

Lecture 1 – What is Theology?

“...We may helpfully define theology as ‘the application of God’s word by persons to all areas of life.’”
John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*

Key Terms

Sapientia, scientia, praxis, objectivism, subjectivism (relativism), *homoousios, homoiousios*

Objectives

- *List and describe definitions of theology in the early church.
- *Discuss the need and purpose of theology.
- *Explain the importance of the different branches of theology.

What is Theology?

I. What is Theology?

A. Definitions within the history of the early church

1. Wisdom: *sapientia*
2. Cognitive knowledge: *scientia*
3. Ethics: *praxis*
4. Theology includes all three (faithful knowing, thinking, and acting).

B. Cognitive knowledge: reductionistic definitions

1. Subjectivist understanding (liberal)
2. Objectivist understanding (evangelical)

“Theology is that which is thought and said about God. True theology is thus given by the Bible itself as the revelation of God in human terms.” Geoffrey Bromiley

C. Theology as a reflection on revelation, the reception and interpretation of revelation

1. Distinction between theology and revelation
 - a. Revelation: God’s declaration of His character, ways, and will within creaturely existence; who God is.
 - b. Theology: a disciplined, extra-biblical reflection upon revelation and the people of God’s historic response to revelation; something we do.

“[Theology is] a form of human reflection, the application of human consciousness to the data of biblical revelation and to earlier ecclesiastical understandings of those data.” John Jefferson Davis

2. Faith seeking understanding. Anselm of Canterbury

3. What can we conclude?

- a. Scripture has a normative priority over our theological insights, conclusions, and systems.
- b. We can be properly humble about our theologies.

II. What is the Need and Purpose of Theology?

A. Doctrine and the Christian faith

1. The centrality of doctrine

It is the _____ of the Christian religion.

2. The nature of doctrine

It is _____ to biblical revelation.

It is a _____ and _____ revelation.

“The primary referent of Christian doctrine is an historical event, rather than any static or timeless concepts.” Alister McGrath

B. How do we get from doctrine to theology?

We must look at the early church.

1. Catechetics (discipleship)
2. Thinking through our faith, or “faith seeking understanding”

“We are to love the Lord with our minds as well as our hearts. Through its distinctions and definitions, linguistics and logic, its study of history and hermeneutics, theology helps to clarify belief. Bearing in mind that Christians are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1), theology seeks to make those mysteries as meaningful as possible to the greater service of God.” Eugene Osterhaven

3. Positive aspect of theological reflection
4. Negative aspect: the exposure of falsehood and the refutation of heresy
 - a. Apologetics and polemics
 - b. The positive effects of falsehood
5. Correcting our misperceptions

III. What is the Goal of Theological Study?

Theology is a disciplined study which seeks to proclaim the Christian faith by focusing upon God’s revelation and the church’s historic response to that revelation.

A. Biblical knowing

1. Knowing who (*sapientia*)
2. Knowing that (*scientia*)
3. Knowing how (*praxis*)

B. Defending the faith

C. Refuting error