

Introduction to Theology
Part One: Foundations

SAMPLE

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Introduction

- I. What is theology? *The study of the person and work of God.*
- II. Is the study of theology relevant and practical for living?
 “A fair question!—but there is, I think, a convincing answer to it. The questioner clearly assumes that a study of the nature and character of God will be unpractical and irrelevant for life. In fact, however, it is the most practical project anyone can engage in. Knowing about God is crucially important for the living of our lives. As it would be cruel to an Amazonian tribesman to fly him to London, put him down without explanation in Trafalgar Square and leave him, as one who knew nothing of English or England, to fend for himself, so we are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing about the God whose world it is and who runs it. The world becomes a strange, mad, painful place, and life in it a disappointing and unpleasant business, for those who do not know about God. Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfold, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul.” Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 14–15.
- III. Wrong Approaches to Theology
- A. *Intellectualism*: As a series of outlines or intellectual exercises
 - B. *Mysticism*: Reliance upon improper sources of theology
 - C. *Utilitarianism and Pragmatism*: “Don’t worry about the details, just get people to heaven.”

Evaluation: Wrong approaches to theology lead to a false gospel, including:

- a misrepresentation of the character of God;
- a misrepresentation of the works of God;
- an accurate presentation of the Gospel with wrong motives;
- burnout and a loss of joy;
- false profession and false security;
- an undue reliance upon technique versus prayer;
- an emphasis upon productivity versus faithfulness;
- dishonor to God in service to God; and,
- eternal judgment:

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge” (Rom. 10:1–2).

- IV. The Proper Approach to Theology: The pursuit of the knowledge of God, unto the love, honor, and obedience of God, for the purpose of the glory of God.

“Theologians do not discover or create God. God is. It is God that made us and not we ourselves. This is perhaps the most fundamental point for the practice of

theology and the living of life. God is not an object present at hand for our investigation, but the Almighty Creator and Redeemer before whom we bow in fear and adoration. In remembering our creaturely status, that we are finite, we should respond to our Creator in humility and obedience” (Source: ?).

“Theology faces the difficult task of giving an account of the One to whom we must give account” (Ibid).

V. The Doctrines of Theology

- A. *Prolegomena*: Introduction to Theology
- B. *Bibliology*: The Doctrine of the Bible
- C. *Theology Proper*: ...the Person of God
- D. *Angelology*: ...Angels, Demons, Satan
- E. *Anthropology*: ...Man
- F. *Harmartiology*: ...Sin
- G. *Christology*: ...Person and Work of Christ
- H. *Soteriology*: ...Salvation
- I. *Pneumatology*: ...the Holy Spirit
- J. *Ecclesiology*: ...the Church
- K. *Eschatology*: ...Last Things

VI. The Doctrine of Salvation (Soteriology) in Relation to Other Doctrines

- A. *Anthropology*: The recipient of salvation is man.
- B. *Harmartiology*: Sin is the ground of condemnation and the need for salvation.
- C. *Christology*: The person and work of Christ are the basis for salvation.
- D. *Pneumatology*: The Holy Spirit is the agent of salvation.
- E. *Ecclesiology*: The result of salvation, the fellowship of the recipients of salvation
- F. *Eschatology*: The ultimate consummation of salvation
- G. *Theology Proper*: Salvation through the work of Christ is the supreme manifestation of the character of God. *The better we understand the doctrine of salvation, the better we understand the magnificent mercy, grace, love, justice, wrath, holiness, and power of God.

Point: The study of theology is crucial to the Christian life. “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the Lord” (Jer. 9:23–24).

*Part VI, The Doctrine of Salvation (Soteriology) in Relation to Other Doctrines, is covered in part two of this class, Introduction to Theology, Part Two: Soteriology.

God Is the Starting Point of All Theology

I. The Nature of God the *Creator*

A. The Incommunicable Attributes

1. Self-existence (independence, self-sufficiency, aseity)¹

a) *Definition:* God is entirely uncaused, self-sufficient, and completely independent of all things in His being and actions. He needs nothing and owes nothing to anyone or anything, for by Him all things were created, and upon Him all things depend for everything.

b) Scripture:

(1) Job 41:11

(2) Psalm 50:10–12

(3) Psalm 90:2

(4) Exodus 3:14

(5) John 1:3

(6) Rom. 11:35–36: “Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

(7) Psalm 90:2: “Before the mountains were born, or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God”

(8) Isaiah 40:13–14: “Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge, and informed Him of the way of understanding?”

(9) Acts 17:24–25: “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things”

c) Implications of God’s self-existence and self-sufficiency to theology:

(1) God is completely *independent*.

(2) God needs nothing, is perfect apart from His creation, and did not need to create anyone or anything.

¹ For an excellent discussion of God’s independence, see Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 600-608.

- (a) God created man out of the overflow of His goodness and sufficiency, not on account of any lack or need in Him.
 - (b) God displays His grace and mercy in saving sinners from the overflowing of His goodness and sufficiency, not on account of any lack or need in Him (and certainly not for anything in us that would deserve such a gift).
- (3) God is in debt to no one (he owes no one anything), while man owes God everything, always.
- (4) Mankind is completely *dependent* upon God for all things, *including knowledge*.
- (5) As God created all things, all things are His handiwork and bear the distinct imprint of His genius and divinity.

Illustrations: Rembrandt, Picasso, a child's finger-painting

- (6) God as Creator and man as creature are absolutely distinct as to their being. God is not man and man is not God any more than the clay is the potter, and the potter the clay.
- (7) *God* has real, objective existence, regardless of man's perception of, or belief in, God's existence.
- (8) As God made and upholds all things, God's *creation* has real, objective existence, regardless of man's perception of it.

Illustration: If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, did it make a noise? Yes, the reality of God's creation is independent of our perception of it.

d) Questions for discussion

- (1) If God needs nothing, why did He create us?
- (2) How do we know that God is eternally self-existent?
- (3) Does the argument that all things have a cause prove that there must at some point be an uncaused cause of all things, and thus prove that God exists and is uncaused?

2. Incomprehensibility

- a) *Definition*: “because God is infinite and we are finite or limited, we can never fully understand God. In this sense God is said to be *incomprehensible*, where the term *incomprehensible* is used with an old and less common sense, ‘unable to be *fully* understood.’ This sense must be clearly distinguished from the more common meaning, ‘unable to be understood.’ It is not true to say that God is unable to be understood, but it is true to say that he cannot be understood fully or exhaustively.”²
- b) Scripture:
- (1) Isa 40:28: “...the Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.”
 - (2) Isa. 55:8–9: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’”
 - (3) Ro 11:33: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.”
- c) Implications of God’s incomprehensibility to theology:
- (1) God cannot be known unless He makes Himself known and gives us the ability to know Him; therefore, all knowledge of God is dependent upon His revelation (Dt. 29:29).
 - (2) God’s knowledge and understanding is infinitely above ours.
 - (3) Because we cannot understand something does not mean it is not true.
 - (4) Though God has given us understanding, reasoning, and logic, that we might know Him, and think and order our knowledge correctly, our understanding, reasoning, and logic cannot be the ultimate authority and standard for what is true; God’s

² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 149.