

# Theology

Our Saviour Evangelical Free Church

## Introduction & The Doctrine of the Word of God

### Key Concepts:

- The place and purpose of theology
- The ability to know God
- The canon of Scripture
- Characteristics of the Bible: Authority and Inerrancy
- Characteristics of the Bible: Clarity, Necessity, Sufficiency

Pages covered in *Bible Doctrine* by Wayne Grudem: 17-63

### Introduction

#### What is theology?

- In a narrow sense: **The Doctrine of God**
- In a broad sense: **Anything that talks about God and His relationship to the world. Everyone has a theology, some people just don't know it.**

#### What is doctrine?

*Didaskalia* and *didaxé* (Greek), “teaching” or “instruction”  
*Doctrina* (Latin), “doctrine”

Orthodoxy: **right belief**

#### Is it even possible to know God?

##### **Does the human mind have a capacity to know God?**

- James 3:9 shows that the mind of every person is made in the image of God.
  - Colossians 3:10 speaks of the renewal of regeneration.
  - The illumination of the Holy Spirit is promised in John 16:7-11.
- ⇒ *Christians are blessed in all three areas, non-Christians are blessed with #1.*

##### **How is the human mind limited in knowing about God?**

- By our finitude [Job 11:7-9]

- By our sin [Romans 1:18-22].
- By the fact that God has not revealed everything to us [Deut. 29:29; 1 Cor. 13:12].

What is systematic theology?

*Wayne Grudem*: “Systematic theology is any study that answers the question, ‘What does the whole Bible teach us today?’ about any given topic...This definition indicates that systematic theology involves collecting and understanding all the relevant passages in the Bible on various topics and then summarizing their teachings clearly so that we know what to believe about each topic.” (*Bible Doctrine*, p. 17)

How should we study theology? (method and practice)

What theology is **not**:

- A defense of something somebody told you one time
- A defense of your experience
- An explanation of your “personal” beliefs
- The construction of a Christian manual for life

What theology is:

- Grounded in God’s revelation
- A search for objective truth
- An attempt to know God more fully and follow Him more devotedly

How should we do systematic theology?

- **Topically or thematically structured**
- **Draws upon whole of scripture**
- **internally integrative**
- **externally integrative**

**Contemporary: Employs contemporary language and thought-forms to address contemporary issues**

**Practical: Provides understanding and direction with respect to life and ministry**

Why should **we** study theology?

**Read Matthew 28:19-20. Theology helps us to fulfill the second part of the Great Commission. We are told to go out into the world and do two**

things; teach people and baptize them, or bring them into a relationship with Christ. The more we know about Christ, the better equipped we are to carry out this command.

Application: How does this change me?

- Reading the Bible: It should encourage us to read the Bible more and help us to read the Bible better. Define better.
- Answering questions: When we wonder what God says about something, it gives us a method for answering these questions.
- Approaching problems: We will be faced with problems, God promises that. God's Word is full of helpful, practical, and timely wisdom and advice for our lives.

## The Doctrine of the Word of God

“The Word of God” in 3 Different Forms

As a person, Jesus Christ (John 1)

As speech by God (e.g. decrees – “let there be light”, personal address – “you shall have no other gods before me”, through humans - prophets

Written, The Bible (Ex. 31:18, 32:16; Deut. 31:9-13; Isa. 30:8; 2 Tim. 3:16)

The Canon of Scripture

Canon – a standard, the body of ecclesiastical/church law, a body of rules

The list of books that appear in the Bible. Canon is from a Greek word that means “measuring rod” or “standard of measure.” The canon is closed and has been closed for almost 1700 years. This means that we do not add books to the Bible anymore. We believe it is sufficient as it currently stands.

Where did we get the Bible?

A letter written by Athanasius in 367 A.D. contains an exact list of the NT canon and was ratified shortly thereafter by both eastern and western churches (Council of Carthage). However, as early as the middle of the second century (approximately 150 A.D. lists consists with most NT books).

How did we get the Bible?

3 Main Criteria for Canonization:

1. Efficacy of a book (2 Timothy 3:16)
2. Usage by early churches (2 Peter 3:16)
3. Apostolic authorship (first or second hand account) (Luke 1:3 and Romans 1:1)

## The Authority of the Bible

Grudem's definition of authority (p. 33): *The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.*

(the following reasons are **selected** from Grudem, p. 33-37)

1. The Bible claims this for itself.
  2. We are convinced of the Bible's authority as we read the Bible.
  3. God cannot lie or speak falsely. (p. 40)
  4. The words of Scripture are self-attesting. **If we believe we need to appeal to something "higher" than the Bible to prove it's truthfulness, such as the scientific method or logic, than we are working under the assumption the thing to which we are appealing is a higher authority than God.**
- ⇒ Objection: "Isn't this a circular argument?"
- In a manner of speaking, yes, but all appeals to ultimate authority must be at some point circular. For, to appeal to the highest authority there is by no definition another source to appeal to. Therefore, if a person prefers another source of authority, their argument will be circular too. Or, if a person believes they cannot know ultimate authority, that is, again, a claim to authority. Even in its circular nature, the argument for the authority of Scripture will be self attesting through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

## The Inerrancy of the Bible

Grudem's definition of inerrancy (p. 42): *The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact.*

Challenges to Inerrancy

“The Bible is only authoritative for ‘faith and practice’.”

“The Bible contains errors.”

Problems with denying inerrancy

If the Bible is not inerrant, God can lie.

If we deny inerrancy, we trust more in our own judgments than God’s revealed truth.

If the Bible is wrong in small matters, it may be misleading in larger matters as well.

## **The Clarity of Scripture**

Is the Bible difficult to understand?

**No, generally, the Bible is easy to understand. Do not kill. Do not be anxious about anything, but by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your requests known to God and the peace of Christ which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. In fact, the Bible is often written to be taught to children (Deut. 6:6-7).**

What is required in order to understand Scripture rightly?

- **Moral and spiritual purity** (1 Cor. 2:14)
- **Willingness** (James 1:5-6)
- **Humility** (James 1:22-25)

Technical terms for the study of Scripture:

Hermeneutics: the study of correct methods of interpretation (especially in the case of Scripture).

Exegesis: the process of interpreting a text of Scripture (**this means to bring out the meaning of the Scripture**).

Expository Preaching: the communication of a Biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies it to the hearers. (Haddon Robinson, Biblical Preaching: Second Edition, p. 21)

## The Necessity of Scripture

Read Romans 10:13-17

What is the Bible necessary for?

1. Knowledge of the Gospel (John 3:18, Rom. 10:13-17)
2. Maintaining spiritual life (Deut. 8:3, Matt. 4:4)
3. Certain knowledge of God's will (Deut. 29:29, Ps. 1:1, 119:1, 1 John 5:3)

What is the Bible **not** necessary for?

1. Knowledge of God's existence (Ps. 19:1, Acts 14:16-17, Rom. 1)
2. Knowing something about God's character and laws (Rom. 1:32, 2:14-15)  
→ General Revelation: The knowledge of God's existence, character, and moral law that comes through creation to all humanity.

## The Sufficiency of Scripture

Definition: The sufficiency of Scripture means that Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly. (Grudem, p. 58)

God still has the ability to speak, however, we can also be confident that He does not expect us to know more than what He has given us now in the Bible (Deut. 4:2, 12:32, Prov. 30:5-6, Rev. 22:18-19).

The canon of Scripture is closed.

If Scripture is sufficient, does that mean we should perfectly obey God?

**This is a double-edged sword. The answer is both yes and no. We will never be able to obey all of Scripture in this life, however, that is the standard God holds us to. Because Jesus was able to perfectly obey, those who are in Christ, have His righteousness imputed onto them and His perfect obedience has now been credited to them as their perfect obedience.**

Scripture is sufficient...so:

1. We can know how God wants us to think and act (2 Tim. 3:17)
2. Nothing else is of equal importance
3. God does not require us to seek secret knowledge about Him not revealed in the Bible.
4. No modern revelations should be given equal weight

5. Nothing not forbidden by the Scriptures (either explicitly or by implication) is sin (i.e. moderate alcohol consumption, dancing, watching many movies or TV shows, etc.)
6. Nothing is required of us by God that is not found in the Scriptures (i.e. certain types of devotional practices, certain abstentions, etc.)
7. We should not hold doctrinal convictions beyond the spectrum of Scripture (this would also apply to our following of certain Bible teachers and preachers)

Application: How does this change me?

Are there areas in your life that you have not (completely) submitted to the authority of God's Word? What are they and how can you change?

How does affirming the absolute authority of the Bible change your approach to reading it?

What in the Bible is difficult for you to believe or obey?

Are there passages of the Bible you find difficult to understand? What encouragement do you find in knowing that the Bible is given and written in a way that may be understood by everyone?

If food is necessary for life and Jesus compares the Word of God to food, what does that say about our need for study of God's Word? Do you approach the study of God's Word in this way?

How does the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture affect your understanding of God's will and your pursuit of it?