

OUTLINE STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES

by

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INTRODUCTION

I. DEFINITION OF THEOLOGY

“Theology is the science of God and of the relations between God and the universe” (Strong).

Theology is the “science of things divine” (Hooker).

1. Derivation.

Theology comes from two Greek words, namely, *theos*, God, and *logos*, speech or reason. Etymologically, theology means a reasoned discourse or treatise about God.

2. Use.

As a term, theology has both a narrow and a broad use:

- a. In its narrow use, theology means the doctrine of God, His being and works.
- b. In its broad use, theology means the sum of Christian doctrines.

NOTE: *By the Church Fathers, John is called “the theologian,” because he treats of the inner relations of the Trinity. Gregory Nazianzen was so called because he defended the deity of Christ against the Arians (A. D. 325-300), and since his time it has been the prevailing usage to employ the term theology in the broad sense.*

3. Possibility.

According to Dr. Strong’s definition, theology has a threefold ground, viz:

- a. “In the existence of a God who has relations to the universe.”
- b. “In the capacity of the human mind for knowing God and certain of these relations.”
- c. “In the provision of means by which God is brought into actual contact with the mind, or, in other words, in the provision of revelation.”

4. Necessity.

The science of theology finds its necessity in these grounds:

a. In the instinct of the mind for system.

“Theology is a rational necessity. If all existing theological systems were destroyed today, new systems would arise tomorrow. So inevitable is the operation of this law that those who most decry theology show, nevertheless, that they have made a theology for themselves, and often one sufficiently meager and blundering. Hostility to theology, where it does not originate in mistaken fears for the corruption of God’s truth or in a naturally illogical structure of mind, often proceeds from a license of speculation which cannot brook the restraints of a complete Scriptural system” (Strong).

b. In the importance of systematic truth to the development of Christian character.

Theology should be dignified, not disparaged. Its study has sometimes been decried as deadening the religious affections. This is a mistake, since it deals with those truths which are best adapted to nourish the religious affections. Genuine piety is not weakened but strengthened by the systematic study of religious truth. Other things being equal, he is the strongest Christian who has the firmest grasp on the great fundamental truths of Christianity. It has been well said that “Christian morality is a fruit that grows only from the tree of doctrine and that Christian character rests upon Christian truth as its foundation” (Farr).

“Some knowledge is necessary to conversion— at least, knowledge of sin and knowledge of a Saviour; and the putting together of these two great truths is the beginning of theology” (Strong).

See Colossians 1:10; II Peter 3:18. Texts representing truth as food, Jeremiah 15:16; Matthew 4:4; I Corinthians 3:1, 2; Hebrews 5:14; Job 23:12.

c. In the importance to the believer of definite and just views of divine truth.

Especially true is this of the preacher: Ephesians 6:17; II Timothy 2:2, 25. “To mutilate it or misrepresent it (the teaching of the Scripture) is not only sin against the Revealer of it—it may prove the ruin of men’s souls. The best safeguard against such mutilation or misrepresentation is the diligent study of the several doctrines of the faith in their relations to one another, and especially to the central theme of theology, the person and work of Jesus Christ” (Strong).

d. In the close relation between correct doctrine and the safety and aggressive power of the church: I Timothy 3:15; II Timothy 1:13.

“Defective understanding of the truth results sooner or later in defects of organization, of operation, and of life. Thorough comprehension of Christian truth as an organized system furnishes, on the one hand, not only an invaluable defense against heresy and immorality, but also an indispensable stimulus and instrument in aggressive labor for the world’s conversion” (Strong).

“A creed is like a backbone. A man does not need to wear his backbone in front of him; but he must have a backbone and a straight one, or he will be a flexible if not a humpbacked Christian” (H. Osgood).

e. In the injunctions of Scripture, both direct and indirect: John 5.39; I Corinthians 2.13; Colossians 1.27, 28; Ephesians 4.11, 12; I Timothy 3.2; II Timothy 2.15; Titus 1.9.

II. DEFINITION OF RELIGION

“Religion in its essential idea is a life in God, a life lived in recognition of God, in communion with God, and under control of the indwelling Spirit of God” (Strong). “The life of God in the soul of man.”

1. Derivation.

This is uncertain. Two views are held:

a. By some it is taken from the Latin verb *religare*, signifying “to bind back,” that is, man to God.

b. Others, with perhaps greater accuracy, take it from the Latin verb *religere*, signifying “to go over again,” “to ponder carefully,” that is, a reverent observance of one’s duties to God.

2. Relation to Theology.

Theology is a science; religion is a life. “One may be a theologian and not a religious man. One may know some things about God and not know God Himself” (Farr).

NOTE: *Some would make religion a kind of knowing, while others would make it exclusively a matter of feeling; but as Dr. Strong says, “Since it is a life, it cannot be described as consisting solely in the exercise of any one of the powers of intellect, affection, or will. As physical life involves the unity and cooperation of all the organs of the body so spiritual life involves the united working of all the powers of the soul. To feeling, however, we must assign the logical priority, since holy affection toward God, imparted in regeneration, is the condition of truly knowing God and of truly serving Him.”*

3. Relation to Morality.

Morality is a law; religion is a life. “Morality is conformity to an abstract law of right, while religion is essentially a relation to a person, from whom the soul receives blessing and to whom it surrenders itself in love and obedience” (Strong). From the Latin *mos*, plural *mores*, comes the word moral. The original word means *a way of acting* and the English word signifies a *right way of acting*. “Ethical” comes from the Greek and has the same force. “Hence the law which tells men how they should act with reference to right and wrong is called moral law, and man is said to have a moral nature because he is capable of acting right” (Farr). See Titus 2.1-15.

4. Relation to Worship.

Worship is an art: religion is a life. “Worship is the outward expression of religion. In it God speaks to man and man to God. It therefore properly includes the reading of Scripture and preaching on the side of God, and prayer and song on the side of the people” (Strong).

Worship, of course, may be both private and public.

NOTE: *“We judge a man’s theology by his creed. We judge of a man’s religion by his life. Theology is of the head, religion is of the heart. God judges us not by what is in our heads, but by what is in our hearts. Religion, not theology, is the final test by which we stand or fall. Many a one who did not subscribe to the Westminster Catechism may be in heaven after all, while another, well grounded in the Five Points of Calvinism and with the Thirty-nine Articles at his tongue’s end, may find himself in hell, damned in spite of his theology” (Farr).*

III. SOURCES OF THEOLOGY

The sources of theology are twofold, viz: Nature and the Scriptures. See Romans 1.20; Psalm 8.3; 19.1; II John 9.

1. Nature.

“The universe is a source of theology. The Scriptures assert that God has revealed Himself in nature. There is not only an outward witness to His existence and character in the constitution and government of the universe, but an inward witness to His character in the heart of every man. The systematic exhibition of these facts, whether derived from observation, history, or science, constitutes natural theology” (Strong). Outward witness: Romans 1.18-20, 33; 2.15.

2. The Scriptures.

“The Christian revelation is the chief source of theology. The Scriptures plainly declare that the revelation of God in nature does not supply all the knowledge which a sinner needs: Acts 17.23; Ephesians 3.9, 10. This revelation is therefore supplemented by another in which divine attributes and merciful provisions only dimly shadowed forth in nature are made known to men. This latter revelation consists of a series of supernatural events and communications, the record of which is presented in the Scriptures” (Strong).

NOTE: *There are four mistaken sources of theology, namely: traditionalism, rationalism, confessionalism, and mysticism.*

1. TRADITIONALISM.

Rome elevates her interpretations of the Scriptures to a plane of equality with the Scriptures themselves.

2. RATIONALISM.

Rationalists subject the teaching of the Scriptures to the criterion of human reason, rejecting what is contrary thereto.

3. CONFSSIONALISM.

The symbol and creed of the church interpret and explicate the Scriptures, but can add nothing thereto in the way of new knowledge.

4. MYSTICISM.

Christian experience is a witness to the truth of Scripture, but is not an independent source of knowledge of divine things.

IV. LIMITATIONS OF THEOLOGY

These are found:—

1. In the finiteness of the human mind: Job 11.7; Romans 11.33.

2. In the imperfect state of science.

The so-called conflict between science and revelation grows out of either an imperfect knowledge of science or an imperfect knowledge of revelation. They cannot conflict when rightly understood, for both are from the same mind and hand: Psalm 19.

3. In the inadequacy of human language: I Corinthians 2 13; II Corinthians 3.5, 6; 12.4.

It is impossible perfectly to express divine truth in human words. Even the Greek language, the most perfect medium of human communication known, is not subtle enough to catch shades of divine truth. The New Testament writers had to give new meanings to old words, thus: *logos*, *hamartia*, *mysterion*, *katallasso*, etc.

4. In the incompleteness of our knowledge of the Scriptures: Psalm 119.18; Luke 24.32, 45.

5. In the silence of the written revelation: Deuteronomy 29.29; Luke 13.23, 24; John 13.7; I Corinthians 2.9.

Observe the silence of Scripture: On the life and death of the virgin Mary, the personal appearance of Jesus, the origin of evil, the method of the atonement, the state after death. Little is said about social and political questions, such as slavery, the liquor traffic, governmental corruption, capital and labor, etc.

Of course principles of right action are laid down, but specific injunctions about many things are lacking.

6. In the lack of spiritual discernment caused by sin.

“The spiritual ages make the most progress in theology. Witness the half-century succeeding the Reformation and the half-century succeeding the great revival in New England in the time of Jonathan Edwards” (Strong).

V. QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY

In order to study theology to the best advantage one should have:

1. A well-disciplined mind.

2. An intuitional habit of mind.

The student should trust his intuitive convictions as well as his logical reasoning. “The theologian must have insight as well as understanding. He must accustom himself to ponder spiritual facts as well as those which are sensible and material; to see things in their inner relations as well as in their outward forms; to cherish confidence in the reality and unity of truth” (Strong).

3. Some acquaintance with science: Physical, mental, and moral.

4. Some knowledge of the languages of the Bible: At least of their genius and idiomatic structure. This of course is not indispensable, but yet a great help.

5. A holy affection toward God: Psalm 25.14; I Corinthians 2.14.

“Only the renewed heart can properly feel its need of divine revelation, or understand that revelation when given” (Strong). “It is the heart that makes the theologian.”

6. The illumination of the Holy Spirit: Psalm 119.18; Luke 24.32, 45; I Corinthians 2.10-12.

Dr. G. R. Crooks of Drew Theological Seminary used to say: “One needs but three things to understand the Scriptures; a knowledge of the languages, the illumination of the Holy Spirit and common sense.”

VI. DIVISIONS OF THEOLOGY

Theological science is generally divided into exegetical, historical, systematic, and practical theology.

1. Exegetical Theology.

This is the study of the languages of the Bible, the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament.

2. Historical Theology.

This is the study of the facts of Christianity. “As giving account of the shaping of the Christian faith into doctrinal statements, Historical Theology is called the History of Doctrine. As describing the resulting and accompanying changes in the life of the church, outward and inward, Historical Theology is called Church History” (Strong).

3. Systematic Theology.

Besides Systematic Theology, which is theology proper, two other terms are used, namely: Biblical Theology and Dogmatic Theology. These three need to be carefully distinguished.

a. Biblical Theology.

This “aims to arrange and classify the facts of revelation, confining itself to the Scriptures for its material, and treating of doctrine only so far as it was developed at the close of the Apostolic Age” (Strong).

Biblical Theology traces the development of revelation in successive books of the Bible and compares the same revealed truth as treated by various writers, as Paul, Peter, James, etc.

b. Dogmatic Theology.

This is the study of the theology of the creeds and confessions of faith of the Christian Church. It often lays more stress upon these symbols than upon the revelation of Scripture.

c. Systematic Theology.

This “takes the material furnished by Biblical and by Historical Theology and with this material seeks to build up into an organic and consistent whole all our knowledge of God and of the relations between God and the universe, whether this knowledge be originally derived from nature or from the Scriptures” (Strong).

d. There is yet another term to be preferred either to Biblical or to Systematic Theology. It is Christian Doctrine.

The word doctrine comes from the Latin *doctrina*, signifying teaching or instruction. It is a New Testament word; see Matthew 7.28; John 7.16, 17; Acts 2.42; 5.28; 13.12; 17.19; Romans 6.17; I Corinthians 14.6; II Timothy 4.2; Titus 1.9; Hebrews 6.2; 13.9; II John 9, etc. Christian Doctrine partakes in part of the character of Biblical Theology and in part of the character of Systematic Theology. That is, while not ignoring the material of Natural Theology (the universe) it yet lays chief emphasis upon the contents of revelation. Christian Doctrine may be denned as the cardinal doctrines or truths of the Bible arranged in systematic form. This is the term which has been chosen for this course; and the expression Outline Studies has been adopted because the lectures are not exhaustive of the subject.

“The Scriptures are rich in doctrinal material, but in elementary form; and it is only through a scientific mode of treatment that these elements can be brought into a theology in any proper sense of the term” (Miley).

4. Practical Theology.

This is “the system of truth considered as a means of renewing and sanctifying men, or, in other words, theology in its publication and enforcement” (Strong).

VII. VALUE OF THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY

A good working knowledge of theology is of very great value:

- 1. It forms the basis of Christian experience:** Titus 2; II John 9.
- 2. It is the touchstone of error:** Matthew 22.29; Galatians 1.6-9; II Timothy 4.2-4.
- 3. It is the foundation of teaching:** I Timothy 4.13.

VIII. METHODS OF THEOLOGY

Various have been the methods of treating the material of theology.

- The *Analytical method* begins with blessedness, which is the end of all things, and then treats of the means by which it is secured.
- The *Trinitarian method* regards Christian Doctrine as a manifestation successively of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.
- The *Federal method* treats theology under the old and the new covenants.
- The *Anthropological method* begins with man’s disease, sin, and ends with redemption, the remedy for this disease.
- The *Christological method* treats of God, man, and sin as presuppositions of the person and work of Christ.
- The *Historical method* discusses, chronologically, the history of redemption.
- The *Allegorical method* describes “man as a wanderer, God as the end, life as a road, the Holy Spirit as a light, and heaven as a home.” This is done in Bunyan’s “Holy War.”

Opposed to all these is the Synthetic method, so called, which “starts from the highest principle, God, and proceeds to man, Christ, redemption, and finally to the end of all things” (Hagenback, *Hist. Doctrine*, 2:152).

We adopt the Synthetic method with some modifications from the usual treatment. The following are the cardinal doctrines of the Bible. Around them may be grouped all the teachings of revelation: God, angels (including Satan), man, sin, Christ (His person and work), the Holy Spirit (His person and work), the church, and the future. The doctrines of Christ and the Holy Spirit are usually classed together under another doctrine called Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation.

But preliminary to the study of all these doctrines is the study of the Bible itself as the source and support of divine truth. Accordingly, we begin with the Holy Scriptures. We may now exhibit the doctrines, which will comprise our course of lectures in this subject:

1. *Bibliology*: Doctrine of the Bible.
2. *Theology*: Doctrine of God.
3. *Angelology*: Doctrine of Angels (including Satan).
4. *Anthropology*: Doctrine of Man.
5. *Hamartiology*: Doctrine of Sin.
6. *Christology*: Doctrine of Christ, His Person and Work.
7. *Pneumatology*: Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, His Person and Work.
8. *Ecclesiology*: Doctrine of the Church.
9. *Eschatology*: Doctrine of the Future.

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