

TTS Essentials – Session [1]: On Theology NOTES

Welcome to the first session of TTS!

- Thanks for coming.
- Thanks to Freedom Church for hosting.

Let's get the boring stuff out the way first!

- **FIRST: Where have we come from?**
 - **CWG background:**
 - Group of friends, wanting to explore deep things.
 - **TTS background:**
 - Had its 'trial run' since June 2017.
 - Opened it up more broadly in Oct 2018.
- **SECOND: Who are we?**
 - **DISCUSS:** You first!
 - What's your name, Church (etc.)?
 - **Wider support:**
 - A core team providing support and wisdom.
 - Coverage from three Chester Churches.
 - **About myself:**
 - Married to Jo.
 - Academic background.
- **THIRD: What is TTS all about?**
 - **A simple vision – theology must serve the Church.**
 - *This means:* questions / comments welcome.
 - *This means:* resources on TTS website are free.
 - *This means:* I'll try to help in any way I can.
 - **Three key principles:**
 - [A] *"The Scriptures cannot be broken..."* [John 10:35]
 - [B] *"Will not the judge of all heaven and earth do right?"* [Gen 18:25]
 - [C] *"Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour"* [Rom 12:10]

[1] What Is Theology? Our Problem & God's Solution

DISCUSS: What is theology? What does it mean to you?

A potential stumbling block:

- For some, theology is...
 - **Irrelevant:** for those in ivory towers.
 - **Not For Me:** for the intellectual type.
 - **Pharisaical:** for laying down the law.
 - **Divisive:** for splitting churches + causing rifts.
- In other words:
 - **Theology is seen as one big, self-indulgent distraction.**
 - Hence terms like 'doctrinaire' + 'indoctrination'.

Theologians are undoubtedly part of the problem here.

- Helmut Thielicke – *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* [1962]
 - Prof. of Systematic Theology, Uni. Of Hamburg.
 - Theological students at a Church bible study.
 - “Although my fate and my life were at stake, those others came at me with their routine. I found in them no trace of life or truths learned by experience. I smelled only corpses of lifeless ideas... I was looking for a Christian in whom I could detect a flame. I found only burnt-out slag” [Thielicke – *A Little Exercise*, p.14]

BUT LOOK: Isa 42:21

Theology has been done badly – that is indisputable.

But God still takes *pleasure* in the magnification of his teaching!

There's a blessing here we simply can't afford to miss.

[1A] FIRST: How have people understood theology in the past?

- The term has historically been used in different ways:
 - **Greeks:** described the speech of a poet announcing deity.¹
 - **Jews:** Philo called Moses a *theologos*, i.e. he spoke of God.
 - **Church History:** both knowledge AND worship of God.
 - Augustine: “account or explanation of divine nature”²
 - Aquinas: theology is “sacred doctrine”.³
 - Ponticus: “if you pray truly, you are a theologian”.⁴

¹ E.g. Plato's Republic [379a.5-6] – Homer and Hesiod were also called *theologoi*.

² Augustine (354-430AD)– *City of God* VIII.1.

³ Aquinas (1225-1274AD) – *Summa Theologica* I.I.2.

⁴ Evagrius Ponticus (245-299AD) – *Chapters on Prayer* 61.

[1B] SECOND: *So what does theology actually mean, then...?*

- **Thankfully, the term itself isn't that complicated!**
 - *Theos* (θεός): God.
 - *Logia* (λογία): utterances / oracles.
 - Derived from *Logos* (λόγος): word / discourse / speech.
 - **Hence 'theologia' – or theology.**

So we're NOT referring to an academic degree.

We're NOT referring to dusty tomes and oak-paneled libraries.

We're NOT referring to an individual preference.

SIMPLY PUT:

Theology concerns itself with speech *about* God – with the speech *of* God – as well as our experiencing life *with* God.

[1C] How does Scripture 'characterise' this kind of theological study?

- **LOOK:** Eph 4:1-16
 - [1] **As a pursuit after Godly truth + doctrine.**
 - *"We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine" [v.14]*
- **LOOK:** Matt 22:37
 - [2] **As intellectual discipleship.**
 - *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" [v.37]*
- **LOOK:** Prov 23:12 / 1 Cor 14:15 / 2 Cor 10:5 / 1 Thess 5:21
 - [3] **As part of the healthy life of a believing mind.**
 - *"A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion" [Prov 18:2]*

What should we say, then?

What must we conclude?

1. We cannot afford to dismiss theology out of hand.

- a. YES – theologians are sometimes to blame.
- b. NO – you’re not necessarily meant to be an academic.
- c. BUT – it’s too much of a blessing, and God wants *all* of you.
 - i. (That’s why... →→)

2. God makes theologians of all his children.

- a. Theology does not belong to me – it belongs to YOU!
 - i. He’s made it inevitable.
 - ii. He sets us in pursuit after him + his truth.
 - iii. He commands us to worship him with our minds.

3. God wants to use theology for his purposes:

- a. To bring him glory.
- b. To grow the Church.
- c. To grow us into Christ’s likeness.

“Theology can be a coat of mail which crushes us and in which we freeze to death. It can also be (and this is its purpose!) a praise song of ideas. Which of the two it is depends upon the degree in which listening and praying Christians stand behind it”

- Helmut Thielicke.
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[2] The Meaning & Purpose of Theology

Enough talking ABOUT theology.
Let’s DO some theology, together!

DISCUSS:

- *Why would God make us all theologians?*
- *Why would he ask us to think deeply about him?*
- *Why would he have us worship him with our minds?*
- *What’s his purpose in all this?*

Here are five of my own suggestions.

[2A] Reason One: *Because God Created Us.*

- Re: Matt 22 and Jesus' greatest commandment – "MINE!"
 - A confession:
 - Of God's sovereignty, kingship & rule over every all things.
 - A display:
 - Of our divine image – God has given us the gift of reason. (More in S4 / early July!)

[2B] Reason Two: *Because God Is On A Mission.*

- **LOOK:** 1 Pet 3:15
 - We can't tell about that which we don't know.
 - We can't defend that which we haven't examined.
- **LOOK:** 1 Tim 4:16
 - The promise of pursuing the God of salvation.

[2C] Reason Three: *Because God Loves His Church.*

- Re: Eph 4
 - Pursuing Godly doctrine:
 - Grows and matures the Church.
 - Unites the Church.
 - Sanctifies the Church – into Christ's stature.

[2D] Reason Four: *Because God Raised Christ from the dead.*

- **LOOK:** John 11:25-26
 - In other words – **death does not define the Church!**
 - "The gates of hell..."
- **THEREFORE:** Heb 13:7-8 – we can learn from past believers.
 - "If in Christ they are alive and remain members of his body, then the [theology of the Church] cannot proceed by pretending otherwise. The doctors are not dead and gone, but living and active, and members together of the same body of Christ to which we belong" [Holmes – *Listening to the Past*]

[2E] Reason Five: *Because God Is A Theologian.*

- God is in the business of speaking about God.
 - He IS the '*theos logos*' – the speaking God.
 - He IS the reason with which we reason.
 - He IS the truth in which we know truth.
 - **LOOK:** Ps 36:9 – **God makes theology possible; we're just following his lead!**

Did you notice? “BECAUSE GOD”.

Theology is about God – he is the subject.

But also – he is the prime actor, the beginning & end of all study.

[3] How Should We Do Theology Together?

So we’ve established why God would make us all theologians. Now...

DISCUSS: *How should we go about theological study?*

1. Biblically.

- a. If theology is about God speaking, we must heed God’s voice.

2. Joyfully.

- a. If theology is God’s gift, let’s do it with much rejoicing!
 - i. “The theologian who labours without joy is not a theologian at all. Sulky faces, morose thoughts and boring ways of speaking are intolerable in this field” [Barth]

3. Prayerfully.

- a. Knowing about God is not the same as knowing God.

4. Wisely.

- a. Seasoned with salt.
 - i. **LOOK:** 1 Pet 3:15-16

5. Together.

- a. “Come, let us reason together...” [Isa 1:18]

6. Worshipfully.

- a. If God is our delight, then theology must be a song of praise.
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[4] Explaining Theology That Sings

DISCUSS:

What have we established so far?

Teach it back to me!

This explains why we’re bothering to study these ‘Essentials’ at all!

We want to be theologians together.

We want to be equipped for mission and ministry.

We want to learn to love God more.

- Hence the name – *Theology That Sings!*
 - **LOOK:** 1 Cor 14:15
 - “Any theology that does not lead to song is, at a fundamental level, a flawed theology” – J.I. Packer

TTS Essentials – Twelve Big Truths for the Busy Believer.

- What are those 12 Truths?
 - [1] God is a theologian (i.e. today!) / [2] The Great I AM / [3] The Trinity / [4] The Creation of Man / [5] The God-Man / [6] The Work of the Cross / [7] The Resurrection / [8] The Redemption / [9] The Holy Spirit / [10] The Scriptures / [11] The Church / [12] The End.
 - These broadly follow the Nicene Creed as skeleton.
- What’s the perspective here? What’s the ‘angle’?
 - We’re all about historic Protestant Evangelical theology.
 - ‘Catholic’ in the lower-c sense of the word!