

# **We are all theologians.<sup>1</sup>**

## **Introduction**

Are you a theologian? Have you ever had any interest in theology, or done any study of theology? Which side do you come down on in the “filioque” controversy? Are you Superlapsarian or an Infralapsarian? Do you even care? Probably not. And that’s Ok.

## **Objections to theological study**

There are many reasons why people avoid studying theology. Here are some of them:

1. Theology is not relevant to life and not practical for living. Theology is often portrayed as dry and boring, and pointless. The average believer, I suspect, assumes that the study of theology is just not relevant and not practical, and therefore a waste of time.
2. Theology can be divisive. It can split friendships, churches and even nations. The reason we have a Roman Catholic Church and a Greek Orthodox Church today is because of a disagreement over whether two small Latin words “et filioque”<sup>1</sup> should be added to the Nicene Creed.

No one who has looked at church history would deny that there have been some serious problems caused among the people of God by theological disagreements. Unfortunately, in the course of trying to resolve theological differences, the few academic theologians tend to wound the multitudes of simple believers who only want to worship God and get on with their lives.

Some of the most brutal battles in history have been fought over theology. Untold numbers of believers were imprisoned, tortured and executed in the 1400s, 1500s and 1600s, over differences in theology. They willingly paid the price for their theological differences with their blood.

To this day, those differences haven’t been resolved. To this day, there are Christians who are outcasts from their own *Christian* families because of differences in theology and differences in their interpretation

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<sup>1</sup> Google it if you really want to know what all the fuss was/is about. Or come and ask me.

of the Bible. I know some here this morning have experienced this painful rejection.

3. It breeds arrogance and unbelief. I know people who have been to Bible College or Seminary, and I've got to say, what I see in them and hear from them doesn't inspire confidence in the serious study of theology. In fact, some who have devoted the most time and effort to their studies seem to be the most unbelieving now. Some are arrogant about their knowledge, and seem unable to translate that knowledge into Christ-like behaviour. Others develop beliefs which make me wonder whether they are really Christian. The worst have rejected Christ altogether. You may be able to think of some who fit these descriptions.
4. It causes arguments, and can't be known for sure. Trained and experienced theologians have argued for centuries about theology. If they can't work it out, surely it is arrogance and presumption for us to think we have any hope of making proper sense of what the Bible teaches? Well, actually, I believe we *can* make proper sense of it.
5. It is dangerous ground to step onto. Given the risks, who in their right mind would willingly step into the minefield of doctrine and theology? Why not just leave well enough alone? Why stir the pot? Why risk destroying your faith? Why deliberately put yourself into the firing line by studying theology?

After all, God is a God of order, not chaos, of harmony, not division. If theology causes divisions or unbelief among His people, then surely it must be bad. And if it is bad, then surely we ought to avoid it? Don't we have enough problems now without stirring up more unnecessarily?

John Piper says,

*"Good theology will help you live, and help you die. Bad theology hurts. It hurts people and it hurts churches."*

## **What is theology?**

Have you ever thought of yourself as a theologian? Let me suggest to you that you are already a theologian, possibly without even realising it. A theologian is simply someone who thinks about God and has come

to some conclusion about Him, His existence and His attributes. And everybody, even atheists, have drawn their conclusions about God.

The **atheist** has thought about god and believes that science, history and logic prove that there is no god. Incidentally, did you know that the early Christians were called atheists because they worshipped Christ alone, and refused to bow down before the pantheon of Greek and Roman gods?

The **agnostic** has thought about god and concluded that there may be a god, but that he/she/it cannot be known or proven to exist, or proven not to exist, for that matter.

The **humanist** has thought about god and concluded that even if there is a god, he/she/it is inconsequential and irrelevant, therefore we are all our own god, and in control of our own destiny.

The **deist** has thought about god and concluded that there is a god, or many gods, who created everything, but then sat back and left it all to run its own course, either unable or unwilling to intervene at any point. Some who claim to be Christians are actually deists, not Christians.

The **seeker** has thought about god and wants to know if God is real so that he might know how to respond appropriately to Him. The **Christian** has thought about god and believes in a God who not only created, but revealed Himself to humanity by His creation, and also by revelation. And this same God has deliberately chosen to make available much information about Himself, and calls His followers to make the necessary effort to get to know Him.

So then, everyone is a theologian. The real question is, "Will you be a good theologian, or a bad theologian? Will you do good to yourself and to others, or will you do harm?"

Maybe we need to define *theology*, specifically *Christian theology*. Theology is a word that scares people. It sounds like something too hard, or too technical, or just plain irrelevant. Christian theology is simply "teaching the Bible for the purpose of meeting human needs. (Theology) answers human questions, tries to relieve doubts, applies Bible texts to life-situations<sup>2</sup>." We are called to...

*"... love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength (Mar 12:30)."*

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<sup>2</sup> From John M Frame, *Studying Theology as a Servant of Christ*, as found on [http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame\\_articles/2000Studying.htm](http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/2000Studying.htm)

Our calling is to love God with our minds, not only with our heart and soul. Loving God with our minds requires study of His Word to find out about Him, and about His ways. Theology is a confrontation with the living God in His Word<sup>3</sup>.

Husbands, how do you think your wife would feel if you had no interest in her after your initial meeting? Did you court her by ignoring her and taking no interest in her? I doubt it. Do you think that is normal behaviour for someone who claims to love his wife? No, I suspect you wanted to know everything about her; her likes, her dislikes, her family, her experiences, her desires, her interests. Shouldn't we, then, seek to learn everything we can about our Creator, our Saviour, our Redeemer?

Knowing God requires effort on our part.

*Jer 9:23-24 Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."*

Allow me to quote from JI Packer's classic book, "Knowing God"<sup>4</sup>.

Packer says,

"... a study of the nature and character of God... is the most practical project anyone can engage in. Knowing about God is crucially important for the living of our lives." He goes on to say, "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 blindfolded, 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 is right. Theology affects every area of our life. Theology, when studied properly, is life-changing! The reason I am talking about this today is because we start our "Bitesize Theology" study today, and I want you to understand just how important theology is before we start. I want you to be looking forward to the growth and change that will come about in your relationship with Jesus Christ through this little study. But don't worry, we won't be arguing about "Filioque" or the

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<sup>3</sup> John M Frame again.

<sup>4</sup> JI Packer, Knowing God, p.17

various “-lapsarianisms.” We might save all that for a Church History course next year.

It is impossible to read the Bible without being confronted by theology. Do you know how many doctrines are affirmed by everyone’s favourite verse, John 3:16?

*16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

That verse alone raises the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Fall of Man, Substitutionary Atonement, the Sinlessness of the Saviour, Obedience, the Love of God, the Justice of God, Salvation, Justification, Regeneration, Faith, Covenant, Union with Christ, Eternal Security, Resurrection, Heaven and Hell. That is 18 different doctrines from only 24 words. I’m sure there are plenty more.

## **The Questions**

So, I’m going to ask two questions, give some warnings, show how it affects *everything*, then issue you with a challenge.

1. Can I *really* know anything significant and important about God?
2. Why should I bother to learn about God?

1. Yes, we can *really* know about God.

*Rom 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.*

*20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

Clearly, we can learn some important information about God just by observing His creation. It gives us some information about His eternity, His power, and His divinity. But there is also a lot creation doesn’t reveal to us, such as God’s holiness, His love and His plan of salvation.

*Heb 8:10-12 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God,*

*and they shall be my people. 11 And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. 12 For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."*

God didn't intend to leave us with only creation to inform us about Him. His plan was that we should all know Him.

*Joh 14:8-9 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

Jesus said that if we have seen Him, we have seen the Father also. We find out about Him in the Bible, so logically, it is to the Bible we should go to learn more about God.

2. Knowledge of God prevents us from being deceived by the enemy.

*Gen 3:1-6 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die." 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.*

*Eph 4:11-14 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*

## The warnings.

- A) Firstly, I need to stress that you don't become a Christian by believing certain doctrines or correct theology. You become a Christian by faith in Jesus Christ on the basis of His blood shed on your behalf. Theology doesn't save; Jesus Christ saves!
- B) I also need to warn you that theological knowledge for its own sake is dangerous.

*1Co 8:1 (NASB) ... Knowledge makes arrogant , but love edifies.*

- C) The goal and purpose of studying theology is to make us more like Christ. It should make us fall in love with Him afresh, and leave us in awe of God and humbled before Him. It should make us more obedient to God and more loving towards our fellow-man. If it doesn't do this, it is worse than useless. Not only will it make us arrogant, obnoxious know-it-alls, but will actually increase our condemnation before God. If we continually study it with unbelief or indifference, we will be worse off spiritually. Jesus warned, *Joh 12:47-48 If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. 48 The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.*

- D) Life and doctrine go together.

*1Ti 4:16 Watch your life and doctrine closely.*

We can't divorce the two, for reasons I'll mention later. It is not just a matter of right living, ignoring doctrine. And equally, it is not a matter of right believing, ignoring how we live. The two go hand-in-glove, and both are vitally necessary for the Christian. Theology is *part* of the Christian life.

- E) Theology *must* be subject to Scripture, not subject to philosophy or human speculation. We all have our pet theories, doctrines and philosophies. Our attitude *must* be that the Word of God, as revealed to us by the Spirit of Truth, reigns supreme over all of them. *All* of our beliefs must be in conformity to Scripture, and if we find any that are not, our immediate response must be to allow our minds to be reshaped by the Word.

F) You may face some doubt and confusion as you begin to dig deeper into the Word. This may become difficult, because we have hung on to certain beliefs for a lifetime. Sometimes we believe them because we learnt them from someone we trusted and respected, such as our parents. It is not an easy thing to let go. In fact, you may feel at times a bit like you are drifting on the ocean on a life raft, with sharks circling below and with no sign of rescue on the horizon. Don't be afraid. The Word of God will do the necessary work in your heart and your understanding. After all, that same Word tells us, [Php 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.](#)

And also,

[Isa 55:10-11 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.](#)

Notice in the Isaiah passage the reference to rain and snow. Rain waters the earth immediately, causing immediate growth. Snow blankets and insulates the earth, only watering later on when it begins to melt. Some things will bring an immediate response and change; others will require something else to apply light and heat before the change is felt and noticed. Be patient. Don't throw something out just because you don't understand it at the moment. If you can see that the Word talks about a certain thing, but you can't yet fit it into your overall framework, sit on it for a while. Allow more light to come from the Word, and trust that God will reveal it in His own good time if it is true, or take it away if it is false.

G) You might respond, "I'm not really interested in the intellectual study of God. I just want to follow Jesus and tell other people about Him." But my question to you then would be, "Who are you following and what do you have to tell people?" That's like saying you want to own a Rolls-Royce because you saw one on TV once and you liked the look of it. Do you know who makes it? Do you know how much it costs? Do you know who sells them? What motor does it have? What features? How does it drive? How long will it last? How much fuel does it use? What, *really*, are you hoping to get?

It really is nonsense, or maybe just laziness, to make those sorts of claims as an excuse for not learning about God. What do you think God is like? Not what do you want Him to be like, or what do you wish He was like, but what is He really like? How can you talk intelligently to

anyone about God unless you take the time to know Him, and to learn about Him, His nature, His ways, His promises, His warnings, and how He has chosen to interact with man? How do you reconcile the God of Christmas with the God of the great judgment of the final day?<sup>5</sup> That's theology.

H) It is too easy when discussing theology to get caught up in endless discussions and debates that never get resolved and never help to build anyone up. Paul warned Timothy of this.

*2Ti 2:14-16 Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. 15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. 16 But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness*

*2Ti 4:3-4 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

Let us not get sucked into speculations, vain discussion, irreverent babble and foolish controversies. If it doesn't build people up and encourage them, it is worthless. It only ruins the hearers and leads people into ever deeper depths of ungodliness.

## **Good theology will help us to live and help us die**

### **How does good theology help our confidence?**

Bad theology will rob us of the many, many promises of God to work for and defend His people. How can we have any confidence in God's actions in our lives if we don't know about Him, and how reliable and trustworthy He is?

Conversely, good theology will give us absolute confidence that not only is God able to save us at the end, but also that *every*

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<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Ligon Duncan in What in the World is the Big Deal with Doctrine? for some of these thoughts, as found in *Reformed Perspectives Magazine, Vol 11 Number 30*, from *Third Millennium Ministries*.

circumstance, trial and difficulty we face will actually be of benefit for us.

How can I say that?

*Rom 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

Good theology tells me that God is big enough, powerful enough, and even sovereign enough to ensure that nothing slips through that will be for my ultimate harm, but all will work for my good.

This doesn't mean I won't face problems, but it does mean I can trust God that it will shape me to be more like my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

*Rom 8:31-39 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died-more than that, who was raised-who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

What confidence and security we should feel when we read these verses! What can shake us? Nothing takes our God by surprise, and there is no trial, challenge or persecution that He can't or won't get us through, all the while holding firmly and unshakeably in the palm of His hand.

But this isn't a confidence in our own ability, but purely and entirely in the ability of an all-conquering God, who works on our behalf on the basis of the blood of His precious Son.

**Good theology increases your confidence.**

**How does good theology help us with the direction and purpose of our lives?**

Bad theology leaves us confused about our place in the world, and leaves us wondering if there is any meaning or purpose to life.

Good theology reveals to us that God has had a plan and purpose for us from eternity past.

*Jer 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

*Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

We are created in the image of God, with a plan in mind, and good works laid out before us to walk into.

**Good theology gives you purpose.**

### **How does good theology help us to grow and mature?**

Theology is not self-sufficient. It depends on the maturity of your Christian life, as the maturity of your Christian life depends on theology. Growth in grace will make you a better theologian, and becoming a better theologian will help you grow in grace.<sup>6</sup>

Poor theology belies Christian immaturity, and makes us susceptible to every passing fad, giving us no stability, hence no maturity.

One of the things I learnt from my years working with the homeless, the addicted and those with behaviour problems is that they all, with no exception that I am aware of, had a turbulent home life. Divorce, violence and alcoholism were common factors. And each one of them was immature.

Parents, a solid and stable home life will help your children to mature. And solid, stable theology will help us all mature spiritually.

*Eph 4:11-16 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

**Good theology makes you mature.**

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<sup>6</sup> John M Frame again.

### How does good theology help us to avoid deception?

We are bombarded today with all sorts of messages, on TV, on the internet, in magazines. Some are clearly and obviously not Christian messages, although if you don't know much about God, how can you discern? Some look deceptively Christian.

Let me give you some examples of the sort of stuff we face: While I was off work some months ago, I watched Oprah interview the author of a book, *The New Earth*, which had become a best-seller in Christian bookstores. Remember this is the woman often referred to as the most powerful woman in the world. Her show is watched by multiplied millions, and her word is gospel for many, many people. The author's message was, quite frankly, unbiblical to the point of being anti-Christian, but it was presented as being extremely helpful to faith. Oprah responded, "I'm Christian too... I thought Jesus came, died on the cross, that Jesus' being here was about his death and dying on the cross, when it *really* was about him coming to show us how to *do it*, how to *be*. To show us the Christ-consciousness that he had, and that that consciousness abides with all of us." She also said, "God is a *feeling* experience. God is not a *believing* experience.... If God for you is still about a belief, then it's not truly God." That is nothing less than Gnosticism in modern clothes, New Age mysticism, and I might add, New Age mumbo-jumbo. It is *not* Christianity, and definitely has nothing to do with saving faith. In another one of her shows, she was arguing with some of her audience about how to get to God, and Jesus claim that He was the only way. She responded, "There *couldn't possibly* be just one way!"

Another best-seller in the Christian bookstores, *The Shack*, portrays God as an African-American woman. Granted that this book is fiction, but many Christians, and non-Christians are forming their opinions about God from this sort of stuff.

A church minister here in Melbourne, pastor of a large and historic church in the heart of our city, and a man internationally known by the books he has written and conferences he holds, has decided that Christianity doesn't work. He had a billboard erected along one of our busiest roads containing the statement, "The 10 Commandments: The Most Negative Document Ever Written." They are so negative that he

has felt the need to write his own 10 Commandments. He call Moses a mass-murderer, Abraham as fictitious, and Jesus not the Son of God, but merely a Jewish peasant.

Genuine, Biblical Christianity has become so repulsive to him, that he has decided to start a new religion, one that *will* work. He retains his position as pastor of this church, and retains the support of many of his congregation. What kind of arrogance concludes that the all-knowing, all-seeing, all-wise, all-powerful God of all creation can't design a system of faith and salvation that works, so it is up to the puny mind of a puny man to make one up that will work? Frankly, it makes my blood boil.

But what may be worse, and more heart-breaking, are the masses of people worldwide who are attracted to the message of this Pied Piper, and led down "the wide path that leads to destruction (Matt 7:13)" and straight through the gates of Hell, never to escape.

It all sounds to me like a paraphrase of the creation account in Genesis:

*Then man said, "Let us make god in our image, after our likeness..." So man created god in his own image, in the image of man he created him, her or it; male and female and anything else he wanted, he created them.*

Does any of this remind you of the serpent talking to Eve in the Garden of Eden?

*2 Cor 11:12-15 And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. 13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.*

*Php 1:9-10 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,*

Good theology will protect you from being drawn in to errors that may shipwreck your faith, and destroy the lives of your friends and loved ones.

*1 Tim 1:18-20 This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, 19 holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, 20 among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.*

Let's face it. No one likes to be easily conned, gullible, made to look a fool. But that is *exactly* the risk you take when you ignore or reject the opportunity to develop good theology.

**Good theology shows up error.**

### **How does good theology help us to pray?**

Poor theology leaves us in the dark about how, or to whom, we should pray. Is it just some impersonal force, prayed to with vague wishes and hesitant requests? Or is it some god who doesn't know the future and has vowed not to interfere in man's choices?

Or do we pray to the Lord of the universe, a God whose power to grant your requests is never limited?

Effective prayer flows out of a confidence that God is both willing and able to do what we ask Him to do. That confidence in turn comes from knowing Him and His ways, not just from wishful thinking. Where we see a promise from God in the Word, and we know it is in keeping with God's will, then we can pray with unshakeable faith.

Without this foundation, how can we pray with any degree of confidence or faith? Indeed, if we don't have this knowledge of God and confidence in Him, why would we even bother to pray?

**Good theology gives you a reason to pray.**

### **How does good theology help us to evangelise?**

I'm sure you are all familiar with evangelists who make sure they set the right mood and atmosphere by using songs that stir up our emotions, and heart-breaking stories. When it come to the invitation for people to receive Christ, he drags it out for what seems like an eternity, because there always seems to be one more person who needs to come forward and say the sinners prayer.

Then there is the other extreme where the preacher doesn't seem to care whether people get saved or not, and never makes an invitation for people to come to Christ.

The difference in these two approaches is how they understand the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Both of them are extremes, and neither is actually God-honouring. Good theology will stir us to *passionately* call people to Christ, and give us confidence that our preaching, witnessing and pleading will not be in vain.

**Good theology encourages you to evangelise.**

#### **How does good theology help us to worship?**

Poor theology leaves us with a weak, powerless god who seems to know less than we do and is unable to influence our situation or decisions, or unwilling to. In fact, how can we even begin to worship God properly without knowing something about Him? Or are we really worshipping the warm, fuzzy feeling we get when we sing worship songs at church?

I know of no greater foundation for truly Christ-exalting worship than seeing the all-wise, all-powerful, all-loving, all-holy God of the universe revealed clearly in His Word, and in the doctrines we learn from His Word. Learn of Him, and of His nature, and of His character, and of His ways, and you will find it easy and natural to worship Him.

In fact, you may find yourself responding like the apostle Paul often does in his letters. He will begin to tell of the nature of God, or of the grace and blessings of God, and he suddenly erupts with praise to God. Check out Rom 7:24-25, 11:33 or 1 Tim 1:17 for example.

**Good theology stirs you to worship.**

#### **How does good theology affect our worldview?**

Our whole outlook on life is shaped by our theology. It is impossible to believe one thing, and to consistently behave opposite to your beliefs. If you have a theology of a god who is not in control, you will experience exactly what JI Packer told us earlier. Let me refresh your memory:

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 blindfolded, 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.

Good theology changes the way you look at the world. It changes your motives, your desires, your hopes and dreams, your courage, your strength, your resolve, your relationships, your moods, your security. Whatever you can think of that influences the way you live your life is improved by good theology. That may seem a bold claim, but many of you are about to put it to the test. Reserve your judgment for twenty weeks, then come and tell me how *everything* has changed.

**Good theology changes your outlook on all of life.**

### **How does good theology help us to die?**

Bad theology gives us nothing to look forward to, no certainty about eternity. Maybe you have been to the funeral of someone who is not a Christian. It can be a depressing affair. Without God, there is no hope and nothing for the mourners to be encouraged by. The best they have is the memories of the past and the good times they shared.

If you have been to a Christian funeral, the contrast is dramatic. There is grief, no doubt, because a loved one has left us. But there is a remarkable joy about the certain knowledge that the deceased is now being in the presence of Jesus, no more tears, no more pain. And there is the joyful expectation of meeting up again at the end of this life and sharing eternity together. The difference is good theology; a theology that reveals the knowledge and certainty that our loved one is eternally safe and secure in the hands of a living and loving God.

*Heb 6:17-20 In the same way God wanted to demonstrate more clearly to the heirs of the promise that his purpose was unchangeable, and so he intervened with an oath, 18 so that we who have found refuge in him may find strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us through two unchangeable things, since it is impossible for God to lie. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, sure and steadfast, which reaches inside behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus our forerunner entered on our behalf, since he became a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.*

Good theology helps us not only when we attend the funeral of a loved one, but helps us when we face death ourselves. Good theology encourages us that we have an eternal inheritance, an abode in the presence of the God of the universe. And that no matter what man might do to us, whether accidentally or deliberately, our resting place, now and forever, is with this wonderful God.

**Good theology prepares you for death.**

## Conclusion

I am passionate about the value of theology. I am convinced, from observation, from experience and from the Scriptures that theology is not just for the intellectuals or the pastors in the church. Rather it is *vital*ly important for living, and indeed, is life-changing if correctly understood and applied.

Make no mistake about it, we are in a battle. It is a battle for our eternal souls. You wouldn't go to war with a pea-shooter and a water-pistol. You'd want to take cannons and missiles and bombs and tanks and aircraft and warships. You want to be heavily armed with weapons that you know are effective against your enemy. And one of the most powerful weapons is good theology.

None of us want to look foolish, yet we so easily concede defeat in this battle and allow ourselves to be conned by lies and distortions of truth. Unfortunately, the end result may be far worse than looking foolish; it may result in eternal damnation.

## The challenge

Can I challenge you to make a lifelong study of theology, starting today if you have never done it before? That will mean reading the Bible, asking questions of the Bible, cross-referencing Scriptures in the Bible and allowing the Bible to yield up its treasures.

Don't just read other peoples comments and thoughts, thus settling for the colourful rocks and pretty seashells you find on the surface. Dig deep into the Word for yourself, mine its depths and it will yield up treasures like you could never imagine.

All this study of theology is not just so you can know *about* God, but so that you may *know* Him. The Bible uses the term *knowing* in the sense of having an intimate, personal relationship. One of the first instances of this term is way back in Genesis 4:

*Gen 4:1 Adam knew his wife Eve intimately, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain.*

*Knowing*, in the Bible, is frequently a relationship term, referring to intimacy and friendship, not just *knowing about*. Remember, the Lord also said of Israel,

*Amos 3: 2 "You only have I known of all the families of the earth..."*

Did God not know about the Amalekites and Canaanites and Hittites and everyone else? Of course He did! But He only had a *relationship* with one people, His chosen people.

Do I need to remind you that the all-wise, all-knowing, all-seeing, all-loving God knows what is best for us? His plan of salvation is perfect; His purpose for our lives is the only one that will satisfy.

Let me stress again, bad theology may lead to your eternal condemnation, but good theology doesn't save you. *Only Jesus Christ can save you.* Good theology will help you to understand and appreciate what God has done for you. But a relationship with His Son is what you need to be saved.

God's love is real, and caused Him to offer up His own Son to pay the penalty for our sin, past, present and future. He paid the ultimate price with His own blood.

*Heb 2:1 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. 2 For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?*

Make sure you know Jesus Christ. Not just know about Him, but *know* Him relationally.

*Acts 4:11-12 "...This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

*1 Tim 2:4-6 God our Saviour ...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all..*

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<sup>i</sup> By Ian Gould, preached at City Edge Church, Melbourne, 26/07/09