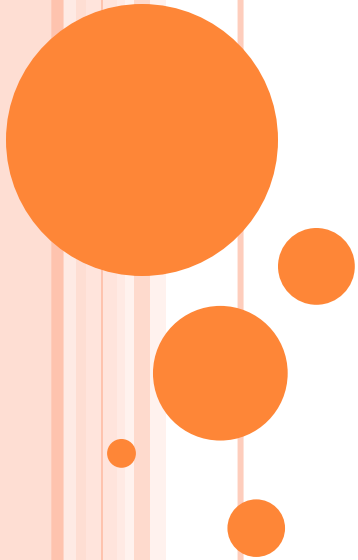


THEOLOGY FOR DUMMIES

Chapter 1

Theology: Tool for Clarifying Faith

1. Why Study Theology?
2. Disclosure
3. Helps
4. Sharpens
5. Awareness
6. Approaches
7. Say That Again



1. WHY STUDY THEOLOGY?

- “Knowledge of God and his ways should draw us closer to him and closer to others. “
 - 1) correct doctrinal beliefs are necessary for establishing a relationship between us and the Father.
 - 2) truth determines our actions: ‘All human experience implies the element of thought. Man must think even if he is the most primitive devotional Christian (Paul Tillich)
 - 3)ideological alternatives face us today—humanism, secularism, materialism and postmodernism.

- **Isn't the Bible enough?**
 - Theology is the discipline of reasoning about God. Theology is a tool for clarifying faith.
 - Theology lives when it gives meaningful answers to questions arising out of the human situation.
 - We cannot fully grasp, appreciate or defend our own position until we consider its alternatives.
 - There are two main doctrines in the Bible –God created the world and sent his Son to redeem it.



2. DISCLOSURE

○ What does Revelation mean?

- **apokalupsis** {ap-ok-al'-oop-sis} 1) laying bare, making naked 2) a disclosure of truth, instruction a) concerning things before unknown, or b) used of events by which things or states or persons hitherto withdrawn from view are made visible to all 3) manifestation, appearance. *[4) Second Coming: Apocalypse]*
- The Greek word APOKALUPSIS is a derivative of APOKALUPTO. APOKALUPTO is a compound word composed of APO, meaning "off" or "away," and KALUPTO, meaning "to cover up." Thus APOKALUPSIS means to take the cover off, to uncover, unveil, reveal or disclose. It implies the drawing away or removal of everything that veils or hides, and therefore it is always opposed to concealment or secrecy
- Aquinas: Natural Theology vs. **revealed theology—truths about God which cannot be apprehended by human reason alone.** *What does the Bible tell us that Nature doesn't?*
- “Some theologians shifted from finding revelation in scripture to the events scripture tells and to the faith which grasps them. Revelation, they say, occurs when a person in faith believes the mystery of the incarnation, not when a person reads the manger story in Matthew for the first time. *The Bible IS or CONTAINS*

○ Can human language express God's revelation?

- “Most Protestant theologians justify the use of human language because God did so in revealing himself to prophets and apostles. *Calvin said that God talks “baby talk” to us.*

○ What is a symbol?

- “Any word or object becomes a symbol when culture invests it with sufficient emotive power to transport the user beyond the word or object to the reality expressed. A symbol system represents the world but also becomes the means for understanding it. As people develop a religious tradition, word-meaning is shaped by common experience. Religious language, then, enables people to live out beliefs, but faith pours back into those words dynamic meaning. *The secular becomes the sacred—communion—but only to the religious community. The language of faith uses profane words.*
- “A religious symbol uses the mundane of ordinary experience in speaking of God, but in such a way that the ordinary meaning of the material used is both affirmed and denied. Every religious symbol affirms and negates itself in the literal sense. God is a Rock, but isn't a rock; God is a Strong Tower, but not a tower.
- “In every age and every culture new symbols emerge to help us understand that one absolute unchanging symbol – Jesus Christ.

○ What is that to me?

- Emailed message about God communicated more than the surface meaning of the sentences, BUT only to those who shared the same religious usage of the words.
- *Does such a community of language users grow up in other contexts than religion?*
 - *teenage slang*
 - *text/twitter messaging*
 - *??*
- *Why are religious symbols more powerful than ordinary symbols?*
- *Luther said “why should the devil have all the good tunes?” and wrote hymns to drinking songs. Could we use Hip-Hop in worship service?*
- *What is the difference between adapting to culture (using their symbols religiously) and sacrilege?*



3. HELPS

- **Aesthetics** = visual arts, caught between two poles:
 - “imitation or representation leads to idolatry.
 - “symbols are man’s only access to reality
 - early compromise: aesthetic theology: cathedrals (“does not contain the sacred but is a means for communicating with the sacred”)
 - Reformation returned theology to propositions, art to merely illustrations.

○ WHAT IS THAT TO ME?

- “If beauty is the radiance of truth, my task is to make sure our sanctuary and the service itself befit the Creator of all beauty.

- *Is beauty merely in the eye of the beholder?*

- *Is there one Christian standard for a beautiful sanctuary or a beautiful liturgy?*

- *Do we share this task? Do we take it seriously?*



- **Apologetics** “the defense, by argument, of Christian belief against external criticism or against other world views” (Hebblethwaite).
 - Tillich: Christianity gives better answers to the human predicament because it captures the REALITY of existence.
 - Barth: no point in arguing, no common ground with pagans.


- **WHAT IS THAT TO ME?**
 - Defending the faith protects it from corruption and is essential for evangelism.
 - *Is evangelism simply telling the good news, or is it convicting people of their need for salvation and the offer of grace?*
 - *Does acceptance come from losing a debate or is it the work of the Holy Spirit?*
 - *Do we argue with ourselves?*



- **Dialectics** (a form of reasoning based on the exchange of arguments and counter-arguments, advocating *propositions* (**theses**) and *counter-propositions* (**antitheses**)).
 - “The outcome of such an exchange might be the refutation of one of the relevant points of view, or a synthesis or combination of the opposing assertions, or at least a qualitative transformation in the direction of the dialogue.
- **WHAT IS THAT TO ME?**
 - “Acknowledging inability to resolve apparent theological contradictions, I commit them to God.”
 - “Before others I will BE a dialectic,
 - “According to Marsha Linehan, the psychologist and founder of Dialectical Behavior Therapy, dialectical thinking is a middle ground between two opposite ways of thinking and acting. One way of thinking is in terms of **absolutes**. This is called **Universalistic thinking** and it means that the belief is that, in an argument or discussion, one person is right and the other is wrong.
 - “**Relativistic thinking**, according to Linehan, assumes that there is no universal truth and that in an argument truth is in the "eye of the beholder.”
 - Linehan then reports that dialectical thinking requires that the thinker transcend polarities. The thinker must look at each of the polarities and ask about what may have been left out of each argument.
 - “ **thinking in dialectical terms is liberating** because it become possible to take in many truths, many realities without rejecting any persons who hold to these opposite or varied opinions, views and realities.

- **Epistemology**—what are the limits of what humans can know?
 - “the rationalist ...stresses the power of human *reason* to grasp truth about the universe and God.
 - “the empirical...stresses that all factual knowledge is derived from *sense data*. **This makes all knowledge subjective.**
 - “Immanuel Kant stressed both thinking and sensing, but added that our faculties determine ahead of time what can be known. For example, linguists stress the importance of *language* in determining our knowledge.
 - “Biblical epistemology stresses the relation between faith and knowledge, love and knowledge, obedience and knowledge. Sources of Christian knowledge are personal experience, revelation, and human history.
 - Barth stressed the unknowability of God by unaided reason (**God chooses what to reveal**).
 - “Since God’s revelation is ‘received by human beings, expressed in human language, and tested by human reason and experience,’ it seems doubtful that knowledge through revelation alone, without critical thinking, is possible.’

WHAT IS THAT TO ME?

- “My knowledge of God is never complete; today I will learn more about him through scripture, prayer, the communion of saints, or new experiences.
 - I seek a ***relationship*** with God, which must be subjective.
 - Does God reveal himself to individuals with an expectation that they will spread the revelation?
 - Is one person’s insight or revelation valid or pertinent to a different person?
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○ History

- “The prologue to Luke’s gospel gives us a useful tool for understanding history:
 - unique events
 - compilation of data (research)
 - record (selection and ordering of narrative)
 - interpretation (ascribing meaning to the chronicle) But “the meaning of events cannot be fully understood by those within the historical process itself (the writers).
 - “The true meaning of history is fully known only by God himself.

WHAT IS THAT TO ME?

- “I take history seriously, unlike many in the Indian religious tradition for whom history is a chain of meaningless, repetitive and fatalistically determined events out of which one should somehow extricate oneself.
- [I] “temper conclusions about the grand story still unfolding.
- Does history reveal God’s judgment on nations?



4. SHARPENERS

○ Philosophy

- “gives criteria for testing truth
- delineation of truth:
 - *paradox*: “a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but in reality expresses a possible truth
 - *metaphysics*: “The word ‘metaphysics’ is notoriously hard to define...Can we say that the word ‘metaphysics’ is a name for that “science” ...whose subject-matter is the subject-matter of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*? “The subject-matter of metaphysics is ‘being as such;’ “is the first causes of things”; “is that which does not change.” Any of these three theses might have been regarded as a defensible statement of the subject-matter of what was currently called “metaphysics” till the seventeenth century, when, rather suddenly, many topics and problems that Aristotle and the Medievals would have classified as belonging to physics (the relation of mind and body, for example, or the freedom of the will, or personal identity across time) began to be “reassigned” to metaphysics. One might almost say that in the seventeenth century “metaphysics” began to be a catch-all category, a repository of philosophical problems that could not be otherwise classified: “not epistemology, not logic, not ethics ... ” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/metaphysics/>
 - *analogy*: “analogy is an inference or an argument from one particular to another particular, as opposed to deduction, induction, and abduction, where at least one of the premises or the conclusion is general.”
 - *paradigm*: “From the 1960s, the word has referred to thought pattern in any scientific discipline or other epistemological context; a philosophical or theoretical framework of any kind
 - *transcendence/immanence*: *transcendent* means that God is completely outside of and beyond the world, as contrasted with the notion that God is manifested in the world. This meaning originates both in the Aristotelian view of God as the prime mover, a non-material self-consciousness that is outside of the world. Philosophies of immanence such as stoicism, Spinoza, Deleuze, or *pantheism* maintain that God is manifested in and fully present in the world and the things in the world.
- “does not make truth claims—provides criteria for coherence.


○ Science

- “limits itself to sense-data, searches for new facts and relations not known before, and expresses fact-relations in mathematical equations... The external world is real and though our knowledge of it is partial, such knowledge is nevertheless true” (*critical realism*).
- science and theology adopt different methods of investigation and limit their scope to try to exclude each other, “but they need each other... The Christian church should not fear science or retreat from its institutions as American evangelicalism did in the mid-20th century.”
- WHAT IS THAT TO ME?
 - “Why would I seek for a miracle when science was performing one before my eyes. .. Science and faith are the beset of friends.”
 - Many scientists are atheists (TV’s Gregory House for one) and many scientific theories conflict with literal interpretations of the Bible (such as the age of the universe, and the evolution of species). Having learned its lesson with Galileo, the Catholic Church has sought to avoid conflict with science, but many protestant creationist have not.

5. AWARENESS

- “Logos theology emphasizes that God reveals himself through Christ to everyman’s conscience.
- How should Christians view other faiths?
 - “Protestant missionaries of the nineteenth century regarded other religions as devil-inspired (but many missionaries to Asia and India found good in their religions).
 - “In the 20th century, study of world religions become popular... however, right up to the present, evangelicals have insisted the ‘adherents of non-Christian religions and world views...must let themselves be freed from their former ties and false hopes in order to be admitted by belief and baptism into the body of Christ.’”
 - Barth: “Religion as the human search for God is *unbelief*, the great concern of godless man, in contrast to *faith* which is human powerlessness before the Word that reveals the judgment and grace to God.”
 - Karl Rahner proposed “anonymous Christians” (“there are many channels of God’s grace and many gospels.”)

WHAT IS THAT TO ME?

- “The law of God is inscribed on Japanese hearts, and when they violate cultural norms such as honesty and filial piety, the Holy Spirit convicts, causing some to seek salvation from God.
 - “in human culture lies preparatory truth for the final truth revealed in Christ, BUT they must not fail to embrace it.”
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6. APPROACHES

○ **Biblical Theology**

- Any theology which seeks to base itself largely or wholly on scripture—introduced in 1940's as reaction to liberal theology.
 - Emphasizes the distinctive nature of biblical concepts as opposed to their connections with the cultures surrounding Israel. Historical acts are the medium of revelation, called “salvation history.” Themes include covenant, proclamation, and confession.
- **New testament theology:** understands texts in their first century setting: narratives of Jesus and the early church, plus occasional letters that focused on problems of individual churches.
 - “The new testament writers' unity in multiplicity consists of their common witness to God's saving action in Jesus Christ, to his establishment of the church by the Holy Spirit, to his freeing men and women from the world for active love, and the future consummation of that Christ-centered saving action.”(Zeisler)



○ WHAT IS THAT TO ME?

- “The Bible is my basic book, the primary source for God’s truth...if I fail to follow biblical truth, it has no meaning for me.
 - We must read the Bible to become exposed to its message, it is not enough to hear the message second hand. Is this a true statement?
 - The Historical Jesus movement has tried to learn as much as possible about the culture of first century Israel. They think that Christ’s message has been overlaid and distorted by twenty centuries of church tradition. Others maintain that the Church has actually preserved the essence of the message, and understands it better today than it was understood then (we have sorted through the heresies and have arrived at time-tested truth—which Presbyterians restate and in our confessions). In the modern age, should we be limited to first century perspectives?
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○ Christian Viewpoints on the Old Testament

- “Record of the religious experiences of sages and prophets [who] direct their message to people of their time with no thought of the future.”
- An historical allegory with the “central theme of God’s *covenant* with Israel which gradually broadens to include all men.”
Editors are responsible for weaving the interpretation of historical events and figures to elaborate this theme as the document is compiled.
- “record of how God worked out the *salvation* of Israel in the concrete *events of history*, and how what he accomplished in his dealings with the men of the OT eventually found its fulfillment in Christ.” God guided the accretion of the OT text and ordered the events that it reports so that the document would prepare the world for the incarnation of Christ and God’s plan of redemption. The OT is meaningful only through the NT.
- “God’s calling of Israel is the beginning of *promise* fulfillment, and it is culminated in Christ who brought salvation to all mankind.” God promises a personal communion with each believer, and the NT and OT demonstrate the reality of the promise and witness how each believer can claim it.



○ Natural Theology

- “knowledge of God can be acquired by man’s reason without revelation (Romans 1, intelligent design).
- “reason can assure us of the existence of God and other certain truths, but only divine revelation can assure us of the doctrine of the trinity, the incarnation, the atonement, etc.

○ Dogmatic Theology

- “If one focuses on the creeds of Christendom, he will develop a dogmatic theology (decree or doctrine). ‘Dogmatic theology expresses a dialogue between the historical faith of Christians and reason. It draws on the scriptures, official church teaching, the history of theology, liturgical texts and other items which make up the lived tradition of the believing community’ (O’collins).
- “Dogmatics has used reason and philosophy to ‘clarify, elaborate and systematize’

○ WHAT IS THAT TO ME?

- “Neither pragmatism or popularity but faithfulness to scripture and the history of orthodoxy will determine my allegiance.”
- The hymn *Once to Every Man and Nation* has the phrase “New occasions teach new duties, time makes ancient truth uncouth. They must up and ever onward. Who would keep abreast of Truth.” Are the “old way” the “time-tested ways” the “traditional ways” to be preserved at all costs, or must they give way to the new forms, the modern synthesis that aims at preserving essence rather than form?

○ Indigenous theology

- “Teaching about God must be relevant to the environment in which that teaching takes place. It should answer questions raised by the life situation people find themselves in, answers rooted both in the Bible and the situation. It is the written Word becoming flesh; as cultures change, indigenous theologies must also.
 - narratives and stories of Bible heroes can be told in modern idiom
 - Christian lyrics can be put to traditional harvest songs
 - enlarge a cultural concept with a Christian interpretation
 - According to Kosuke Koyama, a missionary to Thailand, “theology must be able to culturally express Christianity in terms that carry both the form and meaning of the Gospel message, while rooting itself within the culture, and thus allowing the Gospel to prophetically interpret, challenge, and change that culture and be fully understood by the believers”
 - The first section of Water Buffalo Theology is, “Interpreting History”, followed by “Rooting the Gospel”, “Interpreting Thai Buddhist Life,” and finally “Interpreting the Christian Life.”

○ WHAT IS THAT TO ME?

- “I cannot weaken Christ’s uniqueness, but I must make scriptural truth meaningful to my interest group or culture.



○ Moral theology

- “Moral theology developed from two basic premises in the NT: the proclamation that the reign of God is at hand, and Jesus is the moral symbol of God.
 - “Thomas Aquinas believed man comes from God and through grace and moral choice returns to him.
 - C.S. Lewis is concerned with man’s sense of right and wrong in *Mere Christianity*.
 - In the 2nd Century *Didache* (The Teaching) the good way is contrasted with the bad.

○ Process theology

- “emphasizes ‘event, becoming, and relatedness as basic categories for its understanding rather than those of substance and being” because God is living and understanding him must be a continual process.
 - “God is lovingly and ceaselessly active in the created order, respecting the integrity of his creatures, cherishing the values which they have produced, and motivated by the desire creatively to transform that order so it may actualize further and greater aesthetic riches.”

○ WHAT IS THAT TO ME?

- “As a finite being living in space and time, I understand God more clearly when he speaks in modern idiom and in the present tense. However, the One who declares himself Alpha and Omega is not limited to my present, which tomorrow becomes past. God is not a being in process; he is the Being, the ‘I am that I am.’”
- The authors suggest that *living theology* might be a better term to describe the God who *adjusts* to us, who speaks to all our needs and shares our suffering. We cannot relate to the creator of the Universe (as we saw in Job, His ways are not our ways). The only God humans are capable of having a relationship with is one who shares our state. Jesus is the witness that there is such a God.

SAY THAT AGAIN (USEFUL TERMS)

○ Anthropomorphism

- “We use anthropomorphisms rightly when we talk about God, since we are made in his image.

○ WHAT IS THAT TO ME?

- “use words that keep God’s transcendence and immanence clearly defined. This means avoiding colloquialisms like “the man upstairs,” “Oh, my God,” or “Good God!” and instead, adopting expressions like “Father in heaven,” “god of comfort,” “Merciful Lord”.

○ Apocrypha

- books of “doubtful authenticity” included in Jerome’s Latin translation of the Bible.

○ WHAT IS THAT TO ME?

- “Calvin declared that apocryphal books have no authority at all.” Left out of protestant bibles since 1827. So always remind listeners that these books are merely of historical interest.

○ Canon

- “Egyptian word meaning ‘reed used for measuring,’ today means ‘rule’ or ‘standard.’ Today it refers to the authoritative 66 books of the Bible.

○ Catechism

- “the object of catechesis is... to lead people to communion with Christ, to build up the community of believers, and to strengthen the missionary activity of the church...the context of catechesis was the liturgy, its method was preaching, its content was both doctrinal, based on the creed, and moral—the twofold law of love and the commandments.” (Konstant) *All members of the church take part in the work of catechesis according to their particular gifts and responsibilities (much broader than memorizing the Westminster Shorter Catechism!)*

○ Gospel

- from Gk. *euangellion* meaning “good news.” It is a general term that speaks of the benefits proclaimed in Christ:
 - Mark-ushers in the reign of God in human hearts
 - Acts- missionary proclamation of the kingdom of God
 - Romans-Jesus Christ is God’s son, and we share his righteousness

○ Hermeneutics

- from the Gk. *hermeneuien* meaning “to interpret.” Hermes was “a messenger of the gods who makes intelligible to human beings what otherwise cannot be grasped.”
 - Paul is called Hermes in Acts 14.12.
- “embraces both exegesis, the determination of original meaning of a text, and ‘exposition, the elucidation of its sense form modern readers.’ Applied to explaining scripture within a cultural context.

○ Kerygma

- “a Gk. word meaning either “what is proclaimed” or “the act of proclaiming.”
 - the core of the Christian gospel within the varied NT writings
 - the announcement of salvation in and through particular events.
- “Tillich contrasts kerygmatic theology ... with answering theology, i.e. theology that answers questions people have when they relate the eternal word to the historical moment.
- ***The continuous task of theology is to work out a synthesis of the original core message with its relevance in the modern cultural context.***

○ WHAT IS THAT TO ME?

- “[A good witness requires a] good knowledge of scripture and familiarity with contemporary idiom are a must.”



○ Parable

- from Gk. *parabole*, meaning “a placing beside or a comparison.”
 - “It invites the hearer to discern a secret inner meaning which has some analogy with the story as told but stands on a quite other level than its obvious surface meaning”(McFague)
 - “as mundane, the parables imply that the rule of God applies to secular, ordinary and in many instances, relational life, both personal and public.
 - “as extravagant, the parables imply that the ways of the conventional world are not the ways of God...there is tension between the logic of merit and the logic of grace.
 - “as indirect, the parables imply that their significance must be grasped in a shock of recognition as listeners apply the stories to themselves.

○ Typology and allegory

- the first “is a comparison of historical events or persons along a scale of time: Adam and Christ or the Exodus and the Cross.
- the second “makes a biblical text into an indicator of eternal truths.
- Typology is Jewish; allegory is Greek.
- “Typology and allegory...underscore the fact that religious practices gradually change into new forms for expressing timeless truth, but scripture itself is tied to the historical milieu in which it was written.”
 - “Origen (200 A.D.) tried to expound the entire OT allegorically, but Reformers rejected allegory.
 - “Modern expositors look at scripture in two senses: the linguistic/literary sense and the religious/theological sense.

○ WHAT IS THAT TO ME?

- “Modern allegory must be based upon sound exegesis”
- When we **apply** scripture to help us make a decision we must be careful that the essence of the two situations match. How does scripture guide your decisions?