

Biblical Doctrine: An Overview (from ESV Study Bible)

I. Introduction

1. Definition of theology: The word "theology" comes from two Greek words, *theos* ("God") and *logos* ("word"). The study of theology is an effort to make definitive statements about God and his implications in an accurate, coherent, relevant way, based on God's self-revelations. Doctrine means instructions that explain explicitly and logically Christian theology.
2. Who is a theologian? Every Christians who seeks consistent explanations of God.
3. Necessity of theology
 - 1) The triune God is truth (Rom 3:3-4; John 14:6; 15:26). We could love and worship God only when we know about the truth that He revealed.
 - 2) We cannot love God without biblical doctrines of God. Love of a person cannot be separated from knowledge of that person (Deut 30:7; Mark 12:30). The commandment of the law includes loving of God through the mind.
 - a. Avoid dichotomy between the heart and the mind.
 - b. The word for mind in Greek and Hebrew refers to the rational, rather than emotional, faculty of the human nature. The right use of the mind is essential to worship, prayer, service, and evangelism.
 - 3) The spiritually mature Christian should advance in biblical doctrines by going beyond the basic things (Heb 5:11-6:2)
 - 4) Doctrinal education of the truth of God is essential to the sanctification of the Christian (Jn 17:17).
 - 5) Biblical discipleship cannot be done without doctrinal education.
 - a. Jesus' Great commission could be done not only by evangelism(mission) but also teaching all what Jesus commanded us to observe.
 - b. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is not merely by our confession, but needs to be demonstrated by our remaining (obedience to) in his words. If so, we need to understand rightly what his words mean exactly.
4. Method of Theology
 - 1) A study of the will of God is based on a right interpretation of the biblical texts that God inerrantly revealed.
 - 2) The meaning of a text must be understood in light of the historical, literary, and linguistic contexts of the period when it was written and the canon.
5. Process of Theology
 - 1) Collect, analyze, and summarize the entire lessons of the Scriptures on a particular topic in a systematic and harmonious way.
 - 2) Different degree of theological importance in doctrines

- a. Doctrines absolute to salvation and Christian identity (God's creation, the Trinity, the incarnation of Christ, salvation by Christ, faith alone, the second coming of Christ, the last judgment...)
 - No negotiation or compromise with those doctrines essential for salvation.
 - Those who deny them are heretics. No salvation for them.
 - b. Important doctrines (doctrinal convictions) to constitute a membership of a local church or a denomination (biblical inerrancy, believer's baptism by immersion, predestination, the way of the presence of the Lord in the Lord's Supper)
 - No need to make those who disagree with you in those areas your enemies.
 - Not all convictions are equally biblical. But we need to treat others with respect and to talk with them about our differences in love and patience.
 - Nonetheless, denial of those convictions would disqualify one as a member of a particular faith community.
 - c. Personal opinions
 - Within Christian orthodoxy boundary, there are some issues that have not obtained a unanimous agreement (origin of the soul, the views on the millennial kingdom, trichotomy or dichotomy....)
 - We need to study together continually about them and to be humble towards one another.
 - Do not make your difference split your church or your faith community.
 - d. Some doctrines could belong to B or C according to a particular church or person.
- 3) The criteria of theological importance among doctrines. (1) biblical clarity; (2) relevance to the character of God; (3) relevance to the essence of the gospel; (4) biblical frequency and significance (how often in Scripture it is taught, and what weight Scripture places upon it); (5) effect on other doctrines; (6) consensus among Christians (past and present); and (7) effect on personal and church life.

II. Area of Doctrines

Area of Study	Technical Title
Method and foundation	Prolegomena
The Bible	Bibliology
God	Theology proper

Humanity (or man)	Anthropology
Sin	Hamartiology
Christ	Christology
Holy Spirit	Pneumatology
Salvation	Soteriology
Church	Ecclesiology
Last things	Eschatology

III. Bibliology

1. Revelation
 - 1) The word 'revelation' in Greek means to show something hidden by opening the curtains.
 - 2) The incomprehensibility of God (Ps 145:3, Isa 55:8-9; Rom 11:33-34). Since man is a creature, he cannot fully understand all things of God. Furthermore, man after the fall is necessarily limited in knowing God. But man can know God due to revelation.
 - 3) There are general revelation and special revelation
2. General revelation
 - 1) This revelation is general in its method (nature and conscience), content (the existence of God, the judgment of sins, the common graces of God), and scope (all human beings).
 - 2) Nature (Ps 19:1; Rom 19-20) and Conscience (Rom 2:14-15)
3. Special revelation
 - 1) This revelation is special in its method (God directly revealed through prophecies, miracles, the incarnation, and the Bible), content (the Trinity, salvation [justification by faith alone in Christ alone]), and scope (only covenant people).
4. Inspiration
 - 1) God's work that supervised biblical writers so that his revelation should be rightly written)
 - 2) 2 Tim 3:16 (All Scripture is 'God-breathed.') The Bible is what God directly spoke. The word 'Scripture' means sacred writings. Not only the ideas but also the words of Scripture are inspired.
 - 3) 2 Pet 1:20-21. Biblical writers wrote Scriptures by the strong guidance which kept them from human limits and errors.

5. Inerrancy

- 1) God's work that made Scripture the inerrant words of God's revelation through the inspiration of the Spirit. Inerrancy belongs to the original autographs of biblical writers.
- 2) Inerrancy includes not only the things that belong to salvation and ethic but also all that Scripture affirms whether it is a description of nature or a historical report.
- 3) Inerrancy must be understood in light of communication skills, culture, and a way of describing nature. We should not demand the accuracy of modern science from the Bible.
- 4) Inerrancy is supported by the attributes of God (truth, God cannot lie, omnipotence, omniscience) and the incarnation of Christ.

6. Clarity

- 1) Biblical clarity does not mean that there is no difficult passage in the Bible (2 Pet 3:16)
- 2) But it means that we could know explicitly at least what to obey through the illumination of the Spirit (2 Tim 2:7) and the pastors and teachers who are gifted in the knowledge of God.

7. Sufficiency

- 1) 2 Tim 3:16 tells that Scripture is sufficient in knowing and preparing all things that are necessary to learn the truth and do good.
- 2) Scripture provides sufficient materials for us to be saved and to worship God.
- 3) However, this does not mean that Scripture directly teaches us about all academic truths. Nonetheless, Scripture is sufficient for us to find the truth of God through direct references or indirect implications or rational inferences from various principles of Scripture.

8. Authority

- 1) The Bible alone is the inerrant source of the revelation of God.
- 2) A theologian, a denomination, a church, and a tradition must be continually affirmed and corrected by the Bible. They should also submit themselves to the absolute authority of the Bible.
- 3) Sola scriptura means *suprema scriptura*. The Bible is *norma normans* (the rule that governs other rules) and cannot be challenged by any authority. But a theologian, a pastor, and a church are *norma normans* (the rule that is governed by Scripture)

IV. The Doctrine of God

1. Possibility of knowing God (We cannot know everything about God even through revelation, but we can know what God wants us to know. We should avoid a mystic

movement that contradicts or ignores the objective truth that was revealed in the Bible)

Means of Revelation	Examples
actions	creating, judging, redeeming
names	"LORD" (Hb. <i>YHWH</i> , or <i>Yahweh</i>) "God Almighty" (Hb. <i>el Shadday</i>) "Master, Lord" (Hb. <i>'Adon</i>)
images	Father, Rock, Husband, Shepherd
attributes	holiness, goodness, love, grace, wrath

2. Divine attributes– They are explicitly demonstrated in Jesus Christ, the exact image of God (Heb 1:3).

- 1) Communicable attributes: love, righteousness, truth, holiness, ... These are found in God and us. However, this does not mean that we have the same kind of attributes as God's because what are found in us are the attributes of creatures.
- 2) Non-communicable attributes: omnipotence, omnipresence, almighty, self-sufficiency....
- 3) Simplicity of God. God is not a composition of various. He is always and wholly loving, holy, .. Since he is not a man, he does not stop loving in order to exercise his wrath against sin. He remains loving and righteous while he exercises his wrath

3. The Trinity

- 1) Definition: There is only one God. But this God exists as the three Persons (Father, the Son, and the Spirit). One God in three Persons = the Trinity. Not three Gods. Not one Person-God in Judaism and Islam.
- 2) Three Persons inter-dwell one another (perichoresis = inter-dwelling, interpenetration). 'Don't you know that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father' (Jn 14:10)
- 3) Each Person is fully God. All three Persons are equal in the divine substance.
- 4) The revelation of the Trinity is hinted in the OT (divine plurality 'we' [Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8]; 'the Lord said to my Lord' [Ps 110:1]) but clearly revealed in the NT (Matt 28:19-20; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:13)

- 5) The Father plans and orders all divine works. The Son achieves what the Father plans and orders. The Spirit applies what the Son achieves to Christians and actualizes all the benefits of Christ in us.
- 6) Trinitarian heresies: Tritheism, Modalism. A modern modalism is oneness Pentecostalism. Jehovah's Witnesses who denied the deity of Christ and the Spirit, Mormons who present the ontological subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father and believe in the three Gods.

V. Christology

1. The Deity of Christ

- 1) The perfect God. He was God even before his incarnation. (Dan 7:13-14; Jn 1:1-3; Phil 2:6). Christ is forever God after his incarnation (Jn 20:28; Rom 9:5)
- 2) The incarnation means that the Son of God took perfect humanity except sin (Jn 1:14)
- 3) He came as the God to redeem us
- 4) Jesus' own testimonies of his deity
 - a. Authority to forgive sins (Matt 9)
 - b. Power to control nature and demons (Mark 4; 5; John 2); Sustaining the universe (John 1; Col 1; Heb 1)
 - c. The Lord of Sabbath (Matt 12)
 - d. Power to give life to the dead (Matt 9; John 11); Resurrection of himself (John 10)
 - e. Acceptance of worship from his disciples (Matt 14; John 20)
 - f. "I am" divine sayings (John 6, 8, 10, 11, 15)
- 5) Heresies denying the deity of Christ: Ebionites (1st century); Adoptionists (Ebionites were adoptionists, but there were other adoptionists in history). Adoptionists have argued that God adopted the man Jesus as his Son when he was baptized by John the Baptist. Arians (Jehovah Witnesses' are contemporary Arians).

2. The humanity of Jesus Christ

- 1) The Perfect man without sin. He was a real man that one could see and touch (Jn 1:14; 1 John 1: 1-3). Human emotions and weakness (hunger, thirst, fatigue, tears, ignorance of the last day...)
- 2) Became our sinless substitute sacrifice on our behalf (Heb 4:15; 9:22; 1 Pet 4:1). Christ took the whole humanity (body and soul) in order to redeem our entire humanity.
- 3) But at the same time his deity did not change [decrease] after the incarnation.

- 4) Heresies denying the humanity of Christ: Docetism, Apollinarius who admitted the human body of Christ but denied his human soul.
3. The hypostatic [personal] union of two natures in Jesus Christ
 - 1) Jesus has two natures (deity and humanity) but is one person.
 - 2) The two natures are perfectly and eternally united in the one person, Jesus Christ. But Christ's two natures have not changed and will not be changed into another nature. Christ's deity will remain as it is. Christ's humanity will remain as it is. Therefore the resurrected and ascended Jesus could be called God who sits at the right hand of God's throne and man Jesus at the same time (1 Tim 2:5)