

INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY

1. Definitions.

- a. Theology: “the ancient and ongoing discipline within the Christian faith that seeks to understand, organize, and articulate truth about the Triune God and His works of Creation and Redemption in light of His special revelation in Scripture, His personal revelation in Christ, and His general revelation in creation.”¹
 - (1) Biblical descriptions include:
 - (a) The whole counsel of God (Ac 20:27).
 - (b) The standard of teaching (Ro 6:17).
 - (c) The doctrine we have been taught (Ro 6:17).
 - (d) Wisdom among the mature (1 Co 2:6).
 - (e) The mind of Messiah (1 Co 2:16).
 - (f) What is written (1 Co 4:6).
 - (g) The traditions delivered by the apostles (1 Co 11:2; 2 Th 2:15).
 - (h) The faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jud 3).
 - (i) Our most holy faith (Jud 20).
- b. Theology proper: is the “scientific investigation into what may be known of the existence, Persons, and characteristics of the triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—and quite apart from their works.”²

2. Ubiquity.

- a. We are all theologians, whether we want to be or not. We all have a theology, or worldview, whether we acknowledge its or not. It is not a matter of whether we are or aren't a theologian. Rather, it is a matter of whether we are a good or bad theologian.
 - (1) “A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.”³
- b. We all act upon our theology every day. We are always practicing our theology. How we live is our theology-in-action.

3. Functions. The functions of theology are to:

- a. Define the Christian faith.
 - (1) “Now in the catholic church itself we take the greatest care to hold that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all; that is truly and properly catholic.”⁴
 - (2) “If everything that is called Christianity in these days is Christianity, then there is no such thing as Christianity. A name applied indiscriminately to everything, designates nothing.”

¹ Dr. Michael Svigel, Dallas Theological Seminary.

² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 129.

³ James W. Sire, *Universe Next Door*.

⁴ Vincent of Lerins (d. 445).

- b. Preserve the church from error.
 - (1) “The function of theology is to preserve the church from fads and novelty. A knowledge of the past keeps the church from confusing the merely contemporary with the enduringly relevant; it distinguishes the transient from the permanent. In so doing, it spares the church from diversions that, while appearing promising at the moment, are in fact harmful. A knowledge of the past bequeaths a stability and confidence in a world where flamboyant voices lend credibility to spurious ideas promising success. In essence, it brings to the church a valuable accumulation of enduring insights (often acquired at an enormous price) as well as relevant lessons and warnings. It abounds in examples, both positive and negative, for the contemporary church.”⁵
- c. Guide the church’s priorities, actions, and responses to events.
 - (1) “From one operation to the next, many things are actually constant. Doctrine, properly applied, often can provide a 70-, 80-, or even 90-percent solution to most questions, allowing leaders to focus on the remainder, which usually involves tailoring for the specific operation. Good doctrine informs, provides a sound departure point, and allows flexibility.”⁶
 - (2) “...[G]ood doctrine is somewhat akin to a good ‘commander’s intent:’ it provides sufficient information on what to do, but does not specifically say how to do it. Airmen should strive above all else to be doctrinally sound, not doctrinally bound.”⁷
- d. Express Christian doctrine clearly.
 - (1) “The study of doctrine should not only help us understand the truth but it should also help us to express it in the very best and clearest way because we have thought about it carefully. Looking over the shoulders of the ancients and listening in on their discussions are of great help in doing this.”⁸
 - (2) “...[T]he Gospel needs to be redirected in fresh and compelling ways to each new generation, for modern people are constantly changing their addresses.”⁹

4. Varieties.

- a. Historical theology.
 - (1) “Historical theology focuses on what those who studied the Bible thought about its teachings either individually or collectively as in the pronouncements of church councils. It shows how the church has formulated both truth and error and serves to guide the theologian in his own understanding and statement of doctrine.”¹⁰
 - (2) Allison, Gregg. *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*. 2011.

⁵ John D. Hannah, *Our Legacy*, 12.

⁶ U. S. Air Force Air Command and Staff College.

⁷ U. S. Air Force Air Command and Staff College.

⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, 72.

⁹ German theologian Helmut Thielicke, paraphrased in Bruce A. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), xx.

¹⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 14.

- (3) Hannah, John D. *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001.
- b. Biblical theology.
 - (1) Biblical theology is “the study of the actual self-disclosures of God in time and space.”¹¹
 - (2) “It deals systematically with the historically conditioned progress of the self-revelation of God in the Bible.”¹² It:
 - (a) Pays attention to the soil of history in which God’s revelation came.
 - (b) Investigates the lives of the writers of the Bible, the circumstances that compelled them to write, and the historic situation of the recipients of their writings.
 - (c) Studies revelation in the progressive sequence in which it was given.
 - (d) Recognizes that revelation was not completed in a single act on God’s part but unfolded in a series of successive stages using a variety of people.
 - (e) Focuses on the record of the progress of revelation.
 - (f) Finds its source material in the Bible.¹³
 - (3) Dallas Theological Seminary, Free Online Courses, <https://courses.dts.edu/home-2/>.
- c. Systematic theology.
 - (1) “Systematic theology correlates the data of biblical revelation as a whole in order to exhibit systematically the total picture of God’s self-revelation.”¹⁴
 - (2) Chafer, Lewis Sperry. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1993.
 - (3) Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 2004.
 - (4) McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 5th ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 2010.
 - (5) Ryrie, C. C. *Basic Theology: A Popular Systemic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth*. Chicago: Moody, 1999.

5. Dangers.

- a. Neglect.
 - (1) “In our day, theology seems to be an irrelevant topic, one that may even be destructive to the health of the church. Parishioners appear more attuned to quick and easy solutions to their felt needs than they are to the reflection and mental exertion required in the study of doctrine. Meanwhile, pastors seem to view theology as a subject to be broached with extreme caution, even embarrassment, preferring instead to wax eloquent on topics that are hardly the central focus of God’s revelation to us.”¹⁵
- b. Compromise.

¹¹ Gerhardus Vos.

¹² Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 14.

¹³ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 14-15.

¹⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 15.

¹⁵ John D. Hannah, *Our Legacy*, 9.

- (1) "...[S]o many pick up the latest theological fashion and hail it as something new. But in fact, what the new theology is now saying has already been said previously in each of the other disciplines."¹⁶
- (2) "Theology insists on following philosophy, no matter how far the assumptions of that philosophy differ from the assumptions of the biblical Christian worldview."¹⁷
- c. Pride.
- d. Divisions and quarrelling.
 - (1) **1 Co 1:10-13** 10 I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Messiah, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarrelling among you, my brothers and sisters. 12 What I mean is that each one of you says, I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos, or I follow Cephas, or I follow Christ. 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?
- e. Disconnect between theoretical theology (orthodoxy) and practical theology (orthopraxy).
 - (1) **Jas 2:18-20** 18 But someone will say, You have faith [orthodoxy] and I have works [orthopraxy]. Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith [orthodoxy] apart from works [orthopraxy] is useless?

¹⁶ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*.

¹⁷ Francis A. Schaeffer.