

WHAT IS THEOLOGY?

To most people, "Theology" is study about God and His Word, the Bible. However, there is a problem with such a definition because man, as a finite (limited) being cannot hope to successfully understand or study God, who is infinite (unlimited). The word "theology" is derived from the Greek words "Theos" (meaning "God") and "Logos" (meaning "word"), and literally means "God speaks!" *Theology, therefore, refers to the practise of listening and responding to God's Word!* In other words, it is a part of the lives of human beings who are in *relationship* with God. The word "relationship" is the key word in the practise of theology because only if we have a personal relationship with God can we ever hope to truly understand anything about Him. There are many people who call themselves theologians but who only have a limited, or at best an academic, understanding of who God is. In other words they know quite a bit *about* God, but they don't *know* God because they have never had a personal faith-based encounter with Him! This is something like knowing all about the Queen but never being able to ask a favour of her because, in spite of one's knowledge *about* her, one does not have that *personal* acquaintance with her that would enable one to ask her for a favour!

THEOLOGY AS A SUBJECTIVE SCIENCE:

It is necessary in every science to have an object which is the focus of study. For example, if one were to carry out a scientific investigation concerning a pencil, one would need a pencil to examine and analyse. *However, it is impossible to make God an object of study, for were we able to objectivise God, then He would cease to be God!* We could never get hold of God so that we could examine and analyse Him. We cannot put God in a test-tube! However, because God has revealed Himself in His Word, we are able to reflect on Him (think about Him). But as He has also revealed Himself as "our Lord" (the One who is greater than us and over whom we have no control), we must have an *exchange of object and subject to have true theology*. In other words, as we study the Word of God we realise that we have to subject ourselves to it in order to receive from it. God then becomes the One that asks questions of us, the One who shows us what we are, the One who teaches and rewards and reveals things to us. *Hence the object becomes the subject.*

Anyone who would reflect on God then must *first* surrender to Him and acknowledge Him as Lord! It follows, then, that one cannot approach the study of theology with pre-conceived ideas or opinions. It is absolutely essential to listen and hear what God has to say in His revelation of Himself. But hearing is complete only when it issues in obedience. *One hears God only when one listens to Him and is obedient to Him.* God would certainly not reveal more of Himself to someone who did not respond in faith to the things that God had already told him. Anyone who does not approach the study of theology in this manner will ultimately end up with a false theology and will also end up worshipping a false god - a god of one's own imagination!

THE PURPOSE OF THEOLOGY:

In Jesus Christ, God is simultaneously Person and Word. He *is* the Truth and does not first need to be investigated, analysed or interpreted (Jhn.14: 6 ...*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*).

As T. Torran says in his "*Theological Science*" (p.147), "If it were only a communicated truth we would be thrown back upon ourselves to authenticate it, and if it were only a person we would be thrown back upon ourselves to interpret him. But because He is a Person and a Message in One, He *is* the Truth who both authenticates and interprets Himself."

So, Karl Barth in his "*Evangelical Theology – An Introduction*" (p.22), says, "Theology is not called in any way to interpret, explain or elucidate God and His Word. Of course, where its relationship to the witnesses of the Word is concerned, it must be an interpreter. But in relation to God's Word itself, theology has nothing to interpret. At this point the theological response can only consist in confirming and announcing the Word as something spoken and heard prior to all interpretation."

The purpose of theology, then, is to declare the Truth of the Word of God as He has revealed, and does reveal it, to those who will hear and obey Him!

THEOLOGY AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD:

Man can only know God insofar as God chooses to reveal Himself to man. Romans 11: 33-36 makes it quite clear that God cannot be known of man *comprehensively* (in the absolute sense), but that He can be known *apprehensively* (in a limited sense). This means that the study of theology has no limits, for God's revelation is personal, differing in extent from believer to believer. Not all believers have the same knowledge of God (I Cor.15:34), while some believers have such an abundance of revelation of God that they are forbidden to disclose it, e.g. Paul in II Cor.12:1-7!

Fundamental to the study of theology then, is a personal relationship between the individual and God, and the distinguishing feature of true theological study is the *humility* it engenders in the believer – for the closer we get to God the more aware we become of our own inadequacies and ignorance.

HOW DOES ONE BEGIN A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

We have repeatedly said that true theology can only come about when a person has a *relationship* with God, but how does one establish such a relationship? In simple language, the first step is to "*...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...*" (Acts 16:31). This is the essence of the Gospel, that all men should personally commit their lives to Christ by believing that He is God in the flesh come to be the Saviour of all who believe in Him through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Jesus died to save us from our sin and bring us back into relationship with God from whom we were separated

because of sin. By acknowledging that He died for us, the Bible says that we are cleansed by His Blood and are made children of God. We become *born-again* (Jhn.3:16) and enter into a relationship with God as our Father. This is the beginning of this relationship that we have been speaking about - it starts when you invite Jesus Christ into your heart and life and He becomes your Lord. Only then will theology become meaningful and effective for you because you will be learning from God Himself through the Holy Spirit just as a child learns from its parents. Without the "new-birth", or salvation, we can learn *about* God but we can never learn to *know* Him personally! As we said before, we can know everything *about* the Queen of England, but we can never ask her a favour unless we personally *know* her! Sad to say, there are many so-called theologians who know *about* God but who do not *know* Him. As Christian believers we should cry with the apostle Paul and say "*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death...*" (Phil.3: 10 KJV).

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CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
(PAPER 002)

WHAT IS THEOLOGY?

Questions:

1. How does a person practice theology?
2. Why is theology a subjective science?
3. What is the purpose of theology?
4. What does a person need before they can begin to practice theology?