

Theology notes 1.1

What is Theology?

Most simply put, theology is the study of God. It comes from the word *theos* which is Greek for “God,” and *-ology* which is from the Greek word *logos* meaning “word.” Most literally then, the word *theology* means “words about God” or “the study of God.”

Nature of Theology

1. Theology is biblical . It takes its primary content from the Old and New Testament Scriptures. While additional insight may be obtained by the study of God’s creation, or what is sometimes referred to as the book of God’s work, it is primarily God’s Word that constitutes the contents of theology.
2. Theology is systematic. It does not look at each of the books of the Bibles separately, but attempts to draw together into one coherent whole what the entirety of Scripture says on a given topic, such as human sinfulness.
3. Theology is done in the context of human culture. Theology, particularly in its more advanced to technical sense must relate the teaching of Scripture to data found in other disciplines that deal with the same subject matter.
4. Theology is contemporary. The aim of the theological enterprise is to restate timeless biblical truths in a form that is understandable to the people who are living today.
5. Theology is practical. Paul expounded doctrine not merely to inform his readers, so that they might have more data. Rather, he intended that the doctrine he expounded be applied to everyday life. For example, the doctrine of the second coming of Christ can, of course, become the object of speculation - people attempt to ascertain when it will occur in relation to other events. Paul however, in 1Thessalonians 4:16-18 urges his readers to comfort one another with this truth. That the Lord will return and will resurrect all who have believed in him is a source of peace and encouragement in a world in which so much of value appears to be undergoing destruction.

Why Theology?

Psalm 139:17-18

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! ¹⁸Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.

That should be our attitude toward theology. Although the fullness God is absolutely beyond our comprehension, and there will always be this awesome wonder and mystery to him, the things that He has revealed to us about himself are incredibly powerful and precious. God has revealed himself to us so that we can have a relationship with him beyond just the intellectual level, but a truly intimate and personal relationship with one that speaks, response to prayers, and moves to intervene in our lives. To paraphrase Jonathan Edwards, “Theology is the study of how we can live to God by Christ”. Living to God requires knowing who the true God is versus all the idols of the world.

Everything is affected by your theology. For example, if your theology denies the existence of God, then your morality is going to be affected since its basis is not a personal and timeless being. With a theology of atheism (i.e. belief that there is no God) morals become relative to the time and situation. In this case, what is true for one generation may not be true for another. If

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your theology denies the sinfulness of man, then a bloody sacrificial death to atone for sin becomes repulsive, since, according to your theology, men don't need to have their sin atoned for. If your theology is polytheistic (i.e. belief in many gods), then you will constantly be trying to figure out which god or gods you should encounter, pray to, and/or appease in order to make their situation "right." The implications are endless.

What can be more important, practical and refreshing than the knowledge of how to orient our whole life to God, the "fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13)?"

Theology is a precious gift to the body of Christ, for believers who long to know their God, their salvation, and their glorious hope.

To build up leaders and the church

Titus 1:9

He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Equip people for the role of leadership to know what the trust worthy word of God teaches, so that they can encourage, teach, and correct those who oppose sound doctrine.

How We Do Theology?

Through Study of Scripture:

The Bible's authority over the Christian is an absolute authority in every part of their life. To do otherwise is really to set ourselves up as God. To look at the Bible and say, "Well, I'm not going to follow that part but I'm going to follow this part," or, "I'm going to obey this little verse and not this little verse," is, in one sense, to set ourselves over Scripture and to determine what is true and what is not, what we follow and what we won't, and when we do that, we've become little gods ourselves. We've set ourselves up as the god of the universe. And that is idolatry. So, to deny Scripture and not live by its authority in one sense is to try to supplant God and make ourselves that authority. So, it's very important that Scripture dominate the Christian's life in almost every area, or in every area, so that they really do give God his proper place as the ultimate authority. [Dr. Michael J. Kruger]

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

As this passage teaches, the Scriptures are ultimately from God, and they are designed to provide God's people with fully-reliable special revelation.

We believed that God's hand protected the Scriptures from error. God supernaturally gave biblical writers information about the present, the past and the future, and he superintended their authorship so that everything they wrote was true. Most importantly, divine inspiration gave the Scriptures absolute, unquestionable authority.

But we also acknowledging that Scripture's human authors made significant contributions to the content and meaning of the Bible.

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Question of Clarity and meaning

Rather than treating the Bible as if it had dropped down from heaven, Scriptures came through human instruments and historical processes. This concern with human authorship accords well with the way Jesus and biblical writers often approached the Bible. For example, in Matthew 22:41-44, we read this account:

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'?" (Matthew 22:41-44).

In this passage Jesus used Psalm 110:1 to confound the Pharisees by explicitly drawing attention to David, the human writer of this passage. Both Jesus and the Pharisees agreed that the Messiah would be David's descendant. But in first-century Palestine, David would not normally have called his descendant "Lord." So, Jesus asked the Pharisees to explain why David ascribed this title to his son.

Notice that Jesus' argument depended on the fact that Scripture's meaning relies partly on details in the lives of its human authors. Examples like this abound of biblical writers and characters referring to Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, David, Paul, and other human instruments of God's Word. These human instruments made significant personal contributions to the Scriptures.

Scriptures rose out of real human situations. And they were written by people for particular historical circumstances. If Christians were to understand the Scriptures properly, they must not only stress the divine origins of Scripture, but also their human, historical origins. The authority of Scripture gave weight to both the divine and human sides of biblical inspiration.

Through Learning from Trusted leaders / Church Traditions:

Hebrews 13:17 - 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.

Reformers spoke of the authority of Scripture under the rubric of *Sola Scriptura* — "Scripture alone." Unfortunately, many evangelicals today have a serious misunderstanding of the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*. Believing that the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* implies that we should have no authority but the Bible. But this wasn't the position of the Reformation, and it's not a true implication of the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*. The Reformers insisted on *Sola Scriptura*, not because they believed that the Bible was the only authority for believers. Rather, they meant that the Bible was the only unquestionable authority for believers.

The doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* led Calvin to insist that the teachings of the church should finally be evaluated in the light of Scripture. As he put it here, "the standard of Scripture" must be applied.

But third, and most importantly for our purposes here, Calvin claimed that the doctrines of the past should be accepted "like a provisional judgment." That is to say, the longstanding, ancient findings of the church should be accepted as our provisional or preliminary judgments. We should accept their teaching until the weight of careful, biblical exegesis proves them wrong.

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