**Who Needs Theology?**

Lesson 4

What are some of the objections to doing theology that you have heard?

1. Theology is a killjoy.

 -Theology is a lot of hard work, why can’t we just enjoy God?

2. Theology leads to division.

 -“Theology divides, Jesus unites.”

3. Theology is too speculative.

 -Theology delves too deeply into the things of God.

 -A preoccupation with the unknowable makes you lose touch with reality.

 -“So heavenly minded that you are no earthly good.”

4. Theology simply leads to dead ends.

 -We end up coming to stalemates.

 -Agree to disagree.

-While it is important to recognize the possible dangers of theology (which happens when theology becomes an end in itself rather than the pursuit of God) many of these excuses against theology are untrue.

1. Killjoy excuse: (Reality)

-One of the greatest pleasures in life is working hard with your heart, mind, soul, and strength to know and love God in deeper and more personal ways.

-The most important things in life take work.

-You can’t enjoy a God you haven’t worked at getting to know.

1. Division excuse: (Reality)

 -Certainly unity at the expense of truth is evil.

 -But ultimately theology is *not meant to unite or divide* – it is the pursuit of truth.

-Plus, most churches do not divide over theology, but over trivial issues (opinions) like music, color schemes, how to spend money, and personalities.

-It is true, however, that we need to learn how to better engage and debate and disagree and yet still love one another. (There is something wrong when we can only be with people that think, look, and act just like we do).

1. Speculative excuse: (Reality)

 -It has been the great thinkers (philosophers & theologians) that change the course of history (for good and bad).

-Often it is not immediate pragmatism that serves a people best, but those who see deep and far and (in the immediate) may seem impractical.

-Sometimes their effect/ideas are appreciated or understood until later

generations.

1. Dead End excuse: (Reality)

 -Many dead ends are not dead ends when we push further on.

 -Dead ends bring us closer to the truth in a process of elimination. (Thomas Edison – the light bulb)

-The truth is:

-We engage in theological reflection because it assists *us* in being Christ’s disciples.

-Good theology assists Christians because it grounds their lives in biblically informed truths, which protect them from being swept away by fads and folk theology.

-Good theology moves beyond stating truths; it explores the significance of our beliefs and faith in the way we live our life.

**The task of theology is both critical and constructive**

1. Critical task of theology
2. Theology examines and evaluates Christian beliefs (correcting heresy)

 -Heresy is the mother of orthodoxy.

 -Paul’s letters.

 -NT canon – Marcion

 -Nicean Creed – Arius

 -*Da Vinci code* – People learning about how the Bible was put together.

1. Theology categorizes Christian beliefs in levels of importance.

 \*Dogma, Doctrine, or Opinion

 i. Dogma: Specific to Christianity

-*Great Tradition*

-Denial leads to the questioning of Christianity

-(i.e. full deity and humanity of Christ)

 ii. Doctrine: Specific to Denominations

-*Denominational tradition*

-Denial leads to the questioning of a denomination(s)

-(i.e. mode of baptism, tongues, church governance, women in

ministry, pacifism).

 iii. Opinion: Specific to Individuals

 -*Personal tradition*

-Denial leads to the questioning of the self.

 -This is why, particularly in our day of individualism, though these

are least important, we often make them the most important.

 -So, in choosing a church, we become more concerned about whether we like the music, or that the people vote the way we do, than whether it is faithful to the great tradition.

 -(i.e. placement of the pulpit, dancing, coffee in the foyer, style of music, vaccine/no vaccine).

-Although these categories are helpful, not all issues are as easy to place.

-Where do you place such issues “the rapture” or “the intermediate state” or “the inerrancy of scripture”.

-The Great tradition never made the rapture a dogma. (In fact, the rapture didn’t become a church doctrine until the 1800s).

-Since then, some denominations have made it part of their doctrine.

-Others (like ours) leave it up to a matter of opinion.

\*Ultraliberals – tend to downplay *dogma*.

\*Ultraconservatives/fundamentalists - tend to give too much weight to *opinions.*

1. Constructive task of theology
2. Theology constructs unified models of diverse biblical teaching.

-To set forth the unity and coherence of the biblical teaching about God, ourselves, and the world we are called to be disciples in.

1. Theology organizes and relates these models to contemporary culture.

-To organize Christian beliefs in intelligible ways so that contemporary people – Christian and non-Christian – can understand them.

**The Tools of theology are the Bible, tradition and contemporary culture.**

-John Wesley’s quadrilateral.

1. The Bible (primary tool)

-The reformers strongly reminded us of the primary place of the Bible.

-Four beliefs of the reformers:

1. A rejection of tradition as equal with the Biblical witness.
2. A rejection of natural theology (general revelation) as any reliable guide to true knowledge of God.
3. The affirmation of every Christian believer’s right to read and interpret Scripture.
4. The affirmation of the ongoing nature of theological reflection as a collaborative effort of God’s people (“reformed and always reforming”)

-Can’t be too quick to throw-out tradition, however, as these 4 points are a part of a tradition!

-We are not neutral readers of the Bible.

-We cannot read the Bible through eyes unaffected by our own historical and cultural context.

-Theology is a never ending enterprise (views may/will) change through deeper study.

-Therefore, knowing *how* to read the Bible is of utmost importance.

-Some important basics are:

 1. Scripture should be read regularly and systematically.

 2. Bible study must be theocentric (God-centered) and move beyond ourselves.

 -What does this say about God?

 3. The books of the Bible should be read as books—from beginning to end.

 4. Start by reading the New Testament.

 5. Scripture should be interpreted in light of the literary genre of the book or section being read.

 6. Scripture should be interpreted in light of its historical setting.

 7. We must acknowledge our biases.

 8. We must accept the limits of God’s revelation.

 9. Scriptures must move us from interpretation to application.

 10. Scripture should be used to interpret scripture.

 11. Scripture should be read with the guidance of the church.

-(i.e. The Creed, study guides, commentaries, Bible study groups, the preaching/teaching of called leaders, etc).

-The Holy Spirit works *through* the church (more often than *through* individuals).

\*Gordon Fee’s book *Reading the Bible for all its Worth*

2. Tradition

-Great Tradition and denominational traditions.

-It is both foolish and impossible to jump from the prophets and the apostles to today without giving any consideration to the intervening time.

-Our forbearers grappled with the significance of the Biblical message as we do.

-Looking at the past alerts us to some of the pitfalls we should avoid, plus allows us to stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before.

-Plus, with the distance of time, we see who are some of the church’s greatest teachers that we can learn from. (i.e. Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Wesley).

-Again, the Holy Spirit works *through* the church *throughout history.*

3. Contemporary Culture

1. A relevant theology articulates Christian beliefs in a manner that people can understand.

-This is new translations are so important

-Words change meaning and better/newer manuscripts are discovered.

1. A relevant theology speaks to the problems, longings and ethos of contemporary culture.
2. A relevant theology also takes seriously contemporary discoveries and insights of the various disciplines of human learning.

 -We cannot withdraw from our social and historical contexts.

**Questions**

1. What objection(s) to theology have you held (or hold) to?

 a) killjoy; b) leads to division; c) too speculative; d) leads to dead ends.

2. Did anything Pastor Stef said tonight dispel those myths? (why/why not?)

3. When or how have you held an *opinion* too dogmatically?

4. What were the results?

1. Do the categories of *dogma, doctrine,* and *opinion* help you? (why/why not?)
2. How do you distinguish *dogma, doctrine,* and *opinion*?
3. What one or two Bible study tips that you heard tonight do you need to put more into practice? (How are you going to do that?)
4. What are some ways that knowing our theological traditions protect us?
5. In what ways does having a good Biblical theology help us interact and be a light to our contemporary world?