

“Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good” (1Thess 5:21 KJV).

“If we believe in God, we should also believe in the Word of God. Since God was interested enough to create us, and since He created us as rational beings, surely He is interested enough to communicate with us and thereby fulfill His purpose for creation” (Bernard, 1992).

Thinking About Theology

by Jan Paron

The Bible is God's inerrant, authoritative Word. God speaks to believers, individually and communally, through His Word. Also, by means of the Bible, He calls them to come close and, by faith, experience the fullness of Christ Jesus in their hearts. “Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong” (Eph 3:17-19 NLT).

Theology Defined

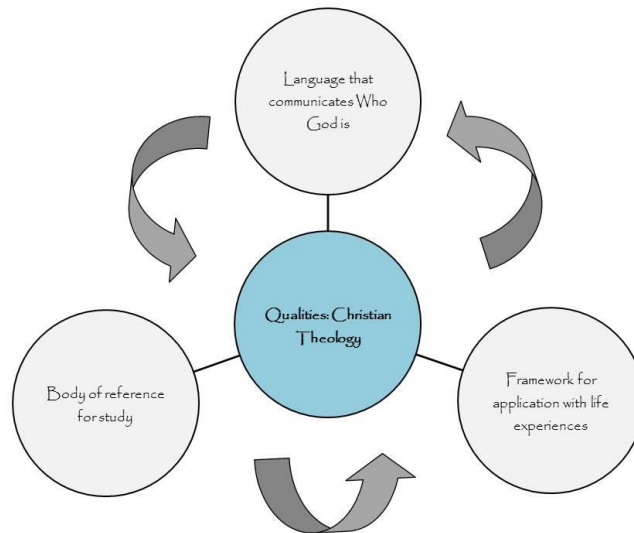
How does theology connect to the Bible? Theology itself relates to study of God and originates from two Greek words, theos and logos. Theos translates from Greek as God, and logos as study (Ross, 2002, ¶ 5). One can learn more about the theology by examining its Latin derivation. McMahan explains that “Latin textbooks use the word theologia to refer to knowledge of God and what God reveals to man about Himself and the world in which He lives” (1998, ¶ 3).

Theology possesses three qualities: it brings understanding about God; provides a body of reference for study and serves as a framework of application for application of life experiences (See Figure 1). Together, these three qualities create a platform upon which man can unlock the truth about the Gospel. Joshua Harris suggests that “Theology shapes the way we think and live” (2010).

Theology is a language of sorts. Language is a dialect associated with a unique subset of culture. Cultures, such as academic discipline, corporate business and people, depend on language as a means of expression in order to cross communicate. Further, people use language as a way of as a way to make sense of their inner thoughts and world around them. The theology of God is a distinct language that communicates the Christian tenets of faith. This language reveals who God is and His attributes and presents itself in one Bible of two testaments. A believer finds the foretelling of the coming of the Messiah in the Old Testament and the prophecy fulfilled through Jesus Christ in the New Testament. A Christian studies the Bible to gain an understanding of who God is in relation to one's identity in Christ and having the mind of Christ.

When one has the mind of Christ, it works in tandem with one's walk in Him. In 1 Cor 2:16, Apostle Paul writes, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ" (KJV). Upon study of the Bible, the Holy Spirit reveals to the believer how to lead a life that is sanctified and holy to God, walking in a pathway illuminated by the Light. As a result, the Holy Spirit, through the Word, develops the believer's spiritual maturity and walk in covenant with Christ in love.

Figure 1: Three Qualities of Christian Theology



Theology Linked to Reflection

So then, what is theological reflection? When the believer reflects on theology, he or she seeks the presence of God through Scripture: discipleship in spiritual growth and formation, comfort from challenges, direction with daily choices or actions, clarity in purpose and solutions in ministry. The goal in theological reflection is to formulate thoughts based on conception of a particular action, test it against God's Word, revise or validate thought, support final direction based on Scripture, relate what one learned and apply it. Theological reflection is a process. Through this process a believer makes what is termed by Regina Coll as "faith connections" (1992, p. 91).

I would liken a life without faith connections, to travel without a compass. Another way to look at theological reflection is from the perspective of faith. Debeer and O'Connell, state that, "life experience invites us to reflect" (*The Art of Theologic Reflection*, 2002, p.1). Once saved by grace through faith, the believer is transformed by the renewal of his mind. A believer wears the mind of Christ; and therefore, view and translate the world around you from this perspective. As Abigail Johnson writes,

Theological reflection is simply wondering about God's activity in our lives. Where is God present? What is God calling us to do? By taking time to ask questions about what happens to us—seeing our experiences through the lens of faith—we become clearer about our connection to God. We all ask questions about relationships, our work, our children, our government, and our situation in life. We all reflect, wonder, analyze, think, assess, and discuss with friends as ways of trying to understand our life. Theological reflection simply refocuses all that thinking to encourage a stronger sense of relationship with God, asking, "Where does God fit into the picture?" (Alban Institute, *Alban Weekly*, "Theologic Reflection in Small Groups," August 14, 2006, No. 108).

Steps in Writing a Theology

1. Pray first for direction, knowledge and wisdom. Stay closely connected to God and Him guide you. Without the Holy Spirit leading you in the process of writing a theology, it is impossible to write one. Start early. Give God time to reveal direction to you.
2. Before you research your topic, think about its scope of research, intended audience, theology due date and presentation format. The goal is to produce a narrow body of knowledge that reflects depth and thorough coverage, rather than broad spectrum, surface information. One note, a power point offers a great medium to present a theology. However, it can prevent you from going fully flushing out a topic because it push the mechanical side of writing. Also, you can get sidetracked with images becoming a distraction to conceptual representation.
3. Write your research question. Know where you're going, otherwise you put yourself in the position of wandering, going off track and losin time. Even when your teacher gives you a topic, you still need a research question. Give yourself a clear focus, before you start researching, analyzing Scripture and writing.
4. Organize your writing or presentation. Some people outline first and reformulate the outline as they go along. Others begin with topics and add information to them. Some can begin with the these, add their ke points and just write. The organization is in their head. I'm not one of those people.
5. Gather your Scriptures carefully and fully exegete your text. This means that you'll have to go beyond a simple word study and concordance definition. My recommendation is to go an innertextual and intertextual study, using cross references and parallel verses. Also, look behind the text at author's purpose, cultural context, geographical and political implications, etc. Use a lexicon, interlinear Bible and parsing guide to look at the original meaning of the passage. If you're doing cultural research you'll have to find reliable sources of ancient customs. -- Don't forget to add your citations as you go along. If you think you'll remember, you're mistaken. Use the APA method of citing text. You can learn about APA by checking out APA at the OWL of Purdue.
6. The next step is to decide on your format and style. A theology is not really a research paper, but does contain elements of it. It has at it core the basic structure of an essay.

Some possibilities for a theology are dialogue form, sermon, drama, mixed media or article. Regardless, you want a driving thesis, key points and support.

7. Before I wrote a theology, I looked at examples from other authors. I considered clarity of presentation, structure, dissemination of information and more, all founded on biblical truth. One writer who I used to as a model to guide my theology format and style is David K. Bernard. He is a noted Apostolic Pentecostal author and numerous theology books. I found one an excerpt of one of his books, *New Birth*, online (<http://books.mcquickenenterprise.com/newbirth.pdf>). His writing are popular because he presents biblical truth in an easy to understand and well organized format. He presents a complete work, but uses straight talk. A complete opposite style is the writing of Craig Van Gelder. While I don't agree with some of Van Gelder's doctrinal suppositions, I love the fact that he writes with a complex, academic voice, but breaks it down in understandable terms. Additionally, begins by presenting a clear direction and intent in his writing with each chapter. I also modeled portions of my theological format after portions of his. -- ***One thing that both authors have in common is that their writing pushed me deeper into Scripture. A good theology does that to the reader. The final result is that a theology should make you hungry to learn more about the God's Word, eager to apply in your life and desirous to probe more questions.***