

I. Introduction to Theology

A. What is Theology?

Opening Question

- * When you hear the word “theology” or “doctrine,” what’s the 1st thing to come to mind?
- * “Theology” means a lot of things to a lot of people.
- * It is important that we all start this class on common ground.
- * So, today’s lesson will focus on helping us understand what theology is all about.

1. Definition of terms

a. Doctrine

- * Most simply, doctrine means teaching or instruction.
- * More specifically, Christian doctrine is the fundamental truths about God arranged in systematic form.

b. Theology

- * Theology is the study to know God and His relations with man.
- * It is derived from 2 Greek Words
 - * *Theos* (God) and *Logos* (Word)
- * Thus, the combination renders a literal meaning “words about God.”

Note 2 uses:

- * While it means “the study of God,” the term “theology” can be used both specifically and generally.
- * It is used specifically to refer just to the study of the doctrine of God.
- * It is used generally to apply to all the studies related to the Christian religion (OT studies, NT studies, preaching, missions, etc.)
- * In this general sense, “theology” and “doctrine” are used interchangeably.

2. Theology studies two aspects of God

- * If someone asked you to describe Jay Taylor, how would you describe me?
- * Give students a chance to give several answers.
- * Your answers fall into two categories (what I am like, and what I do).

- * *Likewise, the effort of Christian doctrine is to know 2 aspects of the living God.*

a. God’s Being

- * The goal theology is to know the living God--who He is.
- * What is the nature of God? What are his attributes?
- * But, theology is not only a group of abstract facts about a supreme being. It is also concerned with...

b. God’s acting

- * The goals of theology is also to know the living God--what he does.
- * Theology is also concerned with the “how” of practical Christian living.

- * Theology is established in the reality of who God is (His being) and what He does in relationship to the world (His acting).

Having established an understanding of what theology is, we can proceed to examine various...

B. Categories of Theological Study

Discussion

- * Theology can be broken into 4 main “fields.” (List fields)
- * Can you think of examples, areas of study, that would fall under each of the 4 fields?
- * *Develop diagram to show the relationship between 4 fields of theology.*

1. There are 4 primary classifications of theology.

a. Exegetical (Biblical) Theology

- * This includes fields such as biblical studies (OT & NT) and hermeneutics
- * Studies the contents of Scripture (biblical languages, archaeology, canon, principles of interpretation, etc.)

b. Historical Theology

- * Studies the historical development of Christian doctrine and its influence on the life of the church throughout history.
- * From the 1st Century (NT times) until now.
- * It looks to understand how the church has expressed its belief.
- * It considers:
 - * Biblical historical data
 - * Church history
 - * Secular history

c. Systematic Theology

- * Arranges in a logical order those materials from exegetical & historical theology.
- * This kind of theological study can take one of two forms:

(1) Doctrine (Dogmatics)

- * The systematic presentation of Christian beliefs.
- * “Dogma” literally means opinion or decree.
- * Man’s statement of truth set forth in a creed.
- * For example, the A/G has 16 fundamental truths in their dogma (statement of faith).
- * This is where the focus of this course lies.
- * We are taking a systematic look at all of the major Chr. doctrines.
- * I wanted you to know how it fits in the bigger theological picture.

(2) Apologetics

- * The rational, logical defense of what is believed.
- * An attempt to show that it is rationally believable.
- * To defend one’s beliefs from attack from without.

* *So far we have considered exegetical theology, historical theo., & systematic theo.*

d. Practical Theology

- * Application to life of the things contributed by exegetical, historical and systematic theology.
- * Our conduct based upon what we believe.

- * The expression of our understanding of how we should behave.
- * Includes studies such as preaching, pastoral care, church administration, counseling, worship, CE, etc.)

* *Note: None of these 4 fields of theology should be studied in isolation of the others.*

2. **Christian doctrine is closely related to all of these fields.**

* *Remember, Chr. doctrine is simply a statement of one's systematic theology.*

a. **Christian doctrine must be solidly rooted in exegetical theology.**

- * Only from focused study of the Bible can our system of Christian beliefs be developed.
- * The body of knowledge upon which a particular area of theology is developed must be built upon the foundation laid by sound biblical study.

Illustration

The task of developing doctrine could be likened to a director of a symphony. He takes the various notes, the themes, moods, and instruments, and blends them together in order to help the listener be able to understand the intent and message of the composer.

b. **Christian doctrine must be integrally related to historical theology.**

- * Our Christian doctrine can learn lessons from what the church has believed or done in the past.
- * Historical theology fills in the gaps between the time when God's word was written and the present time.
- * It provides a continuous story of the church's belief and understanding of God in the intervening time.

Illustration

- * If someone tells you, "don't touch that stove, the fire will burn you," you should listen to what they say.
- * If someone says, "don't jump off of that 100' cliff or you will die." I can learn from their knowledge.
- * If a wise person tells us from his experience/knowledge, we do not have to relearn it, but we can learn from others.
- * We may still study it for ourselves, but we should consider what they have to say.

c. **Christian doctrine must be integrally related to practical theology.**

- * Practical theology is the field that brings our Christian doctrine together with real life.
- * Practical theology is the facet of theological studies which provides the interface of theory and practice.
- * Practical theology is not simply instruction in church skills, but is the process of connecting the church with the real world through a process of reflection and action.
- * We reflect on the Christian doctrine, and then take the appropriate action to apply it to life. *Reflection + Action = Praxis*

Small group discussion

- * What we believe affects how we act toward God and others.
- * What are 3 examples of how our belief/doctrine can affect our actions?
- * Let me give you an example to get you started.
 - * What we believe about God affects how we approach him.
 - * If we see him as stern, harsh judge, we will approach him w/fear.
 - * If we see him as an all-loving 'Santa clause' we may approach him too casually.

Additional examples

- * Social action
 - * Do you believe our Christian obligation is to meet physical needs or spiritual needs, or both?
- * Husband/wife relationships
 - * Do you believe the husband rules the home exclusively and wife must subjectively obey?

Summary Comments

- * So we can't consider our basic Christian doctrines without being aware of each of these fields of theology.
- * Throughout this course, you will hear me refer to items such as...
 - * the biblical basis for this doctrine
 - * the historical position of the church on a given issue
 - * the way in which a given doctrine practically relates to our lives
- * *Determining theology is a task of the Christian church, it an active process.*
- * *So, the next thing we must consider, is how does the church do this?*

C. The Method of Determining Doctrine

Discussion

- In what environment can theology be determined successfully?
- Can a non-Christian effectively determine Christian theology? Why or why not?

1. **The starting point for determining theology**

- * Theology involves a response of both faith & reason.
- * Christian theology is relative to the revelation of God, while philosophical truth is relative to the human mind.
- * Theology demands a decision concerning the revelation of God, a response composed of both faith and reason.
- * Matt. 11:27 gives us some insight:
 - “All things have been committed to me by my father. No one knows the Son except the father, and no one knows the father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”
- * This passage provides us with a lens through which to view the theological task, while preserving essentials of the Christian faith.
- * See also 1 Cor. 2:10-16.

2. **The steps for determining theology**

a. **Step 1: Complete exegesis of the relevant biblical texts.**

- * One must first examine all of the biblical texts on a given topic.
- * They must do this by following sound principles of interpretation.

- * This includes understanding many things:
 - * grammatical context
 - * historical context
 - * cultural context
 - * linguistic concerns
 - * teaching of all of Scripture
 - * church history
 - * Be sure to note any biases of your resources

b. Step 2: Arrange the various passages into a cohesive whole

- * After we have examine all of the various passages on a given topic, we must then gather them together to determine recurring themes, etc.
- * We must draw from the various passages, from many different writers, into a consistent whole.
- * Make sure to allow the whole Bible to influence the theological decisions being made, not just one isolated text.

Illustration

- * Let me try to illustrate this point.
 - * What food do you like to have for lunch? (Ask this of many)
 - * Did you usually eat in your home or eat out?
- * From their answers, draw some overarching patterns.
- * So we can conclude, that AGTS students like to eat _____.
- * If just one person had said that they like to eat cold cereal for lunch, we could not come to that conclusion for everyone else.
- * This study has only revealed what AGTS students like to eat for lunch.
- * This does not necessarily mean that it is true for all Americans.
- * We would have to ask this question of other groups as well.
- * If we start to see repeating patterns, then we can conclude that Americans like to eat _____ for lunch.

c. Step 3: Determine the doctrinal content

- * The task is to distinguish between a message restricted to a particular culture or situation, and a message which applies to all cultures.
- * The effort of systematic theology is to uncover the transcultural messages and compile them as a doctrine.

d. Step 4: Present the truth in a systematic way.

- * To be meaningful, theology should answer questions that people are asking.
- * Theology is to confront culture with revelation in a form to which culture can respond and make a decision regarding the revelation.
- * This is the step we will be doing for this class.

* *We have looked at the steps for doing theology, but what are the sources for doing this?*

D. Sources for our Doctrine

1. Authoritative Sources

a. Bible

- * The Bible is the divine rule of faith and practice.
- * Whatever is not contained inside or proven by it, cannot be accepted as a article of faith.

b. Holy Spirit

- * The Holy Spirit moved on men to write Scripture and moves on us to illumine the Scriptures.
- * We cannot understand the Bible without the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

2. Secondary Sources

a. Church creeds and confessions

- * These are public testimonies of what is believed.
- * They are explanations concerning the meaning of holy scripture, which are taught by the church.
- * There are historical as well as contemporary creeds.
 - * Read some examples (Apostles Creed, Nicene Creed)
 - * Example: Rodney Howard Browne's God is good, all the time.
 - * Church in Springfield (Cornerstone) that sings a creed.

b. Philosophy

- * Philosophy is the rational effort to understand and logically explain the universe.
- * It is the attempt to answer man's basic questions.
- * Uses of philosophy in theology:
 - * It gives theology a framework within which to work
 - * It provides a vocabulary to express beliefs
 - * It stimulates theology to great precision in its declaration of truth.

c. Nature

- * Psalm 19:1-4 "Handy work" of God gives a *preliminary view* of God and what He is.
- * We can see God and learn of him through nature.
- * Romans 1 indicates that people can learn of God through nature.
- * Some of how God reveals his being occurs in His concrete acts.
- * The transcendent God is also the immanent God.

Example of a Horizon

- * If one were standing at the sea, looking out toward the sea, they eventually see the point where they can see no further.
- * The horizon is the point where the unknown (that beyond the horizon) and the known (that on this side of the horizon) meet.
- * In the same way, we can understand that the being of God (beyond the horizon) is known in His acts (this side of the horizon).
- * This method prevents us from reducing God to a set of abstract principles and characteristics.
- * It affirms both his being and his acting, both the transcendence and the immanence of God.

E. The Value of Doctrine

- * When some people hear the words "doctrine" or "theology," they instantly have a negative impression.
- * They think that doctrine is boring, or difficult, or not related to real life.
- * This is unfortunate, for there are many benefits, and reasons why we should study and

know Christian doctrine.

Small group discussion

- * In groups of 3-4 people, come up with your top 3 reasons why Christians should study and know Christian doctrine. (When complete, share answers together.)
- * *Let's consider 7 values of Christian doctrine.*

1. Doctrine is an expression of one's faith.

- * It is affirming what you believe.
- * Theology is the natural response of our faith toward Jesus Christ.
- * Christians must be able to give expression to their faith ("I believe....").
- * Such statements affirm who God is in Himself and in His interaction with men.
- * We can speak out of our experience, based on correct understanding and belief.
- * Christian faith is not blind faith, but faith in a God who has revealed himself and is knowable.
- * It is faith and understanding together which comprise proper expression of our relationship with God.

2. Doctrine fills the need of answering the basic questions of life.

- * Mankind has always been plagued by questions?
 - * Who am I? * What is the purpose of life?
 - * Why am I here? * Where did I come from, where am I going?
- * Experience alone cannot last long without a systematic statement of truth.
- * If someone only thinks he is on a pointless, meaningless journey called life, he will drift aimlessly without a course or direction.
- * But, it will be very different if one understands his life is planned by his maker, and he is being directed to his heavenly destiny.

3. Doctrine is essential to the full development of Christian character.

- * It provides a means for enhancing our relationship with God.
- * Strong beliefs make for strong character.
- * Clear-cut beliefs make for clear-cut convictions.
- * We must know the word in order to become all that God wants us to be.
- * It helps us know who we are in Christ and what it means to be his child.
- * It helps us to know what we are to do, and gives us a criterion for our actions.

Illustration

- * In the human body, our backbone is central.
- * It is essential, for it serves as the major support system for our entire body.
- * Just as a good backbone is an essential part of a person's body, so a definite system of belief is an essential part of our faith (relationship with God).
- * We must know what the Bible teaches before we can know what God desires for us in every aspect of our lives today.

4. Doctrine assists us in keeping all the teachings of Scripture.

- * The Bible teaches on many different topics, in many different ways.
- * The topics, however, are intermingled, and teachings are not always in complete groupings.
- * It is helpful when these scattered texts are brought together into topics and sub-topics.
- * We must make sure that we take into account all of the teaching of Scripture on a given topic, not just one isolated text.

- * Knowing doctrine helps us to do this.
Example: If only read Deut., would think obedience to God has to result in material blessing. But when I read the rest of the OT and NT, I see that this is not always be the case.

5. **Doctrine is a safeguard against error.**

- * If someone does not know the truth of the Bible, then he/she will not recognize when something false comes along.
- * On the other hand, is someone has studied, and understands, and has hidden God's word in his heart, then he will recognize the false when he sees it.
 - * Example: If we didn't know that the Bible teaches we are saved by grace alone and not works, we could easily fall prey to groups such as Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Buddhists, or Hindus who are striving hard to appease God through works.
- * See Matt. 22:29; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Tim. 4:2-4; 2 Pet. 3:15, 16

6. **Doctrine assists us in sharing our faith.**

- * One of the biggest excuses Christians have when it comes to sharing their faith, is that they are afraid someone will ask them a question they don't know the answer to.
- * Knowing what we believe give us confidence when we are sharing Christ with non-Christians.
- * We are better prepared to answer honest inquiries, as well as to defend Christianity from criticism.
- * We can even become pro-active, and take advantage of everyday opportunities to share what the Bible teaches regarding life.
 - * You know, the Bible teaches us that we don't have to worry about dying
 - * You know, the Bible tells us that in the last days there will be wars...

7. **Doctrine keeps the church & its leaders tied to Scripture.**

- * It is through theology that the church stays integrally related to Scripture.
- * It keeps us from straying off into merely human endeavors.
- * Doctrine (Scripture) is the criterion by which the church operates.
- * Everything we do must revolve around what the Scripture teaches.
- * It is only through the study of Christian doctrine/theology that the church can recognize that which is not Christian and not compatible with the Christian faith.
 - * Things from without: We face many challenges to our beliefs.
 - * philosophy, science, etc.
 - * Things from within: We spend much time and energy on side issues.
 - * Health and wealth gospel, etc.
 - * NT theme: The best way to prevent false doctrine is to know right doctrine (see 2 Peter, etc.).

F. Two Remaining Questions about Christian Doctrine

1. **Is Christianity rational?**

a. **Two incorrect ways to look at Christian doctrine**

- (1) An anti-intellectual approach
 - * It is wrong to think you have to throw your thinking ability out, if

you are going to believe in God.

- * God never asks us to give up our intellect (He gave it to us!).
- * We do need (and should have) rational grounds for our faith.

* *But at the same time, we cannot have*

(2) An all rational approach

- * But it is just as wrong to think we can explain away every aspect of Christianity.
- * There are some things that are beyond our finite, human ability to grasp and understand.

b. The proper (balanced) way to look at Christian doctrine

- * The Christian faith is not irrational, nor is it anti-rational.
- * But, while it does not go against reason, it does go beyond it.

(1) Christian doctrine is substantiated by objective evidence.

- * External evidence, such as the historical fact of Jesus and his resurrection.
- * The logical explanations from Scripture.

(2) Christian doctrine is substantiated by subjective evidence.

- * Our internal, personal experience with Christ.

- * Becoming a Christian is not exclusively a rational process.
- * The issue is not only a matter of the intellect, but is a moral issue as well.
- * Man has been left with a free choice to do what he wants.
- * And unfortunately, some people allow the moral side to over-rule the rational side.
- * Even though they may know that something is true, they choose not to believe it--because they know they would have to change.
- * It becomes a matter of their will--they don't want to believe it.
- * Listen to this statement from Milton's Paradise Lost: "It's better to be my own master in Hell, than the Lord's servant in heaven."

2. Does Christianity differ from other religions?

a. Society's syncretistic attitude toward religion.

- * We live in an era of syncretism.
- * People tend to combine belief systems.
- * Consequently, there is a tendency to combine all religions and say that they are all basically the same, just different methods.
 - * Whichever religion works for you.
 - * They're all just different roads up the same mountain to God.
- * There may be some similarities between many religions.
 - * Belief in a god.
 - * Belief in a golden rule.

* *But there are also significant differences--this is where the key lies.*

b. Christianity is uniquely different from other religions.

Examples:

(1) Initiator of salvation

- * Other religions are about man's struggle to find God, but Christianity is about God reaching down to man.
- * The Bible maintains that Christ is the only way to the Father.

(2) Basis of salvation

- * Salvation by faith and not works.
- * Other religions do good works in hope for salvation, but Christians do good works because of salvation.

(3) Assurance of salvation

- * Other religions offer no guarantee, but Christianity maintains that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

(4) Goal (Hope) of salvation

- * A major difference is the views of man's final destiny.
- * The goal of Christianity is eternal life with God.

(5) Views of God.

- * Christianity believes in one God.
- * He is a loving God who desires to have a relationship with us.

Conclusion

- * So the conclusion is yes, Christianity does differ from other religions.
- * We are going to spend the next 8 weeks learning how.
- * The truths of Christianity will hold up under close scrutiny.
- * Truth, by its very nature, is intolerant to error.

* *Now that we have examined a general introduction to the field of theology, let's start our examination of the basic Christian doctrines.*