

Introduction to Theology

A. What is Theology?

1. The simplest definition:
 - a. Millard Erickson, a modern Baptist theological who wrote one the most exhaustive and trusted systematic theologies available, defined theology simply as “the study or science of God”
 - b. The word comes from two Greek words, theos meaning “God”, and logos meaning “word of” or “study of”
2. A more complete definition:
 - a. Since God is an active being, working in, among, and with His creation, theology also seeks to understand God’s creation and how He interacts with it, including His most precious creation, us
 - b. So, Erickson proposes this: “that discipline which strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith, based primarily upon the Scriptures, placed in the context of culture in general, worded in a contemporary idiom, and related to issues of life”—that’s a mouthful so let’s simplify it:
 - 1) It DESCRIBES the doctrines of the Christian faith (what we believe)
 - 2) It is DETERMINED from the Bible
 - 3) It is STUDIED in the context of human culture
 - 4) It is WORDED in a way that we can understand today
 - 5) And, it is UNDERSTOOD in how it relates to our lives

Dustin: Ryrie Quote

B. Different Types of Theology

1. Natural Theology:
 - a. The study of what nature—God’s Creation—reveals about God and itself
 - b. It tries to answer the question, “What can we learn about God, His creation, and man from nature?”
 - c. It relies upon human observation, reason and philosophy
 - d. It’s not perfect because:
 - 1) It’s limited in what it reveals (e.g. it reveals God’s glory but not salvation)
 - 2) It’s fallen (e.g. it doesn’t always work as God intended due to the Fall)
 - 3) We’re fallen (e.g. our minds are not only finite but marred by sin)
 - e. EXAMPLES:
 - 1) What can we learn about God from studying the universe?
 - 2) What can we learn about God by studying the human body?
 - 3) What can we learn about man by observing human behavior?
2. Historical Theology:
 - a. The study of how Christians have understood or defined Biblical doctrines at various times in the history of the Church

- b. It strives to answer the question, “How did the Church’s understanding of a particular Biblical doctrine change over time and why?”
 - c. It relies on records from Church councils, creeds, confessions, heretical teachings and generally breaks down beliefs into four time periods:
 - 1) Patristic Period (AD 100-400)
 - 2) Middle Ages/Renaissance (AD 400-1500)
 - 3) Reformation/Post Reformation (AD 1500-1750)
 - 4) Modern Era (AD 1750-present)
 - d. EXAMPLES:
 - 1) Martin Luther’s 95 theses that changed how the Church understood works, salvation, indulgences, etc.
 - 2) The Age of Enlightenment/Reason in the 1600s in Europe, which emphasized reason over revelation and believed that man could obtain objective truth about the world, reality, and religion on his own; this impacted even Christianity (mostly in a negative way)
 - 3) Modern Example?
3. Practical Theology:
- a. The study of how to apply theological principles and understanding to everyday life
 - b. It tries to answer questions like, “How does this principle or doctrine explain what we see in the world?” and “How does it apply to my life as a Christian?”
 - c. It relies on both studying the Bible and using common sense and reason to apply what is learned from the Bible to life
 - d. It shapes how we behave, talk, interact with others, and even determines how we preach and teach
 - e. EXAMPLE:
 - 1) God calls His people to be holy because He is holy (Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 20:7). What does this mean? How do we do it?
 - 2) Jesus commanded us to be merciful just as God our Father is merciful (Luke 6:36)? What does that mean and how do we live it out?
4. Biblical Theology:
- a. The study of Biblical doctrines as they are revealed in individual books or portions of the Bible, but also how they are revealed chronologically and historically through the Bible
 - b. It tries to answer questions like:
 - 1) What does the OT teach us about salvation? vs. What does the NT teach us?
 - a) Salvation in the OT is more focused on God’s earthly blessings and promises to Israel than it is eternal life
 - b) Salvation in the NT is more focused on eternal life
 - 2) How did God’s revelation about Messiah change over time, from Genesis to Revelation?
 - a) Genesis: God simply promised Adam and Even that their descendant would crush the head of the Serpent
 - b) Genesis: God revealed to Abraham that the world would be blessed through his descendent
 - c) Deuteronomy: God revealed how He would raise up another prophet like Moses
 - d) 2 Samuel: God revealed that David’s descendant would have an eternal kingdom

- e) Psalms: God revealed how Messiah would be His Son, would teach in parables, much about how He would die, and how He would not see decay
 - f) Isaiah: God revealed that Messiah would be despised, rejected, suffer for the sins of others, die, and ultimately bring salvation to the ends of the earth
 - g) Daniel: God revealed how Messiah would bring an end to sin
 - h) Zechariah: God revealed exactly how Messiah would enter Jerusalem (Triumphal Entry)
 - i) Malachi: God revealed the Messiah would be preceded by a messenger (John the Baptist) who would prepare the way for Messiah
- 3) How does Paul's discussion of works in Romans (Romans 2:8; chapters 3, 4, & 9) differ from James's discussion of works in his letter (James 2:14-26)?
- a) Paul addresses the relationship between works and faith as it relates to eternal salvation (faith alone saves; works plays no part)
 - b) James addresses the relationship between works and faith as it relates to navigating trials (faith without works is dead because faith plus works is required to save from trials)
5. Systematic Theology:
- a. Takes what is learned through Biblical theology and organizes it into topics or systems in order to present what the entire Bible says on each Biblical principle or doctrine
 - b. It strives to answer questions like, "What does the entire Bible have to say about the topic of God, or of man, angels, demons, sin, salvation, etc.?"
 - c. So, with Biblical theology we might say the book of Judges teaches us this about God's judgment, whereas systematic theology would say the ENTIRE Bible teaches this, this, and this about God's judgment.
 - d. This is one of the important things about systematic theology: it presents us with a well-rounded, exhaustive understanding of what God has revealed throughout the Bible regarding a host of principles and doctrines; it gives us a more complete picture
 - e. For this reason, systematic theology is generally taught one topic at a time—in Bible colleges and seminaries, often entire classes are dedicated to just a single topic like eschatology and last a full semester
 - f. Our focus in this series is on systematic theology and we will be taking a similar approach, addressing a single topic each week

C. What Are We Going to Study?

1. Bibliology (Mykel): Study of the Bible
2. Theology Proper (2 weeks; Mykel): Study of the nature and character of God
3. Christology (Mykel): Study of Christ
4. Pneumatology (Dustin): Study of the Holy Spirit
5. Angelology/Demonology (Dustin): Study of angels and demons
6. Anthropology (Mykel): Study of the nature and character of man
7. Hamartiology (Dustin): Study of sin
8. Soteriology (Dustin): Study of salvation
9. Ecclesiology (Mykel): Study of the Church
10. Eschatology (Mykel): Study of the end times

D. Why Study Systematic Theology?

1. Historically...
 - a. Back in the 11th-13th century, after the collapse of the Roman empire and the birth of the West in Europe, theology was referred to as the “queen of the sciences”
 - b. Theology was considered the most important of all the sciences because everything else was thought to be linked to what it revealed about God, creation, humankind, etc.
 - c. So, in order to understand morality, philosophy, biology, astronomy, geology, etc. they believed you needed to begin with theology, a study of God as found in the Bible, because the Bible was considered the source or foundation of all truth; it was the lens through which all things needed to be viewed
 - d. This is why almost every field of modern science was dominated by Christians for hundreds and hundreds of years, like Galileo Galilei (the great astronomer), Isaac Newton (the father of modern physics), Gregor Mendel (the father genetics), Louis Pasteur (the father of microbiology and bacteriology), Carl Linnaeus (father of taxonomy who came up with the naming systems of genus and species) and the list goes on
2. Today...
 - a. Unfortunately, much has changed over time:
 - 1) Most modern sciences are dominated by those who reject what the Bible says
 - 2) Studying theology has even fallen out of favor in churches, Christian schools and colleges
 - 3) It’s called boring, non-essential, even divisive
 - 4) As a result, the American “Church” has become more secular in its thinking than Biblical
 - b. This is precisely WHY we need to study theology today:
 - 1) So that we can know the truth—about God, our faith, the world we live in, and even ourselves (READ 2 Peter 1:2-4)
 - 2) So that we can grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ (READ Ephesians 4:11-15)
 - 3) So that we can protect ourselves from false teaching (READ 2 Timothy 4:1-4 & Titus 1:9)
 - 4) So that we can defend our faith and what we believe (READ 1 Peter 3:15)