

INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY

What is Theology and Why is it Important?

DEFINITIONS

- “Systematic theology is the study that answers the question, ‘what does the whole Bible teach us today?’ about any given topic” (Grudem 1994, 21)
- “The discipline that strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith, based primarily on the Scriptures, placed in the context of culture in general, worded in a contemporary idiom, and relates to issues of life” (Erickson 2013, 8)

YOU ARE A THEOLOGIAN!

- Every Christian has beliefs about who God is, who Jesus is, what salvation is, and how we should live as Christians
- We all organize and synthesize those beliefs together consciously or unconsciously
- Every Christian is doing theology in some sense!
- The question is whether we are doing good theology

ASPECTS OF THEOLOGY

- Is biblical—the Bible as the primary source
- Is systematic—draws from the whole Bible
- Is the basis for engaging culture and learnings
- Is contemporary and contextual in expression—using particular language, conceptual, and cultural forms
- Is transformative and applicable for living

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

- Biblical theology attempts to describe and summarize the teaching (or underlying convictions) of individual books or sections of the Bible in terms of their own emphases, themes and formulations. Biblical theology seeks to organize topics historically and in the order the topics are presented in the Bible. As such, it gives special attention to the teachings of individual authors and sections of Scripture, and to the place of each teaching in the historical development of Scripture. *Central focus: what various Bible writers believed and how they expressed themselves.*

HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

- Historical theology examines what major theologians or church movements of the past have believed, and how theology has developed through history and changing contexts. *Central focus: what theologians have believed and taught.*

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

- Systematic theology attempts to bring the totality of biblical revelation, in its doctrinal dimension, into a unified, coherent and well-organized whole. It can be organized according to topics that may not have been directly on the mind of each biblical writer, and can express itself in language not found in the Bible. It can address current, contextually determined issues raised from outside the Bible itself (though its central agenda arises from within Scripture). *Central focus: God and how he relates to us today.*

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BT AND ST

- What it meant
 - Diachronic
 - History of redemption
 - Reads the Bible inductively and descriptively to show its normative teaching
 - Rationality according to literary genres
- What it means
 - Synchronic
 - Topically organized
 - Rearticulates the Bible deductively and prescriptively to engage culture
 - Integrates various rationalities

NECESSITY OF THEOLOGY

- Theology develops “sound doctrine” leading to godliness (1 Tim 1:3, 10-11; 6:3; Eph 4:14)
- Theology safeguards the church from false teachings (Acts 20:27-30)
- Theology helps to develop doctrinal confessions
- Theology preserves the Gospel for effective mission (1 Cor 15:1; Gen 12:1-3; Gal 3:6-8; Matt 28:19-20)
- Interpretation of *parts* of the Bible is aided by understanding of the *whole* teaching of the Bible

TASKS OF THEOLOGY

- Theology, as a form of science (*scientia*), interprets the Bible and forms truth about God in doctrinal form for a particular context
- Theology, as a form of wisdom (*sapientia*), is the application of truth for the transformation of people and to cultivate godly virtue
- Theology seeks to understand and engage contemporary issues in various global contexts
- Theology facilitates effective preaching and effective service

EXAMPLES OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

- The Trinity
- The incarnation or two natures of Christ
- Divine sovereignty and human freewill
- *Sola Scriptura*
- The “gospel”

THE TRINITY: NICENE CREED, 325

- “We believe in one God, the Father all governing, creator of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father as only begotten, that is, from the essence of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not created, of the same essence (*homoousios*) as the Father, through whom all things came into being, both in heaven and in earth; Who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, becoming human. He suffered and the third day he rose, and ascended into the heavens. And he will come to judge both the living and the dead. And we believe in the Holy Spirit.”

SOLA SCRIPTURA

- This doctrine concerns the Protestant doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture
- Our Roman Catholic friends remind us that the words, “Scripture alone” cannot be found in Scripture itself
- “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or tradition of men” (Westminster Confession)

THE GOSPEL

- “The focus on the gospel presupposes a certain way of reading the Bible. There are those people who treat the Bible as a little narrow piece that gets you into the kingdom. Then come discipleship and training, which are detached from the gospel. In the Bible itself, the gospel is the big thing. It is the good news of what God has done and is doing in Christ Jesus, supremely through his death, resurrection, ascension, session at the Father’s right-hand, continuing to his return, the restoration of all things, the new heaven and the new earth, all grounded on the cross and the resurrection (1 Cor 15; Gal 3:7-9). This is very massive in its implications and bearings. From this come Christian ethics, Christian worldview, and frames of reference on how the church relates to culture. Focus on the gospel in the comprehensive sense is central to the Bible itself” (DA Carson)