

Theology 101 – An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine

Selected Verses

I. Introduction to Theology

A. Who should care about theology?

1. Every Christian is a theologian
 - a. The only question is whether we are competent theologians or sloppy theologians
 - b. The only way to avoid sloppy or ignorant amateur theology is to study theology
2. CS Lewis said, “So for my own part, I tend to find the doctrinal books often more helpful in devotion than the devotional books, and I rather suspect that the same experience may await others. I believe that many who find that "nothing happens" when they sit down or kneel down, to a book of devotion, would find that the heart sings unbidden while they are working their way through a tough bit of theology with a pipe in their teeth and pencil in their hand.” (C. S. Lewis, Preface to Athanasius' *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*)
3. Theology is thinking about God and expressing those thoughts in some way.
 - a. This class is intended for anyone who has an interest in knowing the central doctrines of the Bible in greater depth.
 - b. The class will spend most of its time in Scripture and will help equip believers to better understand and express their Christian faith.
 - c. The ultimate goal in studying theology is to grow in faith and more fully conform our lives to the image of Christ.

B. Concepts and Definitions

1. The concept of theology
 - a. The word “theology” is from *theos* meaning God and *logos* meaning rational expression
 - b. Together the word ‘theology’ means “the rational interpretation of Christian faith”
2. ‘Systematic theology’ is a study that intends to determine what the Bible teaches about any given topic.
 - a. Theology can be comprehended in an orderly and rational manner
 - b. Theology requires exegesis and is well suited to systemization
 - c. Theology is a Bible based study

- d. Systematic theology relates the data of biblical revelation as a whole in order to understand the fullness of God's self-revelation
 - e. In summary, 'systematic theology' is the discovery, systemization, and presentation of fully developed truths about God and the works of God.
3. 'Biblical Theology' is the study of theology as it develops through the progressive revelation of Scripture
- a. Biblical theology will focus with greater emphasis on understanding the development of theology as God reveals more about Himself and His works over the whole progressive course of Biblical revelation
 - b. Biblical theology still requires a systematic approach and presentation
 - c. Biblical theology may focus on the theological understanding or focus of individual authors of Scripture – i.e. 'the theology of Jeremiah' or 'OT theology'
 - d. By contrast, systematic theology is more concerned with what the whole of completed revelation says about a given theological topic
4. Religion vs Theology
- a. Religion is the human system of belief, worship practices, and culture based on human needs and understanding of the world.
 - b. Theology is the human system of belief, worship practices, and culture based on what God reveals about Himself and His world.

C. Some Preliminary Assumptions

1. Hermeneutical Approach
- a. We will employ a basic historical-grammatical-literary approach
 - b. This means that Scripture will be understood within the context that it is given – the historical context, authorial context, and biblical context
 - c. Our goal in Scripture interpretation is to understand what the author intended to say – this understanding is gained through a plain reading of the text while following traditional grammatical rules and conventions
 - d. Scripture will be interpreted within its literary context as well – poetry is read and understood differently than narrative, for example
 - e. Scripture will be taken literally unless the context dictates otherwise
2. The legitimacy of 'proof texts'
- a. More 'liberal' theologians tend to be critical of 'proof texts,' preferring the flexibility to be creative and employ a more philosophical approach to theology

- b. However, our theology will depend on proof texts
- c. Every theological assertion we make will be backed up by at least one reference verse.
- d. In some cases, we may base a theological understanding on several verses taken together, but the resulting theological assertion must be rooted firmly in a clear reading of Scripture.
- e. Proof texts must be used in context – a verse taken out of context may be misleading, so care must be used. In most cases, our proof texts will include a short passage, rather than a single verse.

3. Authority

- a. Scripture is the highest (but not only) authority and governs all interpretations
- b. Our feelings and our intellectual reason may lead us astray if we don't allow ourselves to submit to the authority of Scripture
- c. Our 'faith tradition' or 'denominational doctrine' may inadvertently cause us to overlook contrary teaching in Scripture. We must be aware of this inherent bias and allow Scripture to challenge what we believe
- d. Personal 'experience' is not the same as divine revelation

4. Personal preparations

- a. Christian theologians must be believers – don't trust an unbelieving 'Christian theologian!'
- b. We must try to think theologically – that is we must take care to allow Scripture to influence our theology, and to also understand the basic inviolable truths of God
 - 1) If our understanding tells us that God is deceptive, then our understanding is faulty because we know that God cannot deceive
 - 2) We will talk about heresy a lot in this class, because it helps to provide some 'guardrails' to our theological discussions
 - 3) Don't feel bad if you say something that is accidentally heretical! We've all done it at some point or another – it is a good way to learn to be precise with our language and illustrations
 - 4) In some cases, there is simply room for interpretation – in these cases we must examine the evidence and made a choice (Arminianism vs Calvinism)
- c. We must rely upon the Holy Spirit
 - 1) Jn. 16:12-15

- 2) 1 Cor. 2:10-13
- 3) Prayerfully consider your doctrinal positions
- d. Theology is a spiritual pursuit
 - 1) Our study of theology can be devotional
 - 2) Our study should be worshipful
 - 3) Our theological understanding should affect the way we think – it should pierce our souls and cause us to consider our faith in a deeper manner and be more conformed to the image of Christ

D. What is an 'Essential' Doctrine?

1. An essential Doctrine is a Doctrine that must be understood correctly in order to be an orthodox Christian.
 - a. For example, we must believe that Jesus actually died and rose from the dead, because this is an essential part of the atonement that Jesus provided and this understanding is confirmed by Scripture. Acts 2:24-32; Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:14-17
 - b. Another big one is that Jesus is fully God – Jn. 1:1-2, 14 w/1 Jn. 4:2-3; 8:58 w/Ex. 3:14; 14:9; Col. 2:9; Phil 2:5-8; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8
 - c. Salvation by faith – Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 2:21; 5:4; Rom. 3:20 w/Rom. 4:5; 10:9-10
 - d. The Gospel itself – 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Gal. 1:8-9
 - e. There is only one God – Ex. 20:3-6; Isa. 43:10; 44:6-8
 - f. Jesus is the only way – Jn. 14:6
 - g. Essential doctrines are doctrines that we would die for.
2. Doctrines to die for
 - a. The essentials of evangelical Christianity
 - b. The things clearly taught as foundations of orthodox faith
3. Doctrines to divide for
 - a. Issues absolutely central to life and worship in church (little 'c')
 - b. We may divide over these issues, but still remain united as evangelical Christians
 - c. Disagreement on these issues does not cause our salvation to come into question, but would be significant enough that it could cause a denominational change
 - d. Infant baptism vs adult baptism (paedo vs credo)
 - e. sprinkling vs immersion
 - f. virgin birth
 - g. Trinity

- h. other?
- 4. Doctrines to debate for
 - a. Issues where we disagree and argue with each other, but still worship together in the same church fellowship
 - b. This can be a productive disagreement, whereas the 'divide for' disagreement would be more disruptive
 - c. Worship style – hymn vs contemporary
 - d. Post/Mid/Pre trib
 - e. Other?
- 5. Doctrines to decide for
 - a. Some issues fall into the areas of freedom – Rom. 14
 - b. Scripture may be vague on some issues
 - c. These things would be issues that we might not even argue about
 - d. Appropriate hair lengths for men and women
 - e. Alcohol consumption (tee-totaler vs glass of wine with dinner)
 - f. Other?

E. Some introductory 'mind games' – Agree/Disagree

(These will help us to think like theologians – and make some good discussion)

1. As long as I love Jesus, it doesn't really matter what I believe. (Agree or Disagree?)
 - a. Doctrine is important – how about sin, atonement, justification, forgiveness, etc.
 - b. The gospel includes love, but is more than that too
 - c. Which Jesus do you love? The hippie Jesus? The Muslim Jesus? The Mormon Jesus? The JW Jesus? The Jesus is my homeboy Jesus?
2. A good way to defend ourselves against false teaching is to learn more about the common false religions. (Agree or Disagree?)
 - a. What does Scripture say on this topic? Read Eph. 4:11-16
 - b. The best defense against false doctrine is to know right doctrine
3. Too much talk about sin and hell can turn a non-Christian away from the gospel and church. In a society that struggles with self-image, we should emphasize love and acceptance instead."
 - a. What is the gospel?
 - b. Can the gospel be understood without an understanding of sin and the full penalty for sin? Does the Bible talk about sin and hell?

4. We should not let disagreement over minor points of doctrine affect our unity.
 - a. First, we must define 'minor points'
 - b. Yes, truly minor points should not affect our unity
 - c. However, some doctrine is worth fighting for.
5. The Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it.
 - a. Yep, that's me.
 - b. However, this comes with the responsibility of knowing what the Bible says.
6. I don't see how anyone can look at a newborn baby and not believe in God.
 - a. This brings up the question of general revelation vs special revelation
 - b. To what extent does God reveal himself in creation?

F. What to expect from 'Theology 101'

1. We will explore what the Bible says about several theological topics
 - a. The Doctrine of Revelation – general, special, inspiration, inerrancy, scripture, and canon
 - b. The Doctrine of God – trinity, attributes of God, the decree of God, election, creation, providence, God the Father
 - c. Doctrine of Christ – person of Christ, offices of Christ, and the atonement of Christ
 - d. Holy Spirit – person and work
 - e. Angels – good angels, bad angels, and Satan
 - f. Humanity – Creation, nature of man, and the unity of mankind
 - g. Sin – nature, original, and personal
 - h. Salvation – common grace vs saving grace, general vs effectual calling, elements of salvation, sanctification, and perseverance
 - i. The Church – universal church and local church, the church and Israel
 - j. Last Things – individual eschatology (after life), general eschatology, and Israel
2. As a class, we will discuss each theological topic
 - a. We will discuss different theological understandings
 - b. We will talk about strengths and weaknesses of different theological interpretations
 - c. We may talk about common misperceptions or heresies
 - d. We will always explore 'both sides' of every issue
 - e. I may argue in favor of a point of view that I don't agree with just to aid in understanding an issue
 - f. We will challenge one another and ask lots of questions!

3. We will study Scripture
 - a. We may spend several weeks on some topics, where others will go quickly
 - b. We may spend some time studying passages at length to gain a better understanding of a topic
 - c. We will talk about some “big picture” topics in addition to the individual systematic theological categories
 - d. For example, we will study God’s interaction with his chosen people in the Pentateuch to gain a better understanding of who God is and how he desires for his chosen people to relate to him
4. We will work on personal doctrinal statements
 - a. A ‘doctrinal statement’ is a concise, but complete statement of what we believe
 - b. Our doctrinal statements will cover all of the topics listed above
 - c. Each belief statement will be supported by Scripture
 - d. I will provide some sample statements for you to look at
 - e. I strongly recommend that each of you write your own doctrinal statements, although I am not going to ‘check homework’
 - f. However, if you do want me to review/criticize your statements, I will – just let me know