

What is Theology? (cont.)

Objections to theology. After I finished college, I applied and was accepted to study theology at a graduate school program. One day after church, a woman approached me and offered this admonition: “Don’t let those theology professors destroy your faith.” She was concerned that a study of theology would undermine the firmness of my Christian convictions, that it would steal away something of my zeal. Perhaps her admonition expresses something of your fears as well. Does theological study pose a danger for Christian piety, faith, and practice?

We have all heard this. We are all aware that there is a certain fear, a certain distrust, and even a certain dislike among Christians for theological study. Where does this antipathy to theology come from? There are in fact a number of possible sources: anti-intellectualism, folk superstitions, populism, an emphasis upon experiential subjectivist religion, arid and sterile academic theology, a lack of translation of theological ideas, dense jargon, and simply poor interactions between the rank and file (excuse me, I am from a factory town; I do not think of lay people, I think of the rank and file) and theologians.

The fact is theological study *can* be an enemy to faith. Bad theology is always the enemy to faith, but the antidote to that theology is not no theology. It is good theology. What we want to do is to defend theological study from the detractors, to face some of the objections to theology. Those objections usually come in questions like: Can we study this stuff too much? Can’t I just believe it? Do I really have to know that stuff? Can knowing the Bible or theologically reflecting on it hurt my faith? What I want to do is examine a number of the sources for these questions. And in responding to those sources, we will in effect be answering the primary objections to theological study.

If you look at the outline, I have organized the objections under two categories: first, commitment about the nature of theology, and then psychological dispositions. So first, commitments about the nature of theology. Or I could have titled that, commitments about the nature of the faith because these two will go hand in hand. One objection is (and you hear it many times): God and His Word are to be enjoyed, not studied. Theology just examines things to death. It takes all the light out of the believer’s relationship with God. A radio preacher once said, “Happy is the Christian who never met a theologian.” Theologians are hopeless killjoys. They are bent on taking all the fun out of being a Christian. Stanley Grenz in a little book, an introduction to theology, talks about Linus Van Pelts, a character in the Peanuts comic strip. And if you know anything about that comic strip, Linus is the resident theologian/philosopher, and he tends to reinforce this particular stereotype. As Linus is carefully putting the finishing touches on a snowman, Charlie Brown walks up to him and says, “Well, Linus, did you have a good Christmas?” Linus looks back and says, “What do you mean ‘good’? Did I get a lot of presents? Did I give a lot of presents? Are you referring to the weather on Christmas day or the Christmas dinner? Do you mean: Was my Christmas good in the spiritual sense? Was my Christmas good in that I saw new meanings to old things?” And of course by this time Charlie Brown is gone. This is exactly the way many Christians see theological study. Its interest is needless, joyless, distinctions, definitions, and endless questions.

But I introduce that this source of dislike for theology comes from a particular understanding of the nature of theology, the particulars of the faith. Many Christians have had a bias, a bias toward the subjective, a bias toward the emotional, a bias toward the experiential. Sometimes popular (for lack of a better term), revivalist, or pious strains of the Christian faith have inculcated the idea that what is really important is not what I think, but how I feel about Jesus, and whether those feelings have any connections to the truth is secondary. Such ideas are really a distortion of either pietism or revivalism,

because as both of those arose (pietism in the seventeenth century and revivalism in the eighteenth century), yes, they both *did* emphasize the affective, the emotional, the subjective, but not at the cost of biblical religion or biblical truth. None of the leaders of either of those movements claimed that true religion is about pure subjectivity, feeling divorced from truth. Nevertheless, countless Christians have gained the impression that being Christian is primarily about having certain emotional feelings about Jesus. We run into it a lot, quite frankly, in popular Christian music. By the way, this is one of the reasons why music is important. No one remembers the sermon, and those of you who have preached need to understand that. A half an hour after you preached it is gone. No one remembers the sermon. What they remember is the music. Choose the music carefully. Read the music. Pay attention to the music. That is what people take home. But what we hear many times in popular Christian music is that what matters is not cognitive stuff, is not stuff you can put in your head, but love. How will you feel about Jesus?

This problem has grown so endemic within American evangelical circles that writers like Mark Noll, Os Guinness, and David Wells have all spoken of the death of the Christian mind, of the evangelical mind. In a book called *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, Mark Noll said the scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is no longer an evangelical mind. And he is talking about this very reality, that we have fallen into a kind of sentimentality, a kind of emotional subjectivity. We have fallen into the idea that what matters is the depth of our sentiments. My own response would go something like this: millions of people believe and believe with all their hearts that racism is good and proper. That does not make it true. Millions of people believe and believe with all their hearts that artificially ending the lives of the unborn is good and proper and a means of human wholeness and freedom. It does not make it true. Depth of sentiment and depth of sentiment for Jesus is good. I hope you have it. But it is neither self-sufficient, nor is it self-authenticating.

Let me put it in biblical terms. While God wants us to love Him, He declares that our redemption is not a matter of the depths of our passion. Our redemption is a matter of the depths of Christ's passion, of His suffering. Our love for Him is always a response to His historical actions at Calvary, and without that historical, objective event proclaimed and interpreted in Scripture, our feelings are merely empty sentimentality. In other words, our deeply held beliefs are not self-authenticating; they must be tested by the Word of God.

A common version of this objection is that Christian faith should be childlike. Are we not supposed to be like children and not question everything? The people who raise this objection often point to Jesus' acceptance of little children when He held them up as examples of those who would enter the kingdom of God. But they overlook that the apostle Paul commended the Christians of Berea because they examined the Gospel of Christ in light of the Hebrew Scriptures and that they looked at them critically before accepting them (Acts 17). It seems to me that both childlike faith and critical examination have a place in Christianity. How many of you have small children, children three to five years old? I have one of them too. His favorite word right now is 'why?' and right after that is 'what?' and then 'how come?' That hardly sounds like what we have in mind sometimes when we talk about being childlike. The issue that Jesus was getting at with being childlike is not that you do not ask questions; it is that you are accepting; you are not cynical. We adults tend to be cynical about everything—right? Children are not that way. So the issue is not a kind of ignorance. Simple childlike faith and simplistic childish faith are not the same thing. Good theology does not deny the necessity of humble acceptance before God. When you read through Calvin's *Institutes* that is something he comes back to over and over and over again—standing still, standing before the throne of God. It is childlike in coming face to face with the God who is there. And Calvin was the great theologian. Good theology does, however, push beyond blind and unquestioning acceptance of any and everything; it seeks to be properly critical.

I need to say something about this word ‘critical’. It is a word that has gotten bad press. When we hear the word ‘critical’, we say it means negative, judgmental, censorious, but really all it means is: to make a judgment, to make and form opinion. You can be critical and have a good outcome. You can be critical of someone and have a glowing report. All the word means is to judge. That is all that it means.

Our second objection is that doctrine divides people. It breeds intolerance and strife. An old slogan went like this, “Jesus unites, but doctrine divides.” Theological reflection and insistence upon doctrinal reality does divide, but that is the nature of truth. Ask the biblical prophets. Ask Jesus. He came, as He put it, to divide men, to divide truth from error, foolishness from wisdom, because He came to do the Father’s will. To be wise, to know the truth is to reject that which is foolish, trivial, unhelpful, and erroneous. Love does not mean tolerance. Contrary to much of what we hear in our culture today, loving our neighbor does not mean toleration of all things. The most loving thing you can often do for another person is to have the courage to speak the truth. Now theological study does include a kind of formalized thinking, which seeks to be critical of beliefs, to judge whether they are true or false. And that function means that the theologian will come to the judgment that some belief is false, and this will divide people.

The early church debated such issues as whether Jesus was merely a man or somehow far more, perhaps even God. And that debate would take the better part of two hundred years. And before it was done, it would declare many beliefs, many statements about Jesus, and many groups who were saying many statements about Jesus, heretical. That brought huge controversy into the church. Before it was done, it would necessitate the first church-wide ecumenical council. The year was 325 A.D., and the place was Nicea. One of the heroes of Nicea was a man named Athanasius. He was a champion of the position that Jesus is *homoousios*—‘of the Father’, ‘of the same essence’; you see ‘same essence’ here in Greek. The other major party at Nicea was the Arian party. The Arians said that Jesus is not of the same essence. Rather He is of similar essence, *homoiousios*—‘similar’, ‘similar essence’, or ‘like essence’. Notice the difference in these two words, how similar they are. The difference is an ‘iota’, a little ‘i’, the letter ‘i’. But what a difference! The difference between a creature, which the Arians said Jesus was, and being God, which Athanasius and the orthodox party said Jesus was. Now when Athanasius refused to compromise, sometimes he had so few allies that the motto ‘Athanasius against the world’ became something of a joke in fourth-century northern Africa. He would spend over forty years of his bishopric in exile. He was a hunted man, a hounded man, and he has come down to us as a belligerent, divisive, hair-splitting fundamentalist, a man who would bring down the entire church over a single ‘iota.’ But Athanasius was right. And on his rightness hung the very deity of Christ, and the trinitarian reality of God. Obviously not all the issues that face us are as decisive as this issue. Some differences are not the difference between orthodoxy and heresy. As a matter of fact, many of the differences that the church faces are not like that, but truth does always have the potential to divide. But perhaps the best answer I can give to the divisiveness charge is that which was given by Martin Luther: “The primary purpose of truth, of theology, is not to divide, nor to unite, but to discover and protect the truth.”

Another objection: “Theology delves too deeply into things it cannot know, mysteries that are beyond human understanding, and this preoccupation with the unknowable puts theologians out of touch with the practical everyday lives of people.” This one makes me scratch my head because it is unfortunately often true. Theology is often too speculative, far more speculative than it has any right to be. It is one of the things I am going to argue in this course. Much of seventeenth-century Calvinism, my own tradition, engaged in the kind of inquiry that Calvin himself would have called speculative. Theologians have sometimes claimed to know more about heaven and hell, the age to come, the ministry of angels, and many other things than the Bible says, and sometimes we have specialized in and trafficked in the most

highly questionable of theological concerns. Perhaps it will tickle the ears of the overly curious. But let me spread the guilt around to get other people involved. I think an overly speculative and argumentative theology is also sometimes the special interest of theological students. Once we have mastered some of the ideas and impenetrable fog of jargon, we seek for someone to joust with. We have not mastered the goal of theological study, nor its real intention, but we have got some of the tools—I was going to say the weapons—and thus we seek intellectual combat with anyone who is willing to take us on. In other words, sometimes we know just enough theology to get into trouble and to give the theological enterprise a bad name. So unfortunately I think this third objection is often far too true.

One of the things I want to argue for this semester is that in order to be a faithful reader of Scripture, in order to have and to develop some theological discernment, one does not need a baccalaureate or a master's degree in philosophy. As a matter of fact, those things may hurt you more than help you. I think it is the case that a little old lady sitting in Minnesota or Norway or wherever can be as faithful to the Lord and know the Word of God as surely and truly as anyone else and it has nothing to do with her prowess as a philosopher.

Fourth, I have sometimes heard students, not around here but in the past, complain that the Bible, theology, and doctrine are inappropriate subjects of study because nobody really knows; it is all just a matter of interpretation. You have heard that one. I find that a curious comment because, is not everything a matter of interpretation? The study of history is a study of man's interpretation of the past. The study of biology is a study of man's interpretation of a biotic aspect of life. Astronomy is an interpretation of the physics of the astral bodies—and on and on. So it is curious that this argument be applied only to Scripture and theology. In its simplest terms, let me answer the objection by saying that the Bible is meant as God's communication to man. He expects it to be read. He expects it to be understood. If we really want to say no one can understand it, I think we have passed a judgment on God's ability as communicator. Later, we will make the point that reading the Bible well, understanding it, is work; it is hard work. But it is work we are commanded to do. God is a good communicator, but we are going to have to work to hear it, not because what He's saying is vague but because we have so much gobbledygook between the Word and us.

Fifth, and again some of—I have to admit, many of—these come from my experiences teaching at the undergraduate level, in a Christian liberal arts college. I have also heard students say, "Well we don't have to study this stuff because it is self-evident." I think this is kind of our most Reformed problem and it comes from some of our notions about the covenant. I have heard it this way: "I was born a Christian, I did not have to go and get it; it is just my right, it is my heritage, it is in the water, and because I was born into it, I do not have to strive for it." Well, nothing in life worth having comes automatically. And there is nothing automatic about the Christian faith. No one in this room is a Christian simply because your parents are Christians or because you went to a Christian school or you were catechized. It is not Christianity in a can. God wants us to be able to know, to give an account, for the faith that is in us.

But I think there are also some psychological dispositions which oftentimes function as objections. I will go through them quickly. Can I just say that our culture is plain lazy? We do not want to take the time that it takes to read carefully, asking what is there, what it means, and how we are to respond. We live in a video culture. You turn it on; it does not ask you to do any work; it does not even ask you to dress, for crying out loud, it just asks you to be there. Too many of us today are not as willing to invest the time or commitment to Scripture that we spend playing video games or perfecting our jump shots. And I know that sounds a little harsh but I think it is something we see in the broad Christian culture today.

Second, and this is much more substantive: a fear of subjecting our biases to criticism. I suspect this is the strongest psychological motivator behind the popular dislike. You know many of us do not know our faith very well, but we know the world dismisses the Christian faith and we are somewhat fearful that if we studied our faith closely, if we studied its grounding, we would find out something that would undermine it. We would find out that the world's rejection of Christianity is true. In other words, the truth, the real facts of the case, would be a hindrance to our faith. Such a faith is not faith at all; it is just a superstition. It is a belief without groundings, without facts.

The question arises, "Is that possibly due to the fact that we are comfortable with our culture?" Do you mean the extra-Christian culture or the Christian culture? Which culture do you mean? I would give a 'yes' answer if the question is it is because we have grown comfortable with Christian culture. There is a certain cultural Christianity among Christians. We have accepted culture—and generally we have been regenerative, we are generally redeemed. But it has really been a cultural context, within a very narrow cultural context. I come from one of those communities myself, I must admit that. You stay within that community. You do not want to venture too far out. You do not want to subject the faith to the asses of the larger culture, not because you are afraid of them, but you may in fact find out something that will destroy that place where you are comfortable. Again, I mean that as a psychological factor.

And finally I think for a lot of young people, particularly second generation Christians, people who were raised in Sunday school, maybe in Christian school movements, with catechism and all the rest, there is a sense that Christianity is boring, and it is irrelevant. They have heard it, or at least they think they have heard it all their lives. And my response is, we need to admit that we have often made the faith boring. Notice what I said. We have often made the faith boring. Many people who profess to be its teachers do not understand it well, have very little gift for teaching, and fail to see its application to life. But again this fault is not the fault of God or His Word; it is our fault. You need to read Dorothy Sayers's *The Greatest Story Ever Told* [sic]. She says, "How can this be boring? How can this drama be boring?" But sometimes we just kill it. We fail to communicate it well.

Another way I can respond is this: when people say, "That's not relevant," that judgment can go in the opposite direction. What they are saying is that there is a break in relevance. If the kingdom of God, if the Word of God, is not relevant to our lives, maybe the reality is that we have created our lives in such a way that they are not relevant to the Word of God and His kingdom. So maybe we just need to turn the issue around a bit.

V. What is systematic theology? Since this course is in that discipline, I should say something in our introduction to theology about systematics. Again, if you recall we made much at the beginning about the distinction between revelation and Scripture. One of the reasons that distinction is so crucial is that when most of us think about theology, when we hear that term, what we really think of is systematic theology, systems. It does not matter whether it is Calvinist theology, or Lutheran theology, dispensationalist theology, Thomistic theology, neo-orthodox theology, black theology, liberationist theology, feminist theology, 'you-name-it' theology. But contrary to what many of us have said, nobody ever did this: no one ever opened their Bible, turned it over, shook it, and out popped Calvinism, or Dispensationalism, or any other '-ism'. There is no systematic theology in the Bible. Any theological system is a complex product of culturally conditioned methodologies and presuppositions. It is the product of an engagement with the biblical text; it is a product of the testing of the confessional heritage of the church; it is a product of the testing of ideas in the marketplace and in the life of the people of God. The fact is there are many steps or theological functions between the biblical text and any system of thought. Some of those steps, some of those functions, have been institutionalized within a systematic theology or theological curriculum. They are such things as exegesis, biblical theology, historical

theology, systematics. Just for a second I want to zero in on some of these—the theological encyclopedia or the branches of theology. What are some of these theological functions?

First of all, exegetical theology: What does the exegetical theologian do? The exegetical theologian relies primarily on a literary analysis. His job is to ask, “What does the text mean? What does it say and what does it mean?” His focus is the text. He works phrase by phrase, sentence by sentence, hopefully in the original languages, in order to understand and interpret the message of Scripture. The tools of the exegete are sound knowledge of languages, a feel for how language functions, and a knowledge of ancient near eastern culture and history.

Second, biblical theology—biblical theology studies the history of God’s dealings with creation as the history is communicated in Scripture. Geerhardus Vos refers to the focus of biblical theology as being the history of redemption. The exegete, I said, is looking at the text and thinking, “What exactly does this text say?” The biblical theologian is also looking at the text, but his primary question is, “What is the historical story, the historical drama, behind the text?” So rather than a literary analysis, he is using an historical analysis. What is the story that is being communicated? He is looking for the mighty acts of God. Geerhardus Vos himself would be a good example of a biblical theologian. George Ladd, the American Baptist theologian, would be another good example.

Third, historical theology—the historical theologian focuses upon the history of God’s people and their engagement with Scripture. The historical theologian concentrates on the history of interpretation, the history of theological development and the confessional history of the church. He is not looking at the biblical text. So instead of saying, “What did Paul say?” he is going to be asking, “What did Luther say, or Melancthon say, or Irenaeus say?”

Systematics. While exegetical theology focuses on specific passages, and biblical theology on the historical features, and historical on the post-biblical story, systematic theology seeks to bring it all together, to synthesize them. Systematics asks, “What does it all add up to?” In investigating the intermediate state, for example, the systematician looks at the biblical texts that are relevant to death and the pre-resurrection state. He asks what the biblical theologians have said about these texts. He listens to what the biblical theologians have said about the grave—*sheol* in the Old Testament and Hades in the New. He also examines what important historical figures like Augustine, Calvin, and Ridderbos concluded on these issues. In short, he asks this question, “What does it all add up to? What does the whole Bible teach about ‘x’?”

In a second I want to look at systematics a bit more carefully, but for the sake of being comprehensive, let me go on to number ‘five’, practical theology. At first glance it might seem like exegetics, biblical theology, historical studies, and systematics mean to find the meaning of the teaching and that practical theology seeks application. But that is really a misnomer. Any theology, any theology well done, is practical in the sense that its goal is biblically enlightened faith and obedience. Practical theology is no more and no less practical than exegesis or systematics. In fact, a better term than practical theology would be pastoral theology. The pastoral theologian concentrates on the study of the ministries of the church: preaching, counseling, missions, evangelism, worship. You might even think of pastoral theology as applied ecclesiology.

Now, let me come back to the characteristics of systematics. First of all, systematics is a synthetic discipline. Systematics is an integrated discipline, for it stands upon the shoulders of the exegete, the biblical theologian, the historian, and even the pastoral theologian, and draws from all of them. I spend my entire day wandering the halls asking my colleagues, “What is truth?” and they tell me and I add it

all together. Second, the systematic theologian's analysis is topical. He is asking, "What does it add up to? What is a biblical insight on—?" And that topic can be a topic from Scripture, such as the nature of Christ, or the nature of man's life in the world. Or it can be a question that arises from the culture: What is the biblical response to abortion? Nuclear armament? Anything like that. Third, his concern is contextual. Since systematics takes up questions that may derive from the cultural environment, it is a contextual discipline. In fact, and I think that systematics shares this with homiletics (preaching), systematics has the particular calling of relating the particulars of the Christian faith to the contemporary world. Its very job is the application of the message to the world.

And finally fourth, the systematic theologian's job is (or his goal is) prescriptive. By the word prescriptive, I mean it aims for what we should believe, rather than descriptive. A descriptive analysis says, "Here are your options." Prescription says, "Here is what we should believe." I have sometimes heard students, again at the undergraduate level—they say it particularly when they hear me saying something they do not like—they say, "Well you should just give us the options." The problem here is that I cannot find any historical precedence for that. Luther did not do theology that way, neither did Calvin, Augustine, nor Athanasius. There is no historical precedent for that. The systematic theologian aims for a prescriptive analysis.

Now this means that there is a particular relationship between the systematician and the church, and a particular relationship between the systematician and the confessional heritage of the church. Whatever degree of authority the church has or the confessional tradition has will come to bear most clearly in systematics. The exegete or historian may strive for a descriptive analysis but not the systematician. He must always strive for a normative statement. Thus his resources are broader. But this also means that systematics is a less purely academic discipline. It is an ecclesiastical discipline. And the reason I say all of this is to alert you that as a Reformed Presbyterian theologian, I am held accountable to that church and I am held accountable to its confessional underpinnings, and I believe that is right. Theology is always done in the context of the people of God and it is done for the people of God.

Systematic theology has traditionally been divided into certain subjects, or topics, the traditional 'loci of systematics':

*Prolegomena*: the word only means 'a first word, a preceding word.' It includes such things as theological method and epistemology. The word epistemology means: 'How do you know?' And we started with *prolegomena*. We will continue on with that because it includes the doctrine of Scripture as well.

The second is theology proper, the doctrine of God.

Third is anthropology, from *anthropos*, the doctrine of man (these are all taken from the Greek language).

Fourth is hamartiology, the study of sin. *Hamartia* is the word 'sin.'

Fifth is Christology, obviously the doctrine of Christ.

Sixth is soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, from *soteria*, 'salvation.'

Seventh is pneumatology, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, from *pneuma*.

Eight is ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church, *ecclesia*, the Greek word for ‘church.’

Ninth is eschatology, the study of last things; *eschatos* is the Greek word for ‘last.’

Tenth, hermeneutics, the science of biblical interpretation. We will address that discipline in this course.

Eleventh is ethics, the study of the principles of right conduct.

And twelfth is apologetics, the study of the defense of the Christian faith.

Let me say one thing about the exegetical, theological method. Here at Covenant we are committed to the agenda that systematic theology stands upon an exegetical, biblical base. Without naming any names or casting any stones, there are people, both within the Reformed church and outside it, who believe that theology stands upon a philosophical foundation, that one first engages philosophical *prolegomena*. And there is a long tradition of that within the Reformed tradition. Certainly God can be philosophized upon, and legitimately. We do not need to cast stones on the legitimacy of philosophy. But again, remember that old lady in Minnesota, I do not think she needs a degree in philosophy. There are also folks within the tradition who believe that the discipline of systematics should stand upon or work from our confessional standards, that one should start with the Westminster Standards and seek through their theology from there. At Covenant, however, we are committed to—and I will argue this a bit more fully later—the idea that rather than starting with the confession of faith, we work toward a confession of faith. We start with Scripture, we believe in the principle of *sola scriptura*; it presses in upon us that the Bible is our sure norm, our final source of authority. Yes, remember what I just said about being a systematic theologian under the church. I want to take that seriously and that means that I stand under the confessional heritage of the church. But at the end of the day, I work toward it. Therefore, the material we will seek to use will be biblical rather than creedal or confessional.

There are many more things we could do in terms of an introduction to theology but questions of process are usually not the things that get people excited. Next we will move on to the issue of revelation and Scripture. But first, we will take up some questions.

Would I consider Paul a theologian? Let me preface my answer by reminding us that there is no privileged definition of theology—right? So it is really a matter of usage. And my answer is: no I would not consider Paul a theologian. And the reason is, I simply want to protect the distinction between the Word of God and our theological reflection upon it. And that is all. It is purely because of that, that I would say “no.” Now, is Paul reflecting upon the Word of God? Yes. What is he doing in the book of Romans? He is reflecting on what God has done through Jesus Christ. And he even does so systematically. I could say Paul is writing doctrine. But I am going to stop short of saying he is a theologian. It is simply so that I will not confuse God’s revelation with my theological constructions. And I realize what Luke says in his very first chapter about his methods: that he is doing research; he is talking to people. But I am simply going to protect the Word of God. Now there might be better ways to do that, but again the word ‘theology’—we can define the term any way we want to. I am not saying you must define theology the way I have, but I just hope you appreciate the distinction I want to make, that my theological constructions never have the authority of the Word of God. When I make that mistake, then I have given my Calvinism the same authority as Luke or Paul. And by the way, they are fully authoritative. So I hope I am protecting Paul and Luke by making that somewhat artificial distinction.

Is every Christian a theologian? Or if not, should they be? No, not every Christian should be a theologian. We are not doing theology simply by reading the Word of God. I think that theology is a

disciplined organized activity. That little old lady, sitting in Minnesota, when she opens her Bible to have her devotions, to find a word from her Lord, she is not trying to be a theologian. She is not responding to it that way. She is not engaging it that way. Let me give an analogy. The lights that are above us in a room, they are for all of us—right? The light comes on and shines on everybody. But one of us is called to attend to the light. There is a guy called an electrician. It is his job to make sure the electricity works, that there is juice in the box, that the bulbs work, all of that—right? The theologian's job is to attend to the text, to ask those questions, to guide the people of God. We are not all called to it. We are all called to know it as well as we can but we all have a lot of different callings in life. Some of us are called to be farmers and to farm unto the Lord. Some of us are called to raise children. Others are called to be medical practitioners and we will not have the time, we will not have the resources, to give to the study of the Word of God and to the theological arts. Some of us, however, are called to that and we do that for the sake of all. So I would—again somewhat artificially—tend to think of theology as an academic discipline. But one of the things that protects us is the recognition that our response to God and to His Word cuts across the entirety of life, cuts across all the different ways that human beings function. Now notice I did define theology fairly broadly as: knowing *how*, knowing *who*, and knowing *that*—right? So that is fairly broad. But if you look at Scripture it actually calls for an even broader response from us than that. We are called to respond to God with the entirety of our beings. And even to His Word, that kind of theology does not try to cover every possible kind of response.

Are women called to be theologians? Yes! Did you realize—now I am going to dig myself out of the hole you think I have got myself into—that theology is an academically defined discipline? Yes, it comes under the sovereignty of the church, but I do not believe that it is necessarily the case that a theologian be a member of the clergy. As a matter of fact, not every member of our faculty is a cleric. Now that is in the context of the PCA, restricting the office of elder to the male, but the office of elder and the academic office of theologian are not the same.

Are liberal theologians Christians? I want to take the question seriously, partly because much of my education was gleaned in liberal theological schools, and I knew people there who I would have to call liberal but also were Christians. And there were people there I would have to call liberal and I found their Christianity suspect. I think we need to be careful with the word 'liberal.' Classically, liberalism is a collection of commitments about the nature of Scripture and how that Scripture relates to contemporary culture. I think we tend use the word 'liberal' in a very nebulous way. I am going to answer it this way: yes, some liberals are Christians; some conservatives are not. What if someone does not believe in the resurrection, if someone does not believe in the exodus? I dislike the idea of trying to create a list of essentials, of fundamentals, because the Word of God seeks for us to affirm the whole council of God rather than a small list of things. However, it is conceivable that someone could deny the exodus and be a Christian. We can be very confused about the nature and counsel of the Word of God. This should not scare us at all because the issue here is God's grace, not what I say about it. We are going to be surprised when we are all together in the kingdom of God, in its fullness and we look around and see who is going to be there. "You mean that guy made it, even with what he said? And that church over there, what a bunch of jerks!" I think that is going to be the reality, and the fact of the matter is that every person there, every group there, is there by the grace of God and no other reason. Again, it is not because of the great things I said about Jesus; it is the great thing that Jesus said on my behalf to the Father.

What is the relationship between theology and worldview? Many people assume those are the same things. You hear people on the radio, for instance, talk about a worldview but really what they are talking about is something much narrower. Theology is not everything, even within the Christian environment. I am a theologian. I do not know beans about raising hogs and I cannot tell people how to

do it even though I lived in Iowa. There are a lot of things I do not know anything about and a Christian worldview is very, very big. It is a comprehensive collection of beliefs and presuppositions about the nature of reality and the elements of reality. Theology is one part of that. We could go back to our analogy of the lights in our room. I think oftentimes when we impoverish our worldview. Our worldview is as appropriate to the political as it is to the theological. It is open to economic analysis as well as theological analysis. However, there is one thing that stands over all of those: revelation. Again, this is another reason why I should not confuse theology with revelation. God's Word is a word for all of life: for farming, for electricians, for economics, for child-rearing, for sexuality, for all the rest.

Let us pray together.

*Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You again for Your marvelous faithfulness. We thank you, Lord, that though we are insufficient, although we do not have all the answers, although we are subjective and relativistic, mistaken and all the rest of that—You never are. We thank You, Lord, that You are faithful to the end and give us Your sure Word, a word through which we learn of Your marvelous grace and Your Son who came to lay it all on the line for us, that we might become the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ. We pray, Lord, that in the coming weeks, we will gain just a little bit larger vision of the wonder of Your Word and a much greater vision of Your character, of Your commitment, of Your long-suffering love, of Your covenantal jealousy. And through that all, we will know You better, we will serve You better, and we will learn to love the things that You love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*