

## DISCOVERING THEOLOGY

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. Why study theology?

1. Because theological-mindedness, assuming that it is centred on sound teaching and true spirituality, is the best remedy against being 'blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming' (Ephesians 4:14).
2. *Every Christian is called to be a theologian.*
  - (a) You don't have to have a degree in theology to be a theologian.
  - (b) You don't have to be a minister to be a theologian.
  - (c) You don't have to be in full-time Christian service to be a theologian.
3. *The pastor's task is to prepare others for works of service 'so that the body of Christ may be built up... in the knowledge of the Son of God' (Ephesians 4:12-13).*
  - (a) 'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth' (2 Timothy 2:15).
  - (b) 'You, however, know all about my teaching' (2 Timothy 3:10).
  - (c) 'For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine' (2 Timothy 4:3).
4. *The present trend toward man-centredness and 'what's in it for me?' type of thinking has created a vacuum that has left the church in a powerless and superficial state.*
  - (a) Too many Christians cannot tell you for sure what they believe or why they believe it.
  - (b) Too many Christians know nothing of the history of the Christian church.
    - (1) Church history is the laboratory of theology.
    - (2) Knowledge of the past will help us to understand the present and face the future.

5. *All of us need motivation to be disciplined.*

- (a) This book may help motivate us to get on with learning that is long overdue.
- (b) It may help us discipline our minds that they will be filled with godly knowledge.

## B. Why theology and not just the Bible?

1. *One can learn facts about the Bible and miss the important principles that lie behind these facts.*

- (a) It is one thing to know the story of Adam and Eve, quite another, for example, to know:
  - (1) The implications for marriage and the family.
  - (2) The nature of sin, temptation and results of the Fall.
- (b) It is one thing to know that Jesus died on the cross, quite another to know:
  - (1) What the blood of Jesus meant to God the Father.
  - (2) What the blood of Jesus means to us.

2. *Theology is partly shaped by church history.*

- (a) None of us can live in isolation from the past.
  - (1) We all have our biases.
  - (2) They came largely from those who lived before us.
- (b) The Apostle Paul built his teaching on those who preceded him, e.g., Abraham and David (Romans 4:1-8).
  - (1) Our minds have been shaped by great thinkers as well.
  - (2) We often quote Luther and Calvin; they quoted Augustine and Athanasius.
- (c) Some say, 'But I will just read the Bible like Paul. I don't need Augustine or Athanasius or Calvin.'
  - (1) Chances are, they will still have their prejudices.
  - (2) We need to understand our prejudices, how we got them and how to correct them where necessary.

## 1 THEOLOGY: THE STUDY OF THE WORD OF GOD

### A. The word 'theology' comes from two Greek words:

- 1. *theos*, meaning 'God'.
- 2. *logos*, meaning 'word'.

### B. Theology is not a bad word!

1. *Theology was once regarded as the 'queen of the sciences'.*

- (a) Just two or three centuries ago the greatest minds aspired to be theologians or clerics.
- (b) Today the better minds aspire to be scientists or computer experts.

2. *On the Oxford University coat of arms are the words 'Dominus illuminatio mea' – 'the Lord is my light' (Psalm 27:1).*
  - (a) Since these words were written theology has passed behind a cloud.
  - (b) We want to help restore the honour of God's name by a return to theological-mindedness.
3. *Uninteresting preachers, dull theologians and less able men have moved in where spiritual giants once held sway.*
  - (a) Correcting this trend will not be easy.
  - (b) Learning theology may not come naturally.
    - (1) It will take effort.
    - (2) When Jesus said '*strive* to enter in' the Greek is 'agonize'.

## 2 SOUND THEOLOGY COMBINES BOTH THE MIND AND HEART

### A. One without the other will lead to a defect.

1. *Emphasis on the intellect alone is dangerous.*
  - (a) 'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up' (1 Corinthians 8:1).
  - (b) The intellect is only one part of our personality.
  - (c) Intellectual stimulus alone breeds pride and leads to dulness and self-righteousness.
2. *Emphasis on the heart alone is dangerous.*
  - (a) 'The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure' (Jeremiah 17:9).
  - (b) The heart emphasis can lead to an over-emphasis on the emotions.
  - (c) Ignoring the intellectual side of personality can lead to false pride and self-righteousness.

### B. THE BEST THEOLOGY WILL BE SHAPED ON OUR KNEES.

1. Prayer is the antidote to dulness and intellectual pride.
2. Prayer is the vehicle by which our hearts remain sensitive to the Holy Spirit.
3. What the Holy Spirit does not reveal is not worth knowing.

## 3 GENERALLY SPEAKING, THEOLOGY HAS SEVEN BRANCHES

### A. Revelation. The inspiration of the Bible.

1. *This is not a reference to the Book of Revelation, but to the doctrine of revelation.*
  - (a) Revelation comes from the Greek word meaning 'unveiling'.
  - (b) It means to unveil what is hidden.
2. *Revelation deals with the way God reveals Himself.*

3. *God has revealed himself in the Bible by the Holy Spirit.*
  - (a) There is a sense in which revelation and Scripture are used interchangeably.
  - (b) We know the Bible is the Word of God by the 'inner testimony of the Holy Spirit' (Calvin).
4. *The doctrine of the Trinity emerges under this heading, as well as providence.*

**B. Cosmology: the study of Creation.**

1. From the Greek *kosmos* (world, or order of things) and *logos* (word).
2. Cosmology deals with the question: Did God create the universe and all in it or did it evolve or happen by chance?
3. Cosmology also deals with environmental issues.

**C. Anthropology: the study of Man.**

1. From the Greek *anthropos* (*man*) and *logos* (*word*).
2. *Anthropology* deals with the question: Was man created or did he evolve?
3. *Anthropology* also deals with issues such as:
  - (a) Is man fallen?
  - (b) Is man a dichotomy (e.g. body and soul) or a trichotomy (e.g. body, soul and spirit)?
  - (c) Human psychology.

**D. Soteriology: the study of Salvation.**

1. From the Greek *soter* (saviour) and *logos* (word).
2. The words *salvation* and *redemption* are used interchangeably.
3. Soteriology is the widest area that will be covered most widely in future studies, dealing with such subjects as atonement, justification, predestination, the law, faith, sanctification and assurance.

**E. Pneumatology: the study of the Holy Spirit.**

1. From the Greek *pneuma* (spirit) and *logos* (word).
2. This branch of theology overlaps with all of the above but is extended to subjects like the gifts, or anointings, of the Holy Spirit.

**F. Ecclesiology: the study of the church.**

1. From the Greek *ecclesia* (the called out, or church) and *logos* (word).
2. Do not confuse *ecclesiological* (the study of the church and church government) with *ecclesiastical* (referring to work in a denomination, as in 'ecclesiastical appointment').
3. This branch of theology also includes baptism, the Lord's Supper and issues of church and state.

**G. Eschatology: the study of the last things.**

1. From the Greek *eschatos* (last things) and *logos* (word).
2. This branch of theology deals with subjects such as the Second Coming, unfulfilled prophecy, the final judgment, Heaven and Hell.

**4 THEOLOGY AND ETHICS****A. Closely parallel with the study of theology is the study of ethics.**

1. Ethics means moral principles or values.
2. Ethics deals partly with the relevance of theology.

**B. Theological ethics covers such subjects as:**

Marriage and family issues, economics, politics, the environment, sociology, medicine and psychology.

**5 THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY****A. Whereas the subject of spirituality overlaps with many of the above, for example, sanctification or the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, there is a need for particular emphasis on:**

1. The place of prayer in the life of the church.
2. The place of prayer in the life of the believer.
3. Witnessing and soul-winning.
4. How to read the Bible.
5. The place of preaching.
6. Worship.
7. Revival.

**B. 'Learning theology on your knees' is an aspect of our burden that will hopefully preserve us from an arid, sterile, irrelevant kind of emphasis that has not been helpful.****CONCLUSION**

Studying theology in college is not an option open to all individuals. But through this book you have access to a range of teaching more usually available only in college. The benefits are twofold: we will be able to understand Scripture at a deeper level and our devotional times should be more productive.

The Holy Spirit will help in this task: he has promised to 'remind you of everything' you were taught (John 14:26). However, if we are empty-headed before we are Spirit-filled, we will be empty-headed afterwards. I believe Revival, another Great Awakening, is coming. Those who are equipped when it comes will be the most useful to God, the church and the world.