

Turn: 2 Ti 4:2-4 (ESV) preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ⁽³⁾ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching (**NKJV sound doctrine**), but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁽⁴⁾ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Start a study on basics of theology – “Foundations of Christianity”

1. Theology defined: What do we mean when we use that word?

A. Theology simply means the study of God – **Theos** = God. **Ology** = a subject of study

2. Theology is a word many view in a negative way

A. Just a bunch of cold, dry, lifeless facts that don’t mean anything to real life

“How will that help me deal with an unruly child, put food on my table, heal my marriage”

B. We live in a time where they don’t want theology – but is that healthy?

Transition: So I think we need to start our class by looking at “Why is studying theology a necessity?”

I. WHY STUDY THEOLOGY?

1. Because everybody is a theologian – like it or not

A. I’ve heard people say “You may be thinking – why study theology? I don’t want to be a theologian”

The truth is *you are a theologian*

R.C. Sproul: Every Christian is a theologian. We are always engaged in the activity of learning about the things of God. We are not all theologians in the professional or academic sense, *but theologians we are, for better or for worse. The "for worse" is no small matter.* Second Peter warns that heresies are destructive to the people of God and are blasphemies committed against God. They are destructive because *theology touches every dimension of our lives.*

Point: So you are a theologian – And if your theology touches every dimension of your life

A. You want to be a good theologian

Transition: To drive this home – let’s look at some of the misunderstandings Christians have about theology

Some Common Misunderstandings About the Need Of Theology

Many Christians think they can fully experience God apart from theology

A. Problem: How can you truly experience God if you don’t know who He is? What He’s done?

1). Theology is meant to deepen your relationship with God and enhance your experience of God

J. Gresham Machen: The more we know of God, the more unreservedly we will trust him; the greater our progress in theology, the simpler and more childlike will be our faith.

a). A theological understanding will simplify your life

Because you start to rest in the God that theology is teaching you about

“I don’t worry about theology! I just want to love Jesus”

A. Problem: Scripture says in the end there will be many Jesus’

Mt 24:24 (ESV) For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

1). Are you sure you’re loving the right one?

a). Mormons, JW’s, Muslims, world all have a Jesus – just not the Biblical Jesus

2). To some He’s just a good teacher, a great philosopher, a political leader, a great prophet

3). England – full page ad – Lord Maitreya – already came – flat in London

Point: There are many Jesus – but only one saves – *theology tells us which one is the true Jesus*

“I know I’m saved because I believed the Gospel”

- A. Problem: Paul points out there are messages called the gospel that are not the gospel
Gal 1:6-7 (NIV) I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a *different gospel-- (7) which is really no gospel at all...*
- 1). Then he warns people about proclaiming a different gospel
Gal 1:9 (NIV) As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, *let him be eternally condemned!*
- a). That should make us want to know the Gospel accurately
- Thought:** Many messages are called Gospel that won't save you – have you responded to the right one?
- A. Examples of messages called the Gospel
- 1). From a well-known Christian artist in an interview
 What a great question. I guess I'd probably . . . *my instinct* is to say that it's Jesus coming, living, dying, and being resurrected and his inaugurating the already and the not yet of all things being restored to himself . . . and that happening by way of himself . . . the being made right of all things . . . that process both beginning and being a reality in the lives and hearts of believers and yet a day coming when it will be more fully realized. But the good news, the gospel, the speaking of the good news, I would say is the news of his kingdom coming, the inaugurating of his kingdom coming . . . *that's my instinct.*
- a). Here is a man with influence – but he doesn't know the truth that can save
 He is depending upon *instincts* which in this case aren't even close
- 2). A couple more answers to what the Gospel is
 The good news is, God wants to show you his incredible favor. He wants to fill your life with “new wine,” but are you willing to get rid of your old wineskins? Will you start thinking bigger? Will you enlarge your vision and get rid of those old negative mind-sets that hold you back?
- a). Not even close!
- Another:** Good news! God is becoming King and he is doing it through Jesus! And therefore, phew!, God's justice, God's peace, God's world is going to be renewed. And in the middle of that, of course, it's good news for you and me. But that's the derivative from, or the corollary of the good news which is a message about Jesus that has a second-order effect on me and you and us. But the gospel is not itself about . . . *you are this sort of a person and this can happen to you.* That's the result of the gospel rather than the gospel itself. . . . Salvation is the result of the gospel, not the center of the gospel itself.
- a). Uhhhhh... What? Nobody could get saved from that!
- B. When the Gospel is distorted, it is no longer good news
- 1). It becomes a deadly substitute that no longer leads to salvation
 And no longer brings the sinner into a relationship with God
- Thought:** I think this has some horrifying implications
- A. Couldn't this indicate there are many who think they're saved when they're not
- 1). Who have responded to a false gospel that is not God's truth?
- a). God is not bound to accept a redefined message – He is bound to accept one message
- 2). But here is one of the problems – you can get results with a false gospel
- a). A gospel that has no cost - doesn't call man to repentance – to be a follower of Christ
A. W. Pink: We are far more concerned about the results of the gospel than we are about the purity of it.
- 1a). But a false gospel will only produce false converts
- B. *Theology tells us the one message God will accept – safeguards us from embracing a false message*

R.C. Sproul said “Theology Touches Every Area of Our Life”

- A. What happens when I die? Will I go to heaven? What is my confidence based on? You'd better know!
- 1). I've watched great Christian people struggle in the hospital – Satan bringing up every sin

- a). You'd better understand theology that tells you why you're accepted by God
Why the devil's accusations – though true – will be thrown out of court
 - b). Theology equips you against these lies
- B. When life goes south – when trials hit and shake everything around you – How do you rest?
- 1). How do you know that God is in control of all things (that He is **Sovereign**)
And can work those things out for your good
 - 2). And big enough to handle everything that seems to be crushing you (**Omnipotent**)
 - 3). Without a theological understanding – you're left to your own imagination – your own thinking
 - a). Your imagination and your thinking aren't big enough to hold you up
 - b). Theology gives you the reasons why you can trust God and rest in the promises
- C. As you witness – can you explain the Trinity? Huge point of contention with Muslims. Atheists
- 1). I don't mean – "It's like an apple. Skin, meat, core" "It's like water. Liquid. Ice. Steam."
 - a). That may work in a Sunday school. The atheist and Muslim will not be impressed
 - 2). Can you reason from Scripture? That is where the power is. **God uses His Word**
 - a). As we move ahead you will be able too
- D. What about the virgin birth? Seems ridiculous to some – even too many seminary professors today
- 1). Do you know why this is a point we can't surrender? Why it is so important?
 - a). If Jesus isn't born supernaturally – with God as His Father
He inherits Adam's sin nature and can't rescue us from our sin – substitution is ruined
- E. Do you know where to look to prove the deity, incarnation, atonement and substitution of Christ
- 1). This is all essential for our assurance, peace, joy, spiritual strength
- Question:** What about the power of sanctification (living holy lives)? What motivates us to live for God?
- A. So many churches just give their people one list after another – every Sunday
- 1). What you should do for God – take this list and place it on the 100 others we gave you
 - a). Until you're so burdened with what you must do – Christianity loses all its joy
And you lose all your assurance – because you fall short of what those list demand
- B. Guess where the Bible starts in sanctification - **with Theology** – with God and what He's done
- 1). Example: Romans first 11 chapters – theology – the great doctrines of mercy and grace
Justification by faith alone through grace alone in Christ alone apart from works
 - a). The sovereign – merciful choice of God in election
 - b). The security of His grip of love that keeps you until you're with Him in glory
 - 2). Breath-taking – God exalting theology – then finally in Chapter 12 verse 1
Rom 12:1 (NIV) Therefore, I urge you, brothers, **in view of God's mercy**, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.
 - a). There is the answer for those who think theology doesn't affect them
I just want to keep it simple and live for Christ
 - 1a). It is theology which compels you to do that! Which makes that a reasonable choice
 - 2a). The more I understand theology the simpler my life becomes – BIG GOD!
 - 3). So theology convinces us **intellectually** that living for God is reasonable
How the NKJV translates it: Rom 12:1 (NKJV) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, **which is your reasonable service.**
 - 4). AND theology moves us **emotionally** – so we fall in love with Him
1 John 4:19 (NKJV) We love Him because He first loved us.
 - a). How do I know how much He loved me? Theology will tell me

Thought: Why I'm excited about theology – what it does to us

- 1). It will excite us about God – cause us to worship Him – instill a deeper desire to serve Him
 - a). For the right reasons – not to earn acceptance with Him
But because theology will teach us - we have been accepted through Christ's work
- 2). It's because of His grace – His mercy
All He's done for sinners like us - we will desire to serve a God like that!

Summary: You're whole Christian life is affected by your theological understanding

- A. Your joy, rest, peace. Your love for God. Your motivation to live for His glory
- B. Therefore. It makes sense that we should do what it takes to be a good theologian

Transition: Brings us to the second reason we should study theology

2. Because of the war on truth

- A. We live in a day where society around us views the church in a negative light
 - 1). That which used to be common ground has now become a battle ground
 - 2). Issues we assumed were mainstream in America – church and society agreeing
Such as: the makeup of the family – sexual ethics – sanctity of human life
 - a). How we view these things is now viewed as being intolerant and offensive
- B. This exerts pressure upon the church and Its members to compromise what we believe
 - 1). So that we seem less offensive and more tolerant to the society around us
 - 2). Some even suggest - if the church doesn't do this – doesn't compromise - it will die
 - a). It will never be able to reach this new generation with such outdated beliefs
- C. Russel Moore's words in this book "Onward: Engaging the culture without losing the Gospel"

He explains how contrary our view is to what is now considered *normal America*

I was having a conversation with an atheist, a lesbian progressive activist in a major urban cultural center. She wanted to talk to me because evangelical Christianity piqued her interest, as a sociological phenomenon. She was most interested in our sexual ethic, and peppered me with questions about why we thought certain things were sinful. We had a respectful, civil conversation, though she couldn't help but laugh out loud several times when I articulated viewpoints quite commonplace not only in historic Christianity but also in Judaism.

She said I was the first person she'd ever actually talked to who believed that sexual expression ought only to take place within marriage, and that I was the only person she'd ever met in real life who thought that marriage could only happen with the union of a man to a woman. She said that if she ever met anyone who had seen someone for more than three or four weeks, without having sex, she would not first assume that this person had some sort of religious conviction, but rather that this person must bear the psychological scars of some sort of traumatic abuse. She followed this up by saying, "*So do you see how strange what you're saying sounds to us, to those of us out here in normal America?*"

Before I could answer, I was distracted by those two words: "normal America." How things had turned around. Most of the people in the pews of my church back home would consider themselves to be "normal America." They would view this woman—with her sexual openness and her dismissal of monogamy—as part of some freakish cultural elite, out of touch with "traditional values." *But I suspect she's right. More and more, she represents the moral majority in this country, committed to "family values" of personal autonomy and sexual freedom. She is normal, now.*

- 4). Is that really the new normal? Have you watched television lately? It is!
 - a). The truth we believe is sounding more and more absurd to the society around us

Thought: So that exerts a pressure we have all felt - to acquiesce to the culture around us

- A. To keep our mouths shut when we should speak
AND when we do speak to water down what we believe
- B. The danger when a church or a believer waters down what they believe
 - 1). We will start absorbing the culture around us

- 2). Why? Because how we think will dictate how we live
If we allow our thinking to become compromised
- a). It won't be long until our life is affected by those compromised beliefs
Ps 23:7 As a man thinks so is he.
R. A. Torrey: Loose theology leads to loose morality.
- C. The problem; In an attempt to become relevant we become irrelevant
- 1). We lose our grip on what makes us different from the world
- a). What makes us different – it is what our truth has to offer
Forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ!
- 2). We can so dilute the message we are left with nothing to give to them – but religion
A. W. Tozer: Christianity has been watered down until the solution is so weak that if it were poison it would not hurt anyone and if it were medicine it would not cure anyone!
- D. Our main goal *cannot be* to look and sound so much like the world we'll be embraced by the world
- 1). The message we preach about Christ has always been offensive – accept that!
It never has been accepted by everybody: 1 Co 1:23 (ESV) but we preach Christ crucified, *a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,*
- a). Our message tells people there is only one way to God – through faith in Christ
- b). Our message tells people they must turn from their sin and bow to Christ as Lord
- 2). That is the message God uses when He speaks to a sinners heart

Point: You MUST know your theology – to stand against this tide flowing against us

- A. The new normal that is not pro-church – pro-truth
This new normal that is increasingly becoming more aggressive against the church and it's truth
- B. Therefore - You must become so sure of the truth *that you cannot be moved*

Thought: This is why one of the main jobs of the church is to educate its people – to be doctrinal

Eph 4:11–14 (ESV) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds (pastors) and teachers, ⁽¹²⁾ to equip the saints for the work of ministry, *for building up the body of Christ,* ⁽¹³⁾ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of *the knowledge of the Son of God,* to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ⁽¹⁴⁾ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about *by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*

- A. Unfortunately – many churches have stopped thinking that doctrine – theology is important
- 1). That has left their members vulnerable to lies – and victimized by false teachers

Transition: There are many reasons to study theology – just given you two – need to move on

- A. It affects everything in your life in a positive or negative way – be a good theologian
- B. Because of the war on truth – this war is real – know the truth well enough to not be moved

III. HOW WE WILL APPROACH THIS: OUR METHOD

1. **Not as dry lectures - theology excites me – tells me who God is - what He's done**
2. **We will approach theology in a systematic way – “Systematic theology”**

Wayne Grudem: *Systematic theology is any study that answers the question, What does the whole Bible teach us 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.

- A. We will go through the many categories such as
- 1). Bibliology: The study of the Bible - Is the Bible divinely authored, inerrant, infallible
 - 2). Study of God: God the Father. God the Son. God the Holy Spirit.

- 3). Categories of soteriology: The doctrines of salvation
- 4). Categories of ecclesiology – the Church
- B. We will pick out specific subjects in these categories – You’d find “Faith” in the category of Soteriology
 - 1). Systematic theology would trace what faith means from Genesis to Revelation
 - a). Giving a full picture of what it really means to believe
 - b). Won’t be comprehensive – every passage – but those that are necessary to understand
- C. We will do the same thing with subjects like heaven and hell
 - 1). We’ll look at those big words like justification and sanctification – atonement – substitution etc.
 - a). We will break those down so you can understand them
 - b). These are the words that give you strength – *want to return to a Christian vocabulary*

Transition: So our *approach* is what is called systematic theology

- A. What about our *attitude* that we should have as we go through this

IV. HOW WE SHOULD APPROACH THIS: OUR ATTITUDE

1. We should study theology with prayer

- A. It is the Spirit who gives understanding of these great truths

Ps 119:18 (ESV) Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

- 1). Studying theology is a spiritual activity in which we need the help of the Holy Spirit
- B. You may have been an “A” student in school – you had no trouble with any of those text books
But you need the Spirit’s help for spiritual truths – not the same

Why Paul prayed: Eph 1:17–19 (ESV) that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, *may give you the Spirit of wisdom* and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ⁽¹⁸⁾ *having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know* what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ⁽¹⁹⁾ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might

2. We should study theology with humility

1 Pe 5:5 (ESV) ... all of you, with humility toward one another, for *“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

- A. The devil and our flesh love to take knowledge and puff us up – make us proud and critical
 - 1). Theological understanding should humble us as we see who we are and who God is
 - a). We will see how the fall affected us all – and how God graciously rescued us
 - b). When theology is taught correctly – studied with the purpose of application
 - 1a). The end result will always be a God glorifying humility
 - 2). But if we’re just learning to gather facts to win arguments – result will be pride!
- B. We also need humility to be open to new thoughts – this will challenge you in some areas
 - 1). I will use scripture to back up everything I say – but we may still have some disagreements
 - a). I don’t mind that as long as you have a scriptural argument too
 - b). “That doesn’t sound fair” is NOT good enough – show me scripture
“The question is not whether a doctrine is beautiful, but whether it is true.”

3. We should study theology with a sense of rejoicing and praise

- A. Theology wipes me out – it tells me about what God has done for me
 - 1). I learn about His kindness, mercy, grace and love for sinner like me
 - 2). It creates such a sense of gratitude – adoration – worship - obedience

Frederick W. Faber: *Deep theology is the best fuel of devotion;* it readily catches fire and, once kindled, it burns long.

V. WHAT WE SHOULD EXPECT FROM THIS STUDY

1. We will have to think through many issues

- A. I'll make it as simple as possible but you need to think with me

2. We should expect spiritual growth

- A. The more you understand doctrine the stronger you will be
- 1). The stronger you are the more you'll enjoy Christianity
Because the truth is setting you free from what is hindering you

3. You will be protected against heresy in the future

- A. Understand the truth and you will be able to spot the counterfeit
- 1). Important because the counterfeit is going to become very powerful – very convincing
The lies will be so deceptive because they are backed up with powerful signs and wonders
- B. I'm telling you as a Pastor you NEED to know the truth well

4. It will help you in life decisions

- A. As we study theology we learn how God thinks
That really helps in discerning what to do in those grey areas of life
- 1). Many things are automatically rejected – “God doesn't think like that”
- 2). Other things you will feel you can continue to pray about – “God would think like that”
- B. In theology, we study the mind of God – His thoughts – so helpful

I encourage you to hang in there as we go through this

1. It will make a tremendous difference in your life

- A. You may not feel it at first – like vitamins – they produce health slowly but surely
- 1). So commit yourself to being here – we don't grow if we don't stretch