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Sunday School, BOLBC

Introduction - Why Study Theology?

Read: Psalm 119:89 - 105

Pray

Today marks a transition for us in the way we're doing Sunday School here at Bread of Life. As you all know, we just recently started Sunday school back up just a few weeks ago; for the last three weeks, we did a church-wide membership class - not only for visitors interested in joining the church, but also as a refresher for all of us about what church membership is.

But now we're transitioning into a new kind of "class," if you will: this will be a place where we can come together and learn about *theology* - that is, to learn how to *put our Bible's together* and how to understand specific *topics* that the Bible teaches us about.

So I suppose the best place for us to start is by asking and answering the question: *why study theology?*

I. Why Study Theology?

Sometimes words like "theology" and "doctrine" get a bad rap; they can be intimidating for most of us normal Christians; they can even seem abstract and irrelevant to us, at first. We might think that *theology* is what all of those "academic" Christians do at Seminary, in conferences, or in all the fancy books. We might think, "Sure, studying theology is good for pastors, missionaries, seminary professors, church leaders and teachers - but what does it have to do with me?"

There are many answers to that question, but I want us to focus on two for now:

1. Studying theology helps us grow in our own personal discipleship

The gospel is the good news that, even though we are sinners who deserve God's wrath, He loves us anyways and has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life in our place, died for our sins, and rose from the grave so that *whoever*

believes in Him will be saved, forgiven for our sins, reconciled to God, and raised to eternal life - not by works, but all by God's grace! Simply through faith!

But this gospel demands that we *repent and believe*. It is not just something we believe in our minds, or believe just at one crucial point in our lives, but it means starting a whole new life in Christ. It means a LIFETIME of daily *repentance* - turning from our sins and turning to the cross of Christ - and daily *faith* - trusting in Christ alone for salvation and walking in Him by His grace. It means a lifetime of rejoicing in the grace and love of God and, by His strength, becoming more like Christ daily. That's the beginning, middle, and end of the Christian life: to daily turn away from sin, idolatry, our previous lives as God's enemies and to turn *towards* trusting in God's grace and the work of Christ alone, not ourselves, to be made more like Christ each day by His Holy Spirit, and to do all to the praise and glory of our great God.

How do we do that, exactly? This is why it is so important to study the Bible and theology. If we are to live our lives completely dependent on God, trusting in Christ alone and being changed to be more like Him daily, then we must take our "marching orders," if you will, from Christ our Lord, Savior, and King. We must do theology on His terms. This means we must listen to Him by reading, studying, and meditating on the Bible. The entirety of the Bible points us to and explains the gospel of Christ and its implications for our lives. Therefore, the more we understand about the Bible, the more we understand about God, the gospel, and the life He calls us to live through faith in Christ.

But there's also a second reason for us to study theology...

2. *Studying theology helps us fulfill our mission to make disciples of others*

Jesus gives us the Great Commission (our mission as the Christian church, followers of Jesus) in *Matt. 28:18-20*: "And Jesus came and said to the, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and *make disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

This mission includes evangelism - sharing the gospel with non-believers, that they may repent and believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and be saved! And when they do, we *baptize* them. But that's not the end goal: when a person is

baptized, it is just the *beginning* of their relationship with Christ and life as a Christian - it is the beginning of *discipleship*. After baptism, we are to bring the new Christian into the Church and *continue to disciple them* by “teaching them...all that Christ has commanded.” And we know that Christ is God - so that the *whole Bible* is His Word.

This means that in order to be making disciples, we need to be teaching *the whole counsel of God - the whole Word of God*. This is a big part of why I believe our main, steady diet of sermons needs to be *expositional preaching* - preaching the *main ideas and meaning* of a particular passage of scripture; going through whole books of the Bible; and even make it our goal to eventually preach through the *whole Bible*. This is also why we have Bible study on Wednesday nights, giving us another opportunity to walk through the Bible slowly and strive to understand it better and read it more accurately. This kind of preaching and Bible study is incredibly important for us.

But it also takes a lot of time; it will take us *many years* to preach and teach through the whole Bible that way. So that’s why we need classes like this, where we study theology more broadly, to better understand the Bible as a whole. So my aim for Sunday School going forward is for it to be an integral part of *how we make disciples* of one another - whether it’s new Christians coming in, or even the most mature of us continuing their own discipleship by continuing to study and learn more. And then, as we all learn, we can take it and teach it to others - our kids, friends, family members, classmates, co-workers, etc. - as we all strive to make disciples throughout the week.

So that’s why we should study theology. But what is theology, and how do you go about studying it?

II. Two Guiding Principles

Let’s start with two principles that always need to guide us as we study theology:

- A. We must accept the Bible on its own terms
- B. We must understand the Bible using the context, story, and categories that it gives us.

In other words, we must listen to what the Bible says about itself and accept that definition of it, rather than try and oppose our own view upon it. All of our

theology needs to come *from scripture*. We don't want to impose our own views upon the Bible; rather, we want God's Word to shape our understanding of it. When we take a topic like "Creation," for example, we can't start doing theology by saying, "Well, we know from science the evolution is *obviously* where life come from." No, instead, we need to approach the Bible and ask, "What does the Bible

Two Types of Theology: Biblical and Systematic

There are two categories, two types of theology, that we need to study: 1. *Biblical theology*; and 2. *Systematic theology*.

1. *Biblical Theology*

Biblical theology simply means learning how to put our Bible's together; it's the study of the *storyline of the Bible* - the story of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration/Re-Creation - from Genesis to Revelation, and seeing how all the different parts of it fit together to center around the *gospel of Jesus Christ*. So this is the process of just simply walking through the Bible from a "big-picture" perspective to better understand it's storyline, and how every part of it fits together to form a cohesive whole. We're going to do that over the next half a year or so.

But we're also going to study the second type:

2. *Systematic Theology*.

Now as soon as I say those words, I immediately know that they have two things going against them, right off the bat: first, they are long, pretentious sounding words that make us feel like we're in school; and secondly, the first kind is called "biblical" theology, so does that mean that this kind is "unbiblical" or something? No, of course not; we definitely want all of our theology to be biblical and grounded in scripture! This second kind of theology simply means that we systematically take different topics and ask, "What does the Bible say about this topic? How do we take everything the Bible says about it and put it all together, in a way that makes sense?" So, for example, we can take topics like "God," "Humanity," "Sin," "Christ," "Salvation," "The Church," "The Holy Spirit," or even "The End Times," and take one topic at a time as we explore what the whole Bible teaches us about each of them. In many ways, this is exactly what a Statement of Faith does, as we saw last week. It gives summary statements on what we believe the Bible says about many topics, such as the Scriptures, who God is, what the Bible says about humanity, sin, salvation, the end times, etc. YOU can condense our views on such topics in summary statements - but there is also a *lot more* to be

learned about each of them. It is very helpful for us to walk through each of those topics more slowly, over time. That process is called, “Systematic Theology.”

We need both of these kinds of theology - biblical, and systematic. And so, we’re going to do both of them this year in our Sunday School class together.

So we’re going to begin our journey by starting with the foundations: with Scripture. Over the next couple of months, bringing us to about Christmas time, we will study the theology of Scripture - in other words, we’re going to ask, “What does the Bible claim about itself?” After all, if we’re going to approach the Bible on it’s own terms, we need to know what those terms are - so we’re going to study the nature of scripture - that it is God’s *holy, inspired, and infallible word*. We’re also going to talk about how to study and interpret it.

And then, after a short break around Christmas times and the New Year, we’re going to come back and tackle *Biblical theology* - we’re just going to walk through the storyline of the Bible and put it all together.

And after we finish with that, then next year we will continue on and systematically work our way through theological topics, just as we continue to work our way through preaching and teaching books of the Bible.

Questions?