

HEAD, HEARTS, HANDS¹ (2)

Theology: The Basics

A. Introduction

1. If we are to know God better, we need to be theologians.

That is, those who study God and all His works in God's Word, in order to inform our minds, move our hearts, and direct our hands, which will lead to us living a godly life.

The reason why we should be theologians and study theology is because God has spoken, and we must hear Him, love Him, obey Him, and teach others of Him.

2. We do this by regularly reading Scripture, studying in-depth each book of the Bible, and then by crystallising our thoughts about what God's Word teaches on a theme or topic.

On Sunday evenings, we have topical teaching for the explicit purpose of bringing together what the whole Bible teaches on a specific area.

Before we can be theologians we need to answer some basic questions about what it means to be a theologian.

B. Who?

1. You are doing theology as a creature of God.

You are not God, but someone who has been created by Him.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

"So God created man... male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

This means our knowledge of Him will always be limited.

We will never know all there is to know about God.

"Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no-one can fathom." (Psalm 145:3)

"For 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)

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Romans 11:33)

"Our thoughts, our meditations, our expressions of him are low, many of them unworthy of his glory, none of them reaching his perfections." (John Owen)

2. You are doing theology as an image of God.

You have been made in God's image.

"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..." (Genesis 1:26)

This means we are able to know and love and obey God.

"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." (Romans 1:21)

¹ This series is inspired by and based on Prolegomena in Reformed Systematic Theology (Vol. 1) by Joel Beeke & Paul Smalley. This handout gives a summary of chapters 3 and 4

Though we are unable to completely know God, we can truly know God.

3. You are doing theology as a sinner against God.

Our natural response to the truth about God is resistance.

"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19)

Even as followers of Jesus we can be slow to believe.

"He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24:25)

We need Jesus to open our minds to understand the truth about God found in the Scriptures.

"Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." (Luke 24:45)

4. You are doing theology as a child of God.

God's Holy Spirit is at work in us, revealing God in His Word, so that we can know Him better.

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." (Ephesians 1:17)

"...and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." (Colossians 3:10)

The ascended Lord Jesus gives the gift of pastor-teachers to help us grow in our knowledge by preaching and teaching the Scriptures.

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13)

C. Where?

1. You are doing theology in the world.

Where people will not listen to the truth about God.

Where people will not like the truth about God.

"...always learning but never able to acknowledge truth." (2 Timothy 3:7)

"For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear." (2 Timothy 4:3)

2. You are doing theology in the church.

Where people will teach you to know God better.

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." (2 Timothy 2:2)

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:14-15)

Where people will encourage you to know God better.

"But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." (Hebrews 3:13)

"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:25)

D. When?

1. You are doing theology during the travelling days.

When we are wandering in wilderness not settled in the land.

"Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no-one will fall by following their example of disobedience." (Hebrews 4:11)

"And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth." (Hebrews 11:13)

When we see by faith not by sight.

"For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." (1 Corinthians 13:9-12)

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)

2. You are doing theology during the last days.

When God's Word is complete.

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe." (Hebrews 1:1-2)

"God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." (Ephesians 2:20)

"...the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets." (Ephesians 3:4-5)

When false teachers run wild.

"The Spirit clearly says that in the later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." (1 Timothy 4:1)

"Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour." (1 John 2:18)

E. What?

1. You are doing theology that is Christian.

We do theology as disciples of Jesus.

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:29)

We build our lives on His teaching.

"While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5)

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." (Matthew 7:24)

"No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." (John 1:18)

We are taught by Christ as we hear and obey the words of the prophets and apostles.

"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me." (John 5:39)

"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:27)

"He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." (Luke 24:44)

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." (John 16:13-14)

"I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles." (2 Peter 3:2)

2. You are doing theology that is Catholic.

Not Roman Catholic theology, but theology that is universally agreed on by the church in all places and times.

This theology, which is both Trinitarian and Christological, has been captured and preserved in the creeds of the early church - The Apostles' Creed; The Nicene Creed; The Definition of Chalcedon; and The Athanasian Creed.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

"While such creeds are not the inspired Word of God, to deviate from these standards is to enter into the territory declared heretical by the church through the ages." (Joel Beeke)

3. You are doing theology that is Evangelical.

At the time of the Reformation, to be Evangelical was to be Protestant.

Evangelical theology is defined by the gospel.

"Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve." (1 Corinthians 15:1-5)

Evangelical theology is declared in the Five Solas, which are boundary markers to keep us faithful to the gospel.

Sola Scriptura (by Scripture alone) as opposed to Scripture and tradition.

"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe." (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

Sola Gratia (by grace alone) as opposed to grace and human merit.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no-one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Sola Christus (by Christ alone) as opposed to Christ and Mary and the saints.

"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men." (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

Sola Fide (by faith alone) as opposed to faith and works.

"Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness." (Romans 4:4-5)

Soli Deo Gloria (to God alone be glory) as opposed to glory to God and the saints.

"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen." (Romans 11:36)

Evangelical Theology when taught is shaped by the gospel.

This can be summarised as "*Revelation, God, man, Christ, Holy Spirit, salvation, church, last things*" and are the truths that are most emphasised in the Scripture and which have been most significant for the church throughout her history.

"This is the only theology worth believing, living, teaching to others, and if necessary dying for." (Joel Beeke)