

**CHRISTIAN
THEOLOGY**
for
PEOPLE
in a
HURRY

DARYL AARON



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This book is dedicated to
my wife, Marilyn,
and
my daughter, Kimberly,
two of God's most gracious gifts to me.

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INTRODUCTION

God gave the prophet Jeremiah a research project:

Cross over to the coasts of Kittim and look,
send to Kedar and observe closely;
see if there has ever been anything like this:
Has a nation ever changed its gods?
(Yet they are not gods at all.)

Jeremiah 2:10–11 NIV1984

In other words, “Jeremiah, see if you can find an example of a pagan people who has traded in one god or gods for another god or gods.” The implication was that he would come up with nothing. God then contrasts this discovery with the condition of Israel:

But my people have exchanged their Glory
for worthless idols.

v. 11

That is, “The ones who belong to the one true God, the *only* God (‘their Glory’), have done what not even pagans do—traded me in for *nothing* gods.”

The cosmic result of that tragic reality:

Be appalled at this, O heavens,
and shudder with great horror,
declares the LORD.

v. 12

The reason:

My people have committed two sins:
They have forsaken me,
the spring of living water,
and have dug their own cisterns,
broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

v. 13

Stunningly, his people preferred smelly, stale, stagnant water from a leaky artificial hole in the ground to cool, fresh, pure water from an inexhaustible, divinely given source.

This text is getting at the travesty of desiring anything other than the best, our Glory, God himself. This is why, for our own well-being, we are told: “Delight yourself in the LORD” (Psalm 37:4) and “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4). This is why David said:

One thing I ask of the LORD,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.

Psalm 27:4

This is why Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven [God’s dwelling] is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it

again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field” (Matthew 13:44).

God himself is the greatest treasure imaginable, and theology, the study of God, is the greatest treasure hunt imaginable.

This book is about theology, but specifically about systematic theology, a branch of studies generally organized into the following categories:

Bibliology is the study of how God has made himself known generally and the Bible specifically.

*Theology proper*¹ is the study of God himself—who he is and what he has done and will do.

Angelology is the study of other spiritual beings—angels, demons, and Satan.

Anthropology is the study of the pinnacle of God’s creation—humans, the bearers of his image.

Hamartiology is the study of that which is contrary to God—sin.

Christology is the study of the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity—who he is and what he has done and will do.

Pneumatology is the study of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity—who he is and what he has done and will do.

Soteriology is the study of God’s solution to the problem of sin—salvation.

Ecclesiology is the study of the church, the body of Christ—saved people corporately.

Eschatology is the study of “last things”—what God will do in the future as he has revealed it in Scripture.

A few notes about chapter order: In a sense, theology proper could come first since everything flows from God, including the Word of God, the Bible. Normally, however, Bibliology precedes theology proper because the Bible is the primary (though not only) source of information about God. So first we must understand what it is and have confidence in what we find there. After an introduction to theology (chapter 1), Bibliology will be covered in chapters 2–5. Theology proper will follow in chapters 6–11.

Angelology (chapter 12) and anthropology (chapters 13–14) come next, since they deal with beings created by God. Hamartiology (chapters 15–16) naturally follows anthropology, since sin is now a given with regard to human nature and experience. We cannot understand humanity in the present apart from understanding its fallenness.

Christology (chapters 17–22) would fit immediately after theology proper, since Christ is God, the second person of the Trinity. However, I will cover it after anthropology and hamartiology because, in addition to being God, Jesus Christ, also fully human, became human in order to solve the problem of sin. Theology proper, anthropology, and hamartiology help us to better understand Christology.

Pneumatology (chapters 23–25) could also immediately follow theology proper, since the Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity, but it also follows the study of the Trinity’s second person. Soteriology (chapters 26–32) fits next; the work of Jesus Christ provides the basis for salvation, and the Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ to those who believe in him.

Ecclesiology (chapters 33–36) follows as it deals with the corporate nature of all believers. And eschatology (chapters 37–40) comes last because it deals with “last things.”

I have written this book from an evangelical perspective. This means I am convinced of and committed to certain basic ideas: For instance, the Bible is what it claims to be—the very Word of God, without error, completely true and trustworthy; Jesus Christ is who he claimed to be—fully and eternally God as well as fully human; Jesus really did die historically and physically, really was resurrected historically and physically, and really is coming back to earth physically and visibly; and finally, faith in Christ is the only way for us sinners to be accepted by God and enjoy his presence forever.

As we examine and discuss these issues, I will provide evidence for why they are worthy of belief. I will quote or cite biblical texts along the way, and while I could include many more, I encourage you to look up related texts and read them for yourself as well.

After all, anything I might say that is not backed up by and does not adequately reflect God's Word is of little value.

Even those who share this same evangelical perspective do not all agree on everything, especially in the realm of theology. So I have included and have tried to fairly represent theological views I do not hold myself. I have also tried to keep my theological opinions from showing (too much).

It is my earnest desire that this book will whet your appetite for knowing God better, and that it will assist in laying a foundation for your personal, ongoing, lifelong pursuit of more and more of God, the supreme and priceless treasure.

Your life will never be the same. Happy hunting!

1

What Is Theology?

Many people, after hearing the word *theology*, roll their eyes and envision esoteric scholarly debates that have little if any bearing on real life. However, theology is much more basic, more foundational, than this, and it has everything to do with real life. The word itself comes from the Greek terms for “God” (*theos*) and “word,” “thought,” or “reason” (*logos*). So *theology* means: “that which can be said or thought about God—essentially, the study of God.” If the primary (though not exclusive) source of information about God is the Bible, theology can be thought of as the study of the Bible: What does it teach? What is true, according to Scripture?

A more formal definition might be something like this: “Theology simply means thinking about God and expressing those thoughts in some way.”¹ Notice that this describes activity. Theology is not primarily *something*, but rather the *doing* of something, specifically, thinking and expressing. The term *doctrine* refers to the results of the thinking and the content of the expressing (though sometimes *theology* is used as a synonym for *doctrine*).

Furthermore, notice from the definition that theology is not simply a mental activity; it also involves communication. This is

noteworthy because knowledge of God is too essential to keep to oneself. It needs to be passed on to help others understand God as well.

If this is what theology is, then it follows that theology is something *everyone* does, for everybody thinks and talks about God to some degree. Even atheists do; they just do so in negative terms. At some level, all people are theologians, whether they know it or not.² The question, then, is not whether one is “doing” theology but whether one is doing theology correctly.

So *how* do we do theology correctly?

How to Do Theology

First, one truth that Christians have long understood may initially seem counterintuitive: *We must do theology in faith*. Normally we would assume that after we thoroughly understand something, we decide whether or not we should believe it. But the Bible teaches another order. The apostle Paul says:

The person without the Spirit [the unbeliever] does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God [e.g., God’s Word, the Bible] . . . and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:14

In other words, only a person of faith—one who trusts in God and trusts in his Word—can truly understand his Word as he intends. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) put it this way: “I believe in order that I may understand.” Or, as others have rephrased it, theology is “faith seeking understanding.” The belief, or faith, is to precede the understanding.

This does not mean faith is blind. It is not mindless or irrational. God will never ask us to trust in something for which there is insufficient basis for belief. It does mean we must do theology in

dependence upon God, the subject of our study and author of our primary truth source—the Bible, his Word. Through his Spirit, he will guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

Second, *we must do theology in humility*. This should be obvious by the very fact that God is an infinite and perfectly holy being, while we are trying to comprehend him with finite minds that have been affected by sin. (See Jeremiah 17:9, where “heart” refers to the mind.)

“My thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the LORD.
“As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Isaiah 55:8–9

So we should do theology humbly, realizing we will fall short of perfection. This also implies that we should constantly be doing theology in order to be refining it so that more and more it purely reflects the truth.

Third, *we must do theology with the right motives*. Too often theology has been motivated by pride that seeks to show the superiority of one’s intellect and knowledge. This, of course, is the opposite of doing it humbly. In contrast, God-pleasing motives include doing theology to magnify him—“Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31)—and to help others—“Everything must be done so that the church may be built up” (1 Corinthians 14:26; see also Ephesians 4:15–16; Colossians 1:28).

Fourth, *we must do theology in the right way*. For instance, let’s say the subject of our pursuit is “What does it mean to be human?” Foremost, we must regard God’s Word as our primary source (more on other sources in chapter 2). Then we identify the biblical texts relevant to the topic. Next, we interpret those texts carefully, in order to understand them accurately, seeking to determine what

the authors intended to communicate to the original audiences (on biblical authorship and related matters, see chapters 3–5). Finally, we synthesize our findings in order to answer, “What does the entire Bible teach about what it means to be human?”

How to Understand Theology

Theology is also a more expansive term for a number of subdisciplines (including, for example, biblical theology, historical theology, and natural theology). Again, this book’s approach falls under the category of *systematic* theology: the study of the Bible that attempts to categorize or systematize its teaching according to broad topics. The broad topics we will use in what follows will be these: What does the Bible teach about the Bible? God? Jesus Christ? the Holy Spirit? created beings and sin? salvation? the church? the future (or last things)?

The answers are hardly irrelevant or stuff to interest only academic types. They are thoroughly useful, profoundly applicable, even vital to our overall well-being. Paul demonstrated this by how he organized his letters. The first part, generally theological, explains *what* his readers should know and believe (e.g., Romans 1–11; Ephesians 1–3). The latter part, generally practical, applies the theology and illustrates *how* his readers should live as a result of their faith and knowledge (e.g., Romans 12–16; Ephesians 4–6).

The order is crucial: *Theology (biblical truth) is the basis for Christian living*. Paul also showed its relevance by repeatedly encouraging pastors (in his pastoral epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus) to teach people “sound doctrine.” The word *sound* means “healthy.” The point is that biblical truth is necessary, for without it we will be unhealthy spiritually and vulnerable to false teaching (a serious concern of Paul in these letters).

While this relevance and applicability of theology is not always readily apparent, we ought to assume that it *is* relevant and continue to ponder God-revealed truth, with God’s help, as increasingly we

better grasp its relevance. God does *not* waste his words on trivialities. Theology based on the Word of God should not only affect our thinking (what we believe and understand) but also our behavior (how we live), and ultimately our character (who we are).

Therefore, and finally, to do theology correctly *we must apply it to our own lives and help others apply it to their lives*. God desires to use theology (biblical truth) to transform us into godly people. It is my prayer that he will work through the following chapters to continue doing just that.

» INTERESTING FACT

Up until the last couple of centuries, theology was known as the “queen of the sciences.” The assumption was that since everything comes from God, nothing can be sufficiently understood apart from God. Therefore, you were not considered to be educated in *any* field of study unless you had also studied theology. Oh, for the good old days, when theology was given its appropriate and necessary place!