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Omnibus V Primary Section B

In a world of pragmatism and a practical ideology, people don’t have a lot of room for absolute truth. Dogma of any sort and closed definitions are thrown out the window, and ‘openness’ and ‘tolerance’ are bywords. And despite Christ’s command to the church to be in but not of the world, these beliefs have seeped into Christian thinking. Spouting such phrases as “no creed but Christ” and “Me, Jesus and my Bible,” modern-day evangelicals have tried to blur the lines of distinct theology and embrace all touting the name of Christ in a big group hug. While putting aside disputes over lesser doctrines can be good, when peace comes at the expense of truth, something is wrong. Theology is a very important part of God’s Word. The bible is more than just motivational stories; it contains truth, a truth only acquired from God and the study of him. That is theology – the study of God. It is part of the definition of a Christian that he study the character and works of his Lord, Maker, and Savior.

Many often claim that they don’t need the nitty-gritty of theology; that they just love Jesus. But the dogma of theology and a passion for Christ are not mutually exclusive; they go hand-in-hand. Just as a husband and wife who love each other dearly long to find out more about each other, one who has true love for God will want to know more about him, to study him and his works and character. C.S Lewis says in *Mere Christianity*, “Theology means ‘the science of God,’ and I think any man who wants to think about God at all would like to have the clearest and most accurate ideas about Him which are available.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

We are commanded to “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” [[2]](#footnote-2) If we are to ‘grow up into Christ,’ we must follow his rules for doing so. Peter explains: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.” [[3]](#footnote-3) Peter makes it quite clear that our *love* flows *out of* our knowledge. Anyone who tries to skip past the thick theology to ‘love’ is “blind” and has forgotten (or never even knew) the message of the gospel. Instead, theology informs our actions and living.

Theologians speak of the four parts of theology: biblical, historical, practical, and systematic. Our *system* of theology informs our *practical* theology. Each are equally important; you cannot live the Christian life rightly without a system of theology on which it is based, but the system is empty if it is simply a skeleton with no flesh of practical theology.

C.S Lewis again comments, “An old, hard-bitten officer got up and said, ‘I’ve no use for all that stuff. But, mind you, I’m a religious man too. I know there’s a God. I’ve felt Him: out alone in the desert at night: the tremendous mystery.’ …Theology is like [a] map…Doctrines are not God: they are only a kind of map. But that map is based on the experience of hundreds of people who were really in touch with God – experiences compared with which any thrills or pious feelings you and I are likely to get on our own are very elementary and very confused. And secondly, if you want to get any further, you must use the map. You see, what happened to that man in the desert may have been real, and was certainly exciting, but nothing comes of it. It leads nowhere…you will not got to Newfoundland by studying the Atlantic that way, and you will not get eternal life by simply feeling the presence of God in flowers or music.” [[4]](#footnote-4)

This idea of theology as a map builds on passages like John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” If we really love God, we’ll want to worship him in “spirit and truth” (John 4:24) and serve him as he commands. God makes this as easy as it gets: he gives us his own Word in the Scriptures. Without God’s Word (the ultimate theology handbook) we are clueless as to how to worship and love Him. Without God’s Word to guide us, our sin nature will win out. Left to themselves, depraved souls will only conjure up feeble and improper ways of ‘loving’ God. We are commanded in Hebrews 12:28-29 to “be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and…offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.” It is theology that shows us what this acceptable worship is (Acts 2:42), as well as how to live the Christian life; it instructs us in Christian behavior (Romans 12:9-21, Philippians 4:4-9) and matters of the Church (Hebrews 10:24-25, Matthew 18:15-20).

The most important thing theology gives us, however, is a right understanding of Salvation. Theology, in its essence is, along with a biblical Anthropology, the backbone to Soteriology. In fact, it is theology that informs a right anthropology. Calvin states “Man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God…For (such is our innate pride) we always seem to ourselves just, and upright, and wise, and holy, until we are convinced, by clear evidence, of our injustice, vileness, folly, and impurity. Convinced, however, we are not, if we look to ourselves only, and not to the Lord also – he being the only standard by the application of which this conviction can be produced.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Without God and a study of him, we cannot understand our true nature, and unless we understand how truly sinful we are (Ephesians 2:1-3), we cannot recognize how great God’s grace really is. How can one expect to be saved by a mere love for God? A general view of God like this stems only from the General Revelation in creation. But Psalm 19 demonstrates that while General Revelation (Psalm 19:1-6) is enough to hold us accountable (Romans 1:20), the “law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (vs. 7-8). God’s Word – theology – must be rightly understood for one to call oneself a Christian. Without theology telling us that an eternal God made us, and, despite our rebellion against him he redeemed us through the perfect life and death of Jesus Christ the Godman, we’ll think that “A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

Calvin concludes: “For if we reflect how prone the human mind is to lapse into forgetfulness of God, how readily inclined to every kind of error, how bent every now and then on devising new and fictitious religions, it will be easy to understand how necessary it was to make such a depository of doctrine as would secure it from either perishing by the neglect, vanishing away amid the errors, or being corrupted by the presumptuous audacity of men. It being thus manifest that God…has given the assistance of his word to all whom he has ever been pleased to instruct effectually, we, too, must pursue this straight path, if we aspire in earnest to a genuine contemplation of God – we must go, I say, to the word, where the character of God, drawn from his works is described accurately and to the life; these works being estimated, not by our depraved judgment, but by the standard of eternal truth.” [[7]](#footnote-7)

God has commanded us to study his Word and works. The theology contained in his Word instructs us how to live. If, then, we claim to love God, we must desire to know him and his works. Without his Word, written and incarnate, there is no Salvation.

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1. C.S Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, Chapter 1, pg. 135 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ephesians 4:15-16 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 2 Peter 1:3-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. C.S Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, Chapter 1, pgs. 135-136 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.1.2, pg. 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America (1937), New York: Harper and Row, 1959, p. 193, via Wikipedia, via White Horse Inn (<http://twitter.com/WhiteHorseInn>) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.6.3, pg. 28 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)