

## HEAD, HEARTS, HANDS<sup>1</sup> (3)

### Theology: Being a Theologian

#### 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 heads, 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.

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.

2. What does it mean to be a theologian?<sup>2</sup>

It is to do theology as a creature of God, an image of God, a sinner against God, and a child of God.

It is to do theology in the world where people will not listen to or like the truth about God; and in the church where people will teach and encourage you to know God better.

It is to do theology during the travelling days where we are wandering in the wilderness seeing by faith, not settled in the land seeing by sight; and during the last days when God's Word is complete but when false teachers run wild.

It is to do theology that is Christian (taught by Jesus); that is Catholic (universally agreed on by the church in all places and times); and that is Evangelical (defined by the gospel, declared in the Five Solas of the Reformation, and when taught will shaped by the gospel).

3. What do theologians do?

They study and they teach.

#### B. Theologians Study

1. They study with the right attitude.

They want to learn – to grow in their knowledge and understanding.

"I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands." (Psalm 119:131)

"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation." (1 Peter 2:2)

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18)

They are dependent – prayerfully reliant upon Christ to teach them by His Word and Spirit.

"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law." (Psalm 119:18)

"Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders." (Psalm 119:27)

"Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end." (Psalm 119:33)

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<sup>1</sup> This series is inspired by and based on Prolegomena in Reformed Systematic Theology (Vol. 1) by Joel Beeke & Paul Smalley.

<sup>2</sup> My summary of chapters 3 and 4 of Reformed Systematic Theology (Vol.1)

"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)

They are reverent – knowing that they are dealing with the Word of God, not the words of men.

"This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." (Isaiah 66:2)

"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)

*"Everyone who devotes himself to the study of holy literature should keep it firmly before his mind, in all of his reading and meditation, that the all holy God is, in a special manner, close to him as he works." (John Owen)*

They are submissive – to what they are taught.

"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring for ever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous." (Psalm 19:7-9)

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22)

We see this attitude modelled by the Lord Jesus during His earthly life.

## 2. They study with the right tools.

They use the exegetical theology tool to study and seek to understand individual passages of Scripture by asking "What does the text say?" (exegesis) and "What does the text mean?" (hermeneutics).

They use the biblical theology tool to trace how the doctrines found in an individual text develop and progress through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and find their fulfilment in Christ.

They use the historical theology tool to discover how that doctrine has been *"identified, formulated, defended and applied during the long history of the church."* This tool recognises that the Holy Spirit has been giving understanding to God's servants over the past 2000 years and reminds us that we not the first people to have read the Bible.

By using these three tools, they will be then ready to crystallise their thoughts about what the whole of God's Word teaches on a theme or topic (sometimes known as systematic theology).

## 3. They study in the right way.

To inform their heads so that they know God more.

To move their hearts so that they love God more.

To direct their hands so that they obey God more.

The danger comes when a disciple of Jesus is overdeveloped in one area and underdeveloped in another.

Knowledge and action without love leads to going through the motion.

"We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." (1 Corinthians 8:1)

"I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found

them false. You have persevered and have endured hardship for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love." (Revelation 2:2-4)

"You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.'" (Matthew 15:8)

Knowledge and love without obedience leads to loss of assurance and self-deception.

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:22-25)

"We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did." (1 John 2:3-6)

Love and obedience without knowledge leads to false worship.

"Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed... my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge." (Hosea 6:1-2, 6)

### **C. Theologians Teach**

1. The purpose of studying theology is to know, love, and obey God better.

But it is also so that we can teach others of Him that they can know Him better too.

2. Parents are to teach their children theology.

"Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when he said to me, "Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children." (Deuteronomy 4:9-10)

"These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life." (Deuteronomy 6:1-2)

"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

"O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old – what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so that the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands." (Psalm 78:1-7)

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4)

This is how the faith is passed on to the next generation.

### 3. Church members are to teach each another theology.

"I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another." (Romans 15:14)

"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." (Ephesians 4:15)

"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 the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16)

"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." (Ephesians 5:19)

This is how the church is built up in the faith, equipped to serve, peace promoted, and unity is maintained.

## **D. Putting it into practice**

### 1. Studying theology.

Pray – Ask God to help you to know Him, His works and His will.

Read – Collect together and read all the verses related to the doctrine you are studying.

Think – "What do the texts say?" "What do the texts mean?" "How do they relate to one another?" "Where do they fit in the Bible story?"

Listen – Learn from teachers of the past and the present.

Capture – Crystallise your thoughts in your own words.

Apply – How does this doctrine lead to doxology and devotion?

Teach – Share what you've learned with your children and with others in the church.

### 2. Teaching theology.

In the home: read, pray, sing the Bible together.

In the church: instruct, encouragement, sing to one another.