where man speaks. The Church, instead of being the “pillar and ground of truth” would be turned into a debating society in which matters of doctrine are decided by majority vote, and the majority swayed by the debater who can speak most convincingly in “the words which man’s wisdom teacheth.”

You can set aside verbal inspiration and have a church union. In fact, the quicker we can get rid of verbal inspiration the quicker we can have a union of all churches. For with verbal inspiration out of the way, there can be no doctrinal certainty or agreement, and the unionist doesn’t consider doctrinal agreement important. You can deny verbal inspiration and have church union; but you can’t deny it, and expect to have God-pleasing unity in the church.

Usually we speak of justification, conversion and election as belonging to the heart of the Gospel and inspiration as belonging to the foundation. But when we consider that the doctrinal purity of these central articles is dependent on the solid foundation of verbal inspiration, one wonders whether this foundation article is really so far away from the heart of the Gospel after all.

What the denial of verbal inspiration does to the foundation of doctrinal purity, it necessarily does also to the foundation of the individual believer’s faith. The man who denies verbal inspiration does not necessarily lose saving faith at once. God can and does perform miracles. God may still preserve in him the faith that he has been reconciled to God by the blood of His Son. But this is the result of God’s grace, not the result of a denial of verbal inspiration. The denial of verbal inspiration can have but one logical result; it kills the assurance and certainty of faith. We are reminded of Stoeckhardt’s solemn words, “The teaching that the Bible is not the very Word of God robs the Christian of all comfort and assurance. One who holds that the Bible is a book that has a divine and a human side, may easily in the day of distress, in the hour of death, sink into despair. When he looks to, say, John 3:16, Satan may challenge him: Where is your guarantee that this word is not one of the human ingredients of Scripture, that God’s love for the whole world of sinners is not merely a pious wish and self-delusion?” (Proceedings, Central District, 1894, p. 21).

We are dealing with a serious matter. With the denial of verbal inspiration the very foundation of and hope for doctrinal purity is destroyed. How well that we hearken unto the word of David, Ps. 11:3, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

A unanimous acceptance of verbal inspiration is an absolute prerequisite for God-pleasing unity in the Church, because:

III.

A Denial of Verbal Inspiration Corrupts and Infects the Whole Body of Doctrine

It does not take a trained theologian to realize that if we are not agreed on the foundation, the final court of appeal, it is not likely that we will agree on the rest. If we have no common basis from which to draw our doctrine, how can we reach agreement on the various articles? Any flaw in the

foundation will have an adverse effect on the finished structure; any flaw in the foundation of doctrine will have an adverse effect on the entire doctrinal structure.

This may not happen overnight. Some or even many of the Christian doctrines may stand for a time. A man may conceivably deny verbal inspiration and yet teach correctly in regard to justification. This is due, however, to a happy inconsistency on his part. He claims to deny verbal inspiration, but actually he accepts the verbal inspiration of those parts of the Bible which speak of justification. But his doctrinal certainty is a very subjective thing. A year from now he may have a different doctrine of justification, because in the meantime he may have decided that the passages on which he based his doctrine of justification are no longer God's inspired Word. As soon as the foundation has been undermined and hollowed out by denying verbal inspiration, even though some of the individual doctrines may still stand for a time, the divine assurance of their trustworthiness is lacking.

In time the entire body of doctrine will be affected, for with the denial of verbal inspiration sin-blinded reason has been elevated to the position of highest authority in deciding doctrine. When reason is accorded that position the results are deadly. Dr. Walther once said, "The least deviation from the old inspiration doctrine introduces a rationalistic germ into theology and infects the whole body of doctrine," (*Walther and the Church*, p. 14). That germ is dangerous. It will spread and grow. If it ever reaches maturity, it is bound to kill Christian doctrine. The process is not difficult to understand. Let us but remember that the fundamental error of rationalism is salvation by works. Ian is a legalist by nature, and if he permits his sin-blinded reason to correct, to add to or subtract from the Scriptures it will inevitably lead him to the heathen doctrine of salvation by his own works.

Let us see, for example, what happens to the doctrine of justification when reason is substituted for verbal inspiration. We believe that a man is declared righteous before God, not for the sake of his good works, but without the works of the Law, by grace, for Christ's sake. We believe that because God's Word tells us that "there is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," (Rom. 3:23, 24). And again: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law," (Rom. 3:28). Now it doesn't make sense to our reason that God should declare man, vile wretch that he is, righteous in Christ. But we believe it because God's Word says so, and we are eternally grateful that it is so whether reason can fathom it or not. As long as we accept the Bible as God's verbally inspired Word and sole authority in matters of faith and doctrine, this central article of our Christian faith will be kept pure and unsullied. As soon as we deny verbal inspiration and follow the guidance of reason, our reason will tell us that good works are necessary before God will declare us righteous. Where verbal inspiration is denied justification will not long stand in its truth and purity.

Another doctrine which belongs to the heart of the Gospel is the doctrine of Conversion. We believe that every man is dead in trespasses and sins, and that his coming to faith is not, even in the least part, his own work, but alone the gift of God's grace and mercy. That is Scripture doctrine. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast," (Eph. 2:8, 9). Here again a problem arises for our reason when we see that some come to faith and some do not. Scripture tells us that man owes his conversion solely to the grace of God; on the other hand, the man who is not converted has only himself to blame. Again two facts that my reason cannot harmonize. If I accept the Bible as God's verbally inspired Word, then I accept both statements, whether my reason can harmonize them or not, and I do not pry more deeply into God's unsearchable counsel. If I deny verbal inspiration and substitute reason in its place, what is more natural than to assume that there is a difference after all. Perhaps some come to faith because of a better spirit of cooperation with God, because of a right conduct, a right attitude, a right self-determination, or a refraining from willful resistance. Or maybe the difference lies in God. Maybe He doesn't want all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. The article on Conversion is not reasonable. How can it long remain pure after verbal inspiration is denied?

Or what happens to the highly comforting doctrine of election? Here we teach that “all those who by the grace of God alone, for Christ’s sake, through the means of grace are brought to faith, are justified, sanctified, and preserved in faith here in time, that all these have already from eternity been endowed by God with faith, justification, sanctification and preservation in faith, and this for the same reason, namely by grace alone, for Christ’s sake and by way of the Means of grace.” Again, that’s Scripture teaching. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified,” (Rom. 8:29, 30).

But we note that not all come to faith and are saved. Obviously then, God hasn’t elected all. Why some, and not others? Reason has an answer. Maybe God found something good in us. Maybe he elected us because he foresaw that we would come to faith in time. Reason also suggests that if he elected those who are saved unto salvation, he must have elected those who are lost unto damnation. As long as I believe in verbal inspiration, I will not go any farther than God goes in His Word. I will rejoice that He has called me to faith in Christ, and that this call was not a chance happening, but the result of God’s eternal decree. There I will stop. I will not seek an answer to “Why some and not others,” I will not assume that the lost were elected unto damnation because Scripture does not say so. In doing so, I will have to impose silence on my reason, but I am willing to do that as long as I believe in verbal inspiration. If I deny verbal inspiration, the doctrine of Election in its truth and purity cannot long endure.

Or remember Luther’s heroic stand at Marburg. Luther retained the Scripture doctrine of the Lords Supper because he believed the words, “This is my body,” “This is my blood” to be verbally inspired, even though also his “Human reason though it ponder, cannot fathom this great wonder That Christ’s body e’er remaineth Though it countless souls sustaineth.”

And so we could examine many of the other doctrines; the result would be the same. The purity of the individual doctrines can be maintained only on the basis of verbal inspiration. Where verbal inspiration is denied and reason is given full sway, the individual doctrines cannot long stand. The reason why those who deny verbal inspiration do not always immediately cast all other doctrines overboard is that, by the grace of God, they are not always consistent. God in his mercy, for a time at least, may keep them from going that far. But they are certainly heading for trouble. For if they are bold enough to reject one statement of the Bible, what is there to keep them from rejecting all the rest. Left to themselves, there can be but one result, the infection and corruption of every doctrine.

More than that is involved. God speaks to us through His Prophet, “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word,” (Is. 66:2). In that attitude of awe and reverence God would have us approach His Word. Holy Scripture is a holy thing. Luther once said, “Every single Bible-text makes the world too narrow for me.” The child of God who approaches his Bible with a holy awe, realizing that here God Himself is speaking to Him, and who therefore asks God the Holy Spirit to bless that word upon his heart and life, Him God will hear and receive, and will guide him into the way of truth.

But how can we ever be bold enough to assume that God will bless a study of His Word which proceeds from the premise that the Bible contains errors. How can such ever hope to find or remain in the truth when they take it upon themselves to reject parts of the Bible as God’s Word. In doing so they are making a liar out of God. Bear in mind, it was not a man, but our Savior Himself who said, The Scripture cannot be broken. Our blessed Lord has pronounced every word of the Bible as God’s infallible Word; but he who denies verbal inspiration says to the Savior of the world, *No*, you’re wrong, some of it is man’s word. In so doing he insults the majesty of God sets himself up as a critic of God and His Word, and as a critic of Scripture places himself under the terrible judgment described in Mt. 11:25, “Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.” Or let us ponder the fearful truth set down in 1 Pet. 2:7, 8, “Unto you therefore which believe he is precious, but

unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rook of offense, even to them which stumble at the Word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.” This applies not only to those who are offended by the Gospel of Christ, but also to those who criticize Scripture in general. Eventually that Word becomes a savor of death unto death. God gives them up to their perverse and obdurate mind. Certainly, the earnest warning of Paul, “Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,” (Gal. 6:7), applies with special force to man attitude toward the Scripture doctrine of inspiration. Let every one who makes bold to call God a liar when he says the Scripture cannot be broken, likewise solemnly meditate upon the word of St. John the Divine, “If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life,” Rev. 22:19. To assume that one can correct God, can treat His holy Word with disrespect and yet expect to be guided into the way of truth is highly irrational. Where verbal inspiration is denied, God’s Word is despised; and where God’s Word is despised man cannot come to or remain in the knowledge of the truth. The denial of verbal inspiration therefore is bound to infect and corrupt the whole body of doctrine.

A unanimous acceptance of verbal inspiration is an absolute prerequisite for God-pleasing unity in the Church. But what kind of unity does God want in the Church? Is it not that we all speak the same thing, that we be one in the faith, that we be fully agreed in all matters of doctrine and practice? Certainly every sincere child of God longs for and prays for such unity. To achieve such true unity among Lutherans is one of the purposes for which our Synodical Conference was organized. Here then we are dealing with an article which is basic for such unity. We must be agreed on the foundations, otherwise there is no point in continuing negotiations. If we cannot agree on the source of doctrine, on the final court of appeal, how can we agree on the individual doctrines?

For that reason, any church body which is interested in a real unity of doctrine and practice, the only kind of a unity that is pleasing to God, will give this issue some very serious consideration. Especially if there have in the past been differences in the doctrine of inspiration, it will in formulating confessional statements insist on language so clear that it cannot honestly be misunderstood, language that unconditionally rejects error, so that it will make sure that the precious heritage of verbal inspiration is being safeguarded. It may be called loveless, over-suspicious, a bottleneck in the way of Lutheran union, but if it loves the truth no other course of action is possible.

May all who are interested in a God-pleasing unity in the Church, may all who would be and remain true disciples of their Lord Jesus, may all who would be guided in the way of truth and preserved in the truth until the end, hear and heed the word of our Savior, “If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free, (Jn. 8:31, 32).