

Dr. Rick Bartosik

Lecture Series: The Doctrine of God

Lecture 1: “Theology: What It Is and Why We Need It”

INTRODUCTION: Theology: What It Is And Why We Need It

Theology is the most important study that a human being can ever undertake. Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said: “It has been said by someone that ‘the proper study of mankind is man.’ I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God’s elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 7 January 1855, New Park Street Chapel, London, England

Definition of Theology

Meaning of the term: Theology is a word derived from two Greek words: *theos* (God) and *logos* (word, utterance, speech, discourse). It means, “talk about God.” This is really all theology is: rational discourse about God, or the study of God.

Usage: *Narrowly*, the term refers to the study of the nature and attributes of God the Father. *Broadly*, the term refers to the study of all the doctrines of the Bible.

Definition: Theology is “the discovery, systematizing, and presentation of truths about God” Charles Ryrie.

Nature of Theology

Theology is “the science of God” (Bancroft). A science is a department of systematized knowledge as an object of study.

If natural science is concerned with the facts and laws of nature, theology is concerned with the facts and principles of the Bible (see: Charles Hodge, “Systematic Theology: The Method.” Pp. 21-29, in Readings in Christian Theology, Vol. 1, Millard J. Erickson, editor).

The object of natural science is to arrange and systematize the facts of the external world and to ascertain the laws by which they are determined. The object of theology is to systematize the facts of the Bible and ascertain the principles or general truths those facts involve. We cannot construct a system of theology to suit our fancy any more than an astronomer can adjust the mechanism of the universe to suit his own pleasure.

Illustration: Botany is a branch of science dealing with plant life. Picture a scene in which there is a beautiful profusion of plants and flowers and trees. A botanist will go and discover all the different species of trees and plants and flowers, systematize them, and present the facts about them. This is what theology does. Theology is “the discovery, systematizing and presentation of truths about God.”

Presuppositions of Theology

The existence of God. We can have theology because God exists. This assumption is not merely that there is some power, or purpose to which the name of God may be applied, but that there is a self-existent, self-conscious, personal Being, who is the origin of all things, and who transcends the entire creation, but is at the same time immanent in every part of it.

The revelation of God. He not only exists, but He has revealed Himself. He has revealed Himself in nature, history and man’s conscience. But He has revealed Himself preeminently in the Bible. What the Bible says God says. We can therefore turn to His revelation to learn what He has revealed concerning Himself and His relationship to His creatures. The Bible presupposes the existence of God in its very opening statement. It describes God as the creator of all things; and also the upholder of all His creatures, and the ruler of the destinies of individuals and nations. It testifies to the fact that God works all things according to the counsel of His will. It reveals the gradual realization of His great purpose in redemption.

The Material of Theology

General Revelation (Natural Theology—facts of nature)

Special Revelation (Revealed Theology—facts of the Bible)

Question: Can natural theology bring us to a saving knowledge of God? No, for that we need special revelation.

The Method of Theology

The method of theological study is the inductive method

The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science

The theologian is guided by the same rules in the collection of facts as govern the man of science.

Almost all false theories in science and false doctrines in theology are due to a large degree to mistakes concerning the facts.

Examples in the realm of science: The theory of evolution (See Phillip Johnson, Darwin on Trial for a demonstration of the fact that the evidence does not support the theory that all life originated apart from intelligent design)

Examples in the realm of theology: The heresy of Arianism in the 4th century and its counterpart in the cult of the Jehovah's Witnesses today.

The Divisions of Theology

Biblical Theology: “investigates the periods of history in which God has revealed himself; or the doctrinal emphases of the different biblical writers are set forth in a systematic fashion. Biblical theology, while presented in a systematized form, is distinct from systematic theology that assimilates truth from the entire Bible and from outside the Scriptures in systematizing biblical doctrine. Biblical theology is narrower. It concentrates on the emphasis of a given period of history as in the Old Testament or on the explicit teaching of a particular writer as in the New Testament” (Enns, Moody Handbook of Theology, p. 20)

Historical Theology: Is the study of the unfolding of Christian theology through the centuries of the Christian Church. It examines the formulation of the basic doctrines to see how these doctrines were formulated.

Systematic Theology: Examines the whole of Scripture to set forth what the bible teaches on specific doctrines.

Practical Theology/Pastoral Theology: Sets forth the practical work of pastors, elders, and deacons. How to conduct funerals, how to perform marriage ceremonies, the Lord's supper, Baptism.

The Necessity of Systematic Theology

As an explanation of Christianity: As a result of systematic theology, Christians are able to have a clear understanding of the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith. “Systematic theology is necessary as a researched and studied explanation as well as a systematic organization of the doctrines that are foundational and necessary to Christianity. As a result of systematic theology, Christians are able to have a clear understanding about the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith. The Bible was not written in a doctrinal outline; hence, it is important to systematize the parts of the Bible to understand the doctrinal emphasis of the entire Bible” (Moody Handbook of Theology, p. 149).

As an apologetic for Christianity: “Systematic theology enables Christians to defend their beliefs rationally against opponents and antagonists to the faith. Early in the Christian church believers used their systematized beliefs to address opponents and unbelievers. This is perhaps even more important today with the emergence of humanism, Communism, cults, and eastern religions. The systematized doctrines of the Christian faith must be researched, delineated, and presented as a defense of historic Christianity” (Moody Handbook of Theology, p. 149).

As a means of maturity for Christians: Paul’s writings make it clear that doctrine is foundational to Christian maturity. Paul normally builds a doctrinal foundation in his letters, before he exhorts believers to live correctly. Many Christians have faithfully attended church services for decades and yet have little understanding of the major doctrines of the Christian faith. Knowledge of correct doctrine is important in Christian maturity and it protects the believer from error.

The Departments of systematic Theology

Theology Proper-the Doctrine of God
Bibliology-the Doctrine of the Bible
Angelology-the Doctrine of Angels, Demons, and Satan
Anthropology-the Doctrine of Man
Hamartiology-the Doctrine of Sin
Christology-the Doctrine of Christ
Soteriology-The Doctrine of Salvation
Pneumatology-the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit
Ecclesiology-the Doctrine of the Church
Eschatology-the Doctrine of Things to Come (Bible prophecy)

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