

Learning of Christ

- The importance of study.
- Hermeneutics.
- Categories of theology.
- The doctrine of scripture.
- Textual transmission.
- Sources of theology.
- Theological centre.

Study

Paul admonished Timothy concerning study:

Study to show yourself approved to God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim 2:15).

And from a little child you have known the scriptures, which are able to make you wise to salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished for all good works. (2 Tim 3:15-17).

If we agree that the scripture is the word of God, here there is a command from God to study the scripture. The one who studies is called a *workman*, meaning it is something that we work at. It is not just a casual look. We must work to *rightly divide the word of truth*, which means to interpret it correctly. We are not just to assume our interpretation.

Some have said, "Well the first disciples were just uneducated fishermen". Paul studied under Gamaliel, the greatest of the scholars of his time. Paul counted his achievements as "dung" compared to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, but his study was used by God. Paul wrote down most of the doctrines for the church. He did this by the revelation of the Holy Spirit and he also knew the scripture more than any apostle.

This does not mean that the word of God is *shut up* to only a select few. It means that all of us should study and especially those who preach the word. It does not mean that God cannot speak to His children unless we understand the scripture fully. God moves through His Spirit, His love and faith that are in us, according to the priesthood of *all* believers. Nevertheless, He still commands us to study.

Luther was not given his first church until after he earned his doctorate and in his day they were not easy to obtain. He had to master most areas of theology as well as the biblical languages. People often discount this, as though it is of no use, saying that only faith benefited Luther. Luther did not say this. Faith made Christ his Lord, but his knowledge of the scripture was essential to his calling in Christ.

The early Puritans and Dissenters in the 17th Century, though also men of the Spirit, were scholars of the word of God. Our societies today are still greatly indebted to their achievements in all fields. Studying for the ministry in Jonathan Edwards' day in colonial America was equally as comprehensive. His students were people of the Spirit, who did not treat the study of theology rashly.

Ministers of the gospel were once the most educated people in town. Today we are often less educated than those in other professions and among the least educated in the history of the church.

This lack of education has resulted in a lack of knowledge in the pulpits and has harmed lives. Would we allow an uneducated doctor to operate on us? How much more important is the soul?

A look at church history would quickly reassure us of our lack of education. Take, for example, the Roman Catholic documented response to the *Council of Chalcedon* in 451AD, regarding the nature of Jesus Christ. (This is available via a Google search on the Internet.)

The knowledge, expertise and Spirit of Christ in this document are challenging. The Catholics at this time had had a mini-reformation afforded them by Augustine and despite the persecution and heresy, the early church had the fastest mission expansion in history. They were not inept in power, knowledge or missionary impact.

In our modern era things changed around the end of the *Second Great Awakening* in America, in the middle of the 19th Century. A move to ecumenicalism and to what were considered more practical matters in ministry meant the study of theology took a back seat. This has brought a decline in gospel education in our day.

Truth

The first step in bible study is to settle the issue of who determines truth. We cannot judge God's truth in terms of whether we accept it or not. It is still true. Education begins with stripping away our personal, cultural, denominational and emotional preferences, to discover how God speaks for Himself. When we see something in God's word is true, our response should not be, "I do not like that. Others will not like that".

Jesus said, "I am the truth..." (John 14:6). He prayed, "Your word is truth." (John 17:17). Something is true because God said it. Truth is not truth just because we understand it or agree with it, but because God has spoken it. Whether we understand it or not does not make it true or not true. The point is did God say it? "Obedience comes before understanding." That is what our parents told us when we were young!

The *trinity* is true because the Bible teaches it, not because we understanding it rationally. We accept it on the basis of faith, because God's Self-revelation declares it. It is the same with regard to *election*. We do not reshape a doctrine to fit with what seems reasonable, as if to rescue God's reputation. God's word is straight forward; "Who are you O man to reply against God." (Rom 9:20).

This acceptance of God's word as the absolute truth is the beginning point in study.

Learning involves paradigm shifts. It means that we are not the centre of all things. It means that God does not have to "play" according to our human rules. It means that we accept some things by faith and that our reason is not king. It means that we do not make rules in our own mind about what God should be like and then use "study" to confirm what we already "knew".

We must be open to learn. New insights may appear wrong simply because the thought processes we have become accustomed to need looking at. This makes education an exciting process, but also challenging. We have developed a network of interdependent thoughts that can take time to unravel.

Learning can put us outside the camp (Heb 13:13). It is like the prophets found, sweet to the mouth, but bitter to the stomach, meaning the truth of God is so wonderful, but the results of following Him are not humanly acceptable (Jer 1:9, Ezek 2:6-3:3, Rev 10:9-11).

When we go out into life or ministry without study we can fall for every new thing that comes along. We can lead people more by culture and religious tradition than by the gospel. In doing so, many can lose sight of the true gospel. Theological education is important in order to:

1. Give a proper foundation for Christian life and for ministry.

2. Protect people against popular fads.
3. Show the difference between personal/cultural views and biblical truth.
4. Ensure ministry is not business, church growth or pragmatism, but is gospel.
5. Direct us to a divine perspective of truth.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. The word is derived from the name of the Greek god *Hermes*, who in mythology interpreted the message of the gods to the people. Today the word is related to the correct interpretation of scripture.

Everybody interprets, whether we realise it or not. The question is, are we interpreting correctly? If it is settled that God is truth and the scriptures are His word, then the only remaining matter is how we interpret the scriptures. We do not want a *dynamic equivalent*, meaning an understanding of scripture that just sounds right. God said that we should *work*, to find out if it is right.

A common practice is to interpret scripture “devotionally” or “privately”. By “devotional interpretation” we mean reading the scripture assuming what it means to us personally, without taking the trouble to see if that is the intended meaning of the passage. *Devotional study* is a positive practice, but the casual use of it is what we are referring to here. Devotion to God must be based on what God *actually* says.

The Holy Spirit speaks to us from scripture. He reveals the original intended meaning of scripture, as we come to understand its historical and literary (grammatical) context. When scripture was first written, God gave a message to those it was written to, intending that it be understood the same way by generations that would follow. The purpose of study is to read the Bible in its original meaning.

We may give random meanings to the Bible when preaching. We study to help us avoid doing this. The first step in applying the scripture is to understand what it meant to the generation when it was written. Scripture does not mean what we think it means, because we feel that God has spoken to us from it in a particular way. The scripture means what it meant to the generation it was addressed to.

Knowing this *first*, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet 1:20-21).

“Private interpretation” means we interpret the Bible personally, without first finding out what it means *contextually* (in its own context). The meaning of prophetic scripture is not arbitrary, according to our view, but it is according to what the Holy Spirit originally said.

An example of this may be taken from Hebrews 12. The Hebrew believers were told to “lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets them...”. We might read that text today and apply it to a *hobby* which we feel that we should lay aside. While that may be beneficial, it is not the message of the text.

Hebrews was written to exhort believers not to go back to the Law of Moses, but to go on in Christ. The law was the *weight*; and disobedience to the New Covenant (unbelief) was the *sin* that beset them. Hebrews 12 is telling us not to go back to the law, or back to ritual. A “devotional” interpretation may apply a text in a way not intended, while a contextual study looks for the original exhortation.

This is our duty, or God was not serious when He said study to rightly divide the word of truth. A devotional assumption may give us a meaning opposite to the scripture, in the case of Hebrews 12, a legalistic view of a hobby, when the passage was exhorting against legalism. An innocent mistake is fine, but when these assumptions build over time they cause us real problems without us realising it.

When we study contextually we ask questions like: "Who was this passage written to? What was the purpose of the letter? How does this passage fit into the message of the whole letter? How would the people at that time have understood this then?". We need to slow down and have a careful look before we think we know what the passage means, even if we have already read it many times before.

The first question is not what does the passage mean now, but what did the passage mean then?

Devotional/Scholarly

Shallow devotional studies can present a problem, but in recent times people have shied away from scholarly studies because many in the scholastic field were liberal scholars who did not believe in miracles and did not believe that the scripture is the word of God. Liberal scholarship is wrong.

But scholarly studies are required to interpret the scripture. Scholarly studies are studies that reveal and open up the context of scripture. Such studies include literary (grammatical) studies, Hebrew or Greek cultural studies, historical background, Hebrew or Greek language studies and theological studies, which all focus on unearthing the original meaning of the text. This is valuable study if we want to know the Bible.

"Devotional studies" tend to take a short cut form and interpret scripture subjectively. The excuse is that it is the Holy Spirit who reveals the truth. The Holy Spirit reveals the truth *through* the Biblical context, not apart from the biblical context. Scripture *interprets itself* by its context. This is what *exegesis* means.

Exegesis comes from the Greek word meaning "out of". We see *exit* signs in buildings, which show the *way out* of the building. *Exit* comes from the same Greek word. In interpretation this means that we seek to bring the meaning *out of the text* itself, by considering all aspects of *the text's own context*. This means that we derive the meaning from the text, *rather than import* our own preconceived meaning into the text.

Some may preach by taking their inspiration (meaning) from psychology, culture or from motivational or business principles and then import these ideas *into* various passages of the Bible, reinterpreting those passages. This process always misinterprets the Bible, but some people may not realise it so long as the Bible is at least used to speak from. A great deal of preaching is like this.

Pietism

In the century following the Reformation some scholars became cold and ungodly and were not born again. A movement called Pietism arose to correct this, emphasising the new birth and personal faith in the Lord Jesus. Some in the movement went too far, playing down the need for rigorous learning of the scripture. Catechisms began to be shunned, as well as careful teaching of scripture to children.

Catechisms are a formal presentation of the main doctrines of the word of God, which are useful in class studies. Pietism led to the possibility of "faith" being overly subjective, based on personal views and feelings rather than knowledge of the word of God. Pietism also emphasised holiness through personal devotion, like the Catholics before the Reformation. A form of Pietism came into modern Christianity.

Part of the heritage this has bequeathed us is that righteousness is often seen in terms of what we *do not do*. That is, the righteous do not dance, do not go to movies, do not drink, do not play cards, do not smoke, do not swear, do not...Jesus certainly did not live like this (Matt 11:19). This is the self-righteousness of the Pharisees.

This causes us to draw away from society, universities, media, arts and politics, rather than occupying in it. This results in a decline of godliness in our societies, when the church that should be salt, light and leaven instead has no voice except to itself. It has also misled people as to salvation. True righteousness is based on the renewing of the nature by the Holy Spirit, not on rules.

These tendencies in Pietism have influenced hermeneutics, sometimes emphasising the devotional, personal interpretation and playing down more rigorous approaches to Bible study as less spiritual. Pietism has bestowed many benefits upon Christianity, including Spirit filled ministers of the gospel and missionaries around the world. It has awoken many from formalism, but it can also stray into legalism.

“Devotionalism” is existentialism, in so far as it substitutes personal or subjective “truth” for objective truth, rational logical reason and justice. What we feel becomes more important than what is the reality. In a Post Modern world, reality is shifted to a mystical centre. It means “reality” is whatever we define it to be.

The First Apostles

In the New Testament, the apostles referred to Old Testament scriptures without changing the original meaning of them. Matthew referred to Jesus fulfilling Old Testament prophecy without spiritualising the passages. In Is 7:14, Isaiah refers to the virgin birth of the Messiah.

While Isaiah 7 made reference to Isaiah’s time, the Holy Spirit inserted a prophecy that referred only to Christ. Some say the prophecy was first fulfilled in Isaiah’s time by a woman who was a virgin when Isaiah prophesied and later married and had a child. In that case the birth would not have been an unusual sign.

The Hebrew word used in Is 7:14 translated “virgin” always means “virgin” and never just a young woman. The prophecy was not to king Ahaz in Isaiah’s time, but to “the House of David”. Calvin, Gill, Henry, Clarke and scholars from every era claim that Is 7:14 was purely messianic.

This calls into question a principle of interpretation called “double fulfilment”. This principle claims that one verse can be fulfilled two, or even more, times. This brings into question the whole process of hermeneutics. If we can interpret a text in some way, unknown to the author or unauthorised by the Holy Spirit in the original context, then we can apply almost any imagination to almost any passage.

Getting back to Is 7:14, if the prophecy about the virgin birth was fulfilled in Isaiah’s day, then what authentic basis does Matthew have for applying it again to Jesus? The Jews would easily have denied its application to Jesus as an afterthought. Jesus would have been seen as a normal man with a messianic complex, looking for some backing in the religious writings of the day.

The Jews of Jesus’ time did know that verses like Is 7:14 had a singular messianic purpose, but later denied this when they refused to accept Jesus. The point is that a verse in Isaiah could not mean to Matthew afterward what it did not mean when Isaiah wrote it. Isaiah did not have a full understanding when he wrote about Christ, but he did know that the Holy Spirit was referring to Christ when he wrote and not to his own time.

To whom it was revealed, that not to themselves, but to us they did minister the things, which are now reported to you by them that have preached the gospel to you

with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. (1 Pet 1:12).

Claiming that Old Testament prophecies have a double meaning weakens their power in referring to Jesus Christ. Accepting the principle of double fulfilment means that we interpret scripture subjectively rather than by its original intention. We know Is 7:14 was speaking about Christ, because the Holy Spirit said so in Is 9:6-7 and all the way through the book of Isaiah. We can only interpret a text the way the Holy Spirit intended us to in the original context of the passage.

Peter said, when referring to certain aspects of the Psalms, that they were fulfilled by Christ alone and not also by David. Peter specifically denied a double reference in order that the Jews could not escape the conclusion that the text spoke of Christ alone and was fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth. Peter specifically denied a double reference to prophecy. Peter said that:

1. David knew he was not speaking of himself.
2. That the texts were not fulfilled by David in his own time.
3. That David knew he was speaking of Christ, who was to come.

Men and brethren, let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried and his sepulchre is with us to this day. Therefore being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne.

He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. (Acts 2:29-32).

In this passage we see Peter's hermeneutics. The Jews who listened to Peter would have surely mocked at any loose exegesis, or double fulfilment. The church of Christ is not built on such flimsy hermeneutics. Peter said that the prophets knew that some sections of their work were speaking of Christ and not of their own time.

So how do we read the Bible? We do not read it "devotionally", which is bringing personal or private meanings to the text. We read it contextually or exegetically. Do we apply the text to our lives in a devotional way? Yes absolutely! Devotional means loving God and living His way by His Spirit.

But application is the second step. Interpretation is the first step. Passages in the Bible must be interpreted exegetically. Meaning must always be what comes out of the passage, never what we bring into the passage through preconceived ideas or subjective persuasions. This is just common sense. A text means what it says, not something else.

Once we admit to a principle of double reference we apply it in all manner of cases, whenever it suits our purposes. We call it looking for the spiritual or deeper meaning of a text, which is not intended by the original draft. Spiritualisation of texts is a major weakness of devotional and some Pentecostal approaches to study and preaching.

Rachael

There are verses that look like they have double or multiple applications, but more careful exegesis shows a Christological (fulfilment in Christ and the gospel) intention. For example, Matthew quoted Jer 31:15 in regard to the massacre of children by Herod, "The voice was heard in Ramah, Rachel weeping for her children." (Matt 2:17-18).

Ramah was close to Bethlehem. Some have said this text was about the captivity to Babylon, for Ramah was the depot from which the exiles of Judah were taken away to Babylon (Jer 40:1). This application would mean that those children would be returned from exile and so Rachel should not weep, so applying it also to Jesus' time would be a double application. It could also be applied to our day in another return of the Jews, if we liked.

Viewing texts this way allows multiple applications, or Post Modern interpretations, the blain of Dispensational hermeneutics. That is, the text is said to be fulfilled in our own last-days generation. While the principles of scripture relate to every generation, the intended historical fulfilment of them does not.

While Jeremiah is speaking at length about the return of Israel from Babylon, he shows that the purpose of the return is their real deliverance from sin, through the New Covenant. It is this *New Covenant return to God* that Jeremiah is addressing in Jer 31:15-19, not from the Babylonian captivity. Matthew rightly therefore applies this passage to the birth of Jesus Christ and redemption from their enemy (and our enemy), sin. The passage further states:

Turn me and I shall be turned; for You are the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented...(Jer 31:18-19).

This word translated *turn* refers to changing of the heart (Ps 80:19, Lam 5:21). Israel did not repent after their return from Babylon, but soon went back into sin. This was a prayer that was answered in the New Covenant. It also shows that it is God who must turn our heart and that repentance and faith follow this regeneration or new birth.

We also know that Jeremiah was not referring to the children taken in captivity for they were not killed, as those under Herod in Jesus' time were. Jeremiah said *they were not*, which Matthew said meant they were killed. In that Jeremiah said they would be returned, he meant deliverance would come to the seed of Rachel (the children of faith) through Jesus Christ. This is Jeremiah's intended Messianic meaning.

Two Steps

There are two steps in interpreting scripture. The first is seeing what it meant then. The second is applying that today. When we rush over step one, to piously (devotionally, pragmatically) get to step two, we corrupt the gospel message and bring others into bondage to religion. The other pitfall is not getting to step two at all. We must get the true gospel and then apply it to today.

When the Old Testament was written it was not written to us, but to those under the law. John the Baptist and Jesus did not speak to 21st Century Pentecostal/Evangelicals, but to 1st Century Jews. When Paul wrote his epistles he wrote to the Jewish/Hellenist world of his time. Understanding that day is vital in understanding the message.

Some claim that understanding the Bible is just a matter of having the right attitude of heart, loving Jesus, praying and being led by the Holy Spirit. These are necessary, but they do not replace the need to read the Bible properly. God in His love gave a message to people when the Bible was written. But if we misinterpret that message, then it has lost its intended value for us.

It is when we have the original meaning that we can move to the *second step* – applying the original message to our own life and circumstances today. Application, or practical theology, comes second. An honest, open and thorough biblical study comes first.

The Study of Theology

In this section we look at:

1. Categories of theology.
2. Textual transmission.
3. Authority in theology.
4. Theological groupings.
5. Theological centres of focus.

Theology means the study of God. Everyone thinks about God. Is what we think about God correct? We must study theology. When we say that we do not like theology, we are saying that we like to have our own theology, to see God in our own way.

Categories of Theology

Theological education is broken up into the following four main categories:

1. Biblical or Exegetical Theology.
2. Systematic Theology.
3. Historical Theology.
4. Practical Theology.

Biblical Theology

Biblical theology means studying scripture one passage at a time. This is also called *exegetical theology*, taking one passage and interpreting it exegetically. Theological education begins with the study of exegesis and hermeneutics, teaching students the principles of interpreting passages of scripture, to serve as the tools of their work. These are basic essential skills for any believer and for any future pastor.

When we study a subject in the Bible, we start by finding the main passages that relate to that subject. We take each passage, one at a time and look at the meaning of that passage. Each passage must be studied apart from the other passages, on its own merits, or in its own context. In this first step we do not use one passage to interpret another passage. We compare passages later.

We interpret the passage by its *plain intention*, not allegorically (figuratively). The passage is interpreted by plain common sense and not by looking for a hidden or spiritual meaning. There are figurative passages in the Bible, especially in the prophets, but these are intentional in that they relate to Christ. We are not free to interpret scripture figuratively otherwise.

There are different *genres* of scripture. A genre is a type of literature. For example, there are the poetic and apocalyptic styles and the historical narrative. *Apocalyptic* is a type of prophetic literature, like Revelation. Each genre has principles for interpreting it. It is wrong to interpret symbolic language literally and wrong to interpret literal language symbolically. We always look for the scripture's stated intent.

Biblical or exegetical theology involves looking at the literary (grammatical), cultural and historical contexts of each passage, as well as the original language, whether Hebrew or Greek. Exegetical theology is *inductive*, which means that we move *from the particular to the general*. We look for actual, particular, evidence of meaning *within* the passage and do not start with *general ideas* about a doctrine.

If we are studying a topic on the Holy Spirit, we might have a passage in Ezekiel, a passage in John and several other passages. It is important that we complete every relevant passage, or our study will not consider all that the Bible has to say about the issue. When we have completed each individual passage, we are ready to move onto the next stage.

Systematic Theology

Systematic theology is the next stage. It is *bringing together* all our findings from our previous exegetical studies. We systemise, or synthesis all the key passages we looked at, into a whole or complete statement on the topic that we are studying. This is where we make general conclusions on the theology of the subject.

Systematic means *holistic*, not in the sense of including knowledge from non-inspired sources (other than scripture), but holistic in the sense of including all the biblical data from all the books of the Bible. In systematic theology, we get the total overall picture on the subject.

This process of systematic theology assumes scripture does not contradict itself when we compare one passage with another. It assumes that God is consistent in His revelation of Himself and His revelation is sensible. God does not reveal Himself in different ways that are conflicting. In scripture there is a consistent revelation of His nature and person.

This presupposition in Bible study is due to the claim of scripture: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine..." (2 Tim 3:16). Jesus took scripture as historical and literal and interpreted it by its plain intention (Mk 10:5-9). The *doctrine of scripture*, meaning that scripture is God inspired, reliable and has a common sense meaning, is throughout the Bible: Matt 26:56, Luke 24:27, John 13:18, John 19:28, Acts 17:11, 1 Cor 15:3, Gal 3:8, 22, 2 Pet 3:16.

Ezra demonstrated how scripture should be read in its plain sense (Neh 8:8). In Hebrew thought, God's revelation is supposed to make sense and be understood by its plain historical and grammatical meaning. In Ezra's example we see plain exegetical and expositional teaching. *Expositional* means teaching verse by verse from the plain meaning of the passage.

Deut 6:4 says, "The Lord our God is one Lord", (in Hebrew meaning *the Lord is unity*) showing there is one revelation from God, which is not self-contradictory. This means our interpretation of scripture should make sense. It is a matter of God's integrity. He says what He means. He is not leading us astray. He wants us to understand.

If the Bible contradicted itself, that is, did not mean what is said, or could be given several meanings of equal value, then any genuine teaching from scripture would be impossible. It would also mean that any duty on our part, in understating or living truth, would be meaningless.

The commandments "you shall not lie, steal, or commit adultery" are meaningless if we can give a different meaning to them. They assume objectivity in knowledge, a standard of truth that is external to our self, by which we shall be judged. Truth is not culturally relative. There is a universal standard given by one God.

Systematic theology goes by the principle of the *analogy of faith*. This principle states that scripture has one meaning, one message and one faith. It is not contradictory. James Packer said it like this:

Scripture must interpret scripture. The scope and significance of one passage is to be brought out by relating it to others. Our Lord gave an example of this when He used Gen 2:24 to show that Moses' Law of divorce was no more than a temporary concession to human hard-heartedness (Matt 3:8 and Deut 24:1).

The Reformers termed this principle *the analogy of Scripture*. The *Westminster Confession* states it thus: “The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture, it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.”...the various inspired books are dealing with complementary aspects of the same subject.

In theology we start by examining each passage independently and then relate them together for a common meaning. If the scripture is sensible then this process does not lead to contradiction. God intends us to employ all our faculties, mind and spirit, by His guiding grace.

There are mysteries in scripture, at least to the human mind and there are limitations to our knowledge on the context of some of the passages, particularly given our individual learning at any time, but God nevertheless makes its intended message plain to us, as we study it in humility and diligence, guided by the Holy Spirit.

In studying both exegetical and systematic theology there are sources that we should utilize. These include original language lexicons, biblical commentaries and theological dictionaries. We do not have to agree with all the content of these sources, but can benefit from the expertise of people in their own field, whenever they are correct and helpful.

Historical Theology

Historical theology is a study of church history, which looks at theological development in the church fathers, creeds and councils. It is an important field of study for all pastors. We are not the first people to study the Bible. Rather than reinvent the wheel, we should learn from those who went before us. This appears to us to be basic common sense and humility.

We should learn from history. The same errors come around every generation. We can study their consequences in history. Historical theology will show us what the church has believed and taught in the past. This will put present day beliefs in a much broader perspective. While a doctrine may be popular today, it may not have enjoyed popularity on the whole throughout church history. If not, then why?

It takes effort to gain more than a superficial view of history. Some books about the past available today have been re-edited, so in order to get a reliable historical view we have to know earlier editions. A problem occurs when we repeat what we have heard from others concerning history, without really knowing much about it.

Everybody has an historical understanding. Every person's life style is affected by their theological view and their theological view is affected by their perceptions of history. Everybody thinks about history and our thinking is important to how we live. If history was not important, why are so many people trying to *rewrite it*? The attitude of *let others study history and tell us their views on what happened* will depreciate our Christian influence in society. We must participate in the process.

There are pragmatic comments like “Some make history, others study it”. Those who say this are more likely to make a historic shipwreck. God told us to take counsel. If we do not know where we have come from, we will not know where we are going to. We will not have the values that we learn from history.

Historical theology includes a study of those the Lord has used before us. We look at their strengths and weaknesses. We look at main historical church movements and assess their fruits and failures. We see how recent trends developed in history and understand how our current thought patterns were developed.

We also get an understanding of the debt we owe to those who stood firm in the past and this, in turn, causes us to live for future generations and not for our self. People in the past gave their lives for our benefit. We should find out why they did so, lest it be in vain as far as we are concerned.

Past church creeds and early church councils are important. The early Nicaea council of 325AD, made up of independent church leaders from all over the world, addressed important issues of the day. Its theology is not a local or isolated expression. Every Bible student should be familiar with the major church creeds, such as the *Nicene*, *Apostles* and *Athanasian* creeds. These are available in book stores and on the Internet.

If our teaching today is contrary to any of these creeds, then it is likely there is a problem with our teaching. These creeds are not inspired like scripture, but neither are they to be taken lightly. The creeds afford us the opportunity to reflect on scripture. We do not fellowship just with our own generation, but also with those before us. This is vital study.

The Westminster Confession was formulated over a 10 year period with leaders from many nations, whom God used in significant ways, who sought to stay in tune with scripture and with historical positions in the church. The confession became the basis for much of the revival that occurred in the 17th – 19th Centuries.

Many in early 20th Century Pentecostalism claimed they did not need history. They claimed to have no historical connections. This was partly due to the *restorationist* nature of the movement, believing that all history except the original church in Acts was wrong. While they were correct to avoid liberal theology, they were not correct to think they *had it all*. They had taken on more *traditional baggage* than they realised.

Practical Theology

Practical theology refers to the practice of the Christian faith, either in personal life or in ministry. It is the application side of study. We apply what we have learned from scripture to practical matters in daily life. Typical modules of study in this area include *marriage and family*, *missions*, *evangelism*, *worship*, *preaching*, *teaching*, *church administration* and *pastoral ministries*.

Practical theology is vital, as we must live the Christian life and lead others to live it also. We must reach all people with the gospel and pass on all aspects of the Christian faith in our homes and churches. We must be salt and light in our nations and influence all parts of the world in which we live.

It is important to notice the order. Practical theology comes last, *after* a full study of scripture. Practical theology must be built upon the foundation of what God says. What we do in life must be based upon biblical truth. The danger in moving too quickly to practical theology, before a robust and adequate biblical theology, is that other foundations will be substituted into our practice from anthropology (human culture).

We must have a theoretical basis for our practice. Everybody does. We always act from a foundation of theory. If we say that theology is not spiritual or practical and is a waste of time, then we will inevitably build our practice on human ideas. We build on what God says, or we build upon what man says.

Sources of Theology

It has already been shown that everyone has theology – everyone thinks about God. How do we know whether what we think about God is correct? This is determined by the source of our theology. We go wrong in what we think about God when we draw on the wrong places.

So what are your sources of theology? Where do we draw our information about God from? Common sources are our own judgement, traditions, experiences, reason, culture, science, nature, testimonies, feelings, emotion, conscience, religion, a religious leader or scripture. Most often people use a mixture of these things.

What is the basis of authority in theology? Everything people say about God has a basis which they assume has authority to make it valid. It is important to know whether what we say and think about God is correct. One way to find out is to ask what the authority of our position is. Why do we believe what we believe?

In this section we explore authorities that people advocate. Traditionally, Evangelicals/Pentecostals hold that scripture is the only basis of authority, but in practice this position is not always maintained. The traditional doctrine of the authority of scripture is based on the doctrine of *inerrancy*. So we will first explore inerrancy and textual transmission to our current day.

Inerrancy

Inerrancy means that the scripture is without error, whether with regard to matters of faith or history. The doctrine holds that:

1. The original copies of scripture were inspired by God to the extent that they were recorded without error with regard to all matters on which they speak.
2. The copies of scripture we have today, both of the Old and New Testaments, contain no significant transmission (copying) errors.

Over the centuries, especially during the modern era, many scholars have attacked this doctrine. So far none of the critics have stood the test of time. Some people focus on apparent contradictions in scripture, but these are merely different accounts. Others have tried to discredit the history in scripture, but up till now archaeology has never shown the biblical record to be wrong.

Uniqueness of Scripture

The Bible is totally unique in the world. It was written over a 1,600 year period, by many authors, yet with one consistent message. Its contribution to law and ethics through Moses and the prophets is without equal. Its integrity, even when it speaks against its own people, is unique. Its many fulfilled prophecies in relation to the coming and work of Jesus Christ are impossible unless it were the word of God.

The most compelling aspect is the message itself. Its testimony on human nature is flawless. The gospel of redemption through atonement by a worthy substitute who rose from the dead and is returning at the end of the world answers all things. Man could not have thought of this and built it consistently into the whole biblical message from Genesis to Revelation.

The countless number of lives transformed by the Lord Jesus Christ proves the truth of the biblical message. These are lives not just made religious, but changed from sin to righteousness. Whole families and nations have been changed by the gospel message. There is no other power for good in the world today such as the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not a philosophy, but genuine resurrection life.

The Bible contains 66 books in both Testaments, from Genesis to Malachi and Matthew to Revelation. The Intertestamental books and other Apocryphal books are not scripture, but may serve for historical studies. The Canon (the 66 inspired books) is closed, meaning there are no books added after the book of Revelation.

Creation

A main attack on the Bible has been with regard to the biblical teaching on creation. From the 19th Century, Charles Darwin's followers claimed that the world came into existence by natural causes without the supernatural agency of God and life has since evolved over millions of years. This theory is in direct opposition to the biblical message, which claims by the plain meaning of the first two chapters of Genesis that:

1. God made the heavens and the earth in six days.
2. The days were 24 hour periods, with "evening and morning" dividing each day (Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31).

It also appears that creation was in recent history, judging by the genealogies from Adam and other statements in the Bible that may be used to estimate periods of time. We do not necessarily hold to Bishop's Ussher's calculations made in the 17th Century about the age of the earth. We are not certain the content of the Bible is sufficient or even meant to be used for such a calculation, neither do we deny it.

Without going into a detailed defence from scripture here, we hold that *Noah's Flood* was worldwide. Since conditions before the Flood were likely very different to what they are now, it is difficult to rely on dating methods, as they carry unverifiable assumptions about consistency of element decay rates, starting levels of elements and addition or deletion of element levels through other factors affecting the environment.

The existence of starlight from millions of light years away might not be proof of an old universe. We do not have sufficient knowledge of physics to contradict the plain meaning of biblical text. Theories in science are as yet not conclusive. In the field of archaeology many statements in the scripture were at first denied, but always when more evidence came in, the scriptures were shown to be correct. Science is often very political. The evolutionist paradigm is more a dogmatic faith than it is balanced science.

Further, if Noah's Flood is true it would have been the cause of much of the extensive fossil record and brought huge changes to the planet's topography and weather patterns. The ridiculous position of evolutionists is that they claim not to know what caused the sudden influx of the number of fossils. Fossils require that animals die suddenly and are buried instantly. "It may have been a meteorite, or an alien attack on the planet, but all we *know for certain* is that was not the Flood of Noah!"

There are sea shells embedded on the top of Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world. The Mount St. Helen's eruption last century created a huge canyon in one week, showing that as water receded off the earth after Noah's Flood the Grand Canyon could have been formed in one week. All over the world tree fossils are found upright through rock layers which are supposed to have taken millions of years to form. It is not difficult to explain natural evidence from a biblical world view.

Evolution cannot show how life started, especially since more "simple" forms of life are now known to be highly complex. Evolution cannot show one case in which one kind of life form has evolved from another kind. We do not refute natural selection or speciation within a kind.

Evolution is however often taught as fact. Educationalists who are either uneducated or deceptive reintroduce into text books claims which have been disproved for many years, such as the *black and white moths* and the *fish embryos* (evolutionary stages in embryology).

We do not use the findings of an undeveloped and uncertain science as a starting point for interpreting scripture. Those who claim Genesis denies a six day creation usually do so because they

start by assuming the world is millions of years old. This is a faulty way to read the Bible. The Bible should be allowed to interpret itself. Our starting point for biblical interpretation is the Bible.

We do admit that church dogma has often resisted science while misinterpreting scripture. We should be open to a developing understanding of what scripture says, but without reinterpreting it against its plain meaning. The pursuit of science should be without religious restrictions. Today most restrictions on scientists come from the dogma of evolutionist faith.

R. C. Sproul, in his recent three volume edition of *Truths We Confess (a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession)*, stated:

I now hold to a literal six-day creation...traditional (view). Genesis says that God created the universe and everything in it in six twenty-four hour periods. According to the Reformation hermeneutic, the first option is to follow the plain sense of the text. One must do a great deal of hermeneutical gymnastics to escape the plain meaning of Genesis 1-2. The *confession* makes it a point of faith that God created the world in the space of six days.

We recommend many of R. C. Sproul's books. He also often teaches on television broadcasts. Tas Walker (*Creation on the Web*) stated:

Creation is foundational for the Christian church with every major Christian doctrine coming out of the events recorded in the first chapters of Genesis.

Among these are: 1) the nature of God, including His power and goodness; 2) the nature of man, created in the image of God but fallen because of his sin; 3) the nature and consequences of sin; 4) the nature of marriage; 5) the origin of death as a penalty for sin and an enemy; 6) the need for a Saviour to redeem man from sin; 7) the origin and meaning of work and the weekly day of rest; 8) the relationship between man and the rest of creation, which is now cursed because of sin; 9) and much more.

Fundamentalism

As Bible critics and evolutionists increased in the 19th Century, some church leaders responded against the rising liberalism with a *fundamentalist* approach. *Fundamentalism* sought to re-establish the credibility of the scripture, in the face of *Darwinian science*, with new systems of hermeneutics.

Their main system was called Dispensationalism. The hope was that this new system would explain why there are miracles in the Bible which were real, although in their experience miracles did not happen today. Their answer was that Jesus operated in a different *dispensation*. They said that miracles had since ceased and were not for our current day or dispensation.

They also tried to restore some credibility to Genesis 1 by saying that there was a *gap* of some millions of years between verses 1 and 2. They said that verse 2 was the *second creation*, after the first was destroyed millions of years earlier. They thought this would explain why the world is millions of years old and that Adam was made more recently.

Dispensationalism denies the natural meaning of Genesis 1. There is no gap between verses 1 & 2. The Hebrew word for "was" in verse 2 is not "became" as claimed. When Adam was told to "replenish" (KJV) the earth this meant *fill*, not *refill*. "Replenish" in 17th Century English meant *fill*, not *refill*. Some people still claim that *replenish* here refers to a recreation. This is either ignorance or an attempt to deceive.

The *gap theory* is *read into* texts as a response to the theories of evolution and long age of the earth. This is not exegesis. Jer 4:19-31 does not allegorically refer to creation. Jeremiah said he was

speaking of the judgment of Babylon. We find it difficult to understand how someone could have a Dispensationalist view of Israel and also be a creationist! They are entirely different hermeneutical systems of thought.

Both *Gap theology* and *Long Age creation theology* (that the six days were long ages) in our mind are in conflict with the theology of the Bible. Scripture tells us that death came into the world through Adam, not millions of years before Adam. *Gap Theory* says that Satan was cast down to the earth and led astray the first human race (a pre-Adamic race of mankind) and brought it into judgement and death.

The Bible does not teach this anywhere. Nor does the Bible distinguish between physical and spiritual death as Platonism and *Long Age theory* do. Hebrew thought is not dualistic. Death came by Adam and the resurrection of the dead came by Jesus Christ. This includes spirit, soul and body.

Dispensational ideas were later popularized by the *Scofield* and *Dake's Bibles*. The comments in these publications are fanciful ideas. There is no evidence that either of these men was qualified to write on theology. Scofield had an "interesting" personal life, if you want to research it on the Internet.

Gospel vs. Gnosticism

Dowie was a gospel preacher in the USA in the 19th Century. His answer to the liberal critics was not a philosophy such as Dispensationalism, but the power of Jesus Christ: "Rise and walk", a much better "hermeneutic", a public demonstration of the power of the gospel. Dowie, a Reformed minister from Scotland, saw one of the greatest healing ministries in the modern era. Miracles do happen in our day.

Adjusting hermeneutics to accommodate *evolution* is pointless, as there is no proof for the theory. Adjusting the Bible is *eisegesis*, meaning reading into the Bible from an external mindset. It means starting our interpretation from preconceptions which we then read into the scripture. Those who deny the creation do so by starting with theory and then proceed to rethink the scripture.

Dispensationalist hermeneutics further claims that the seven days in Genesis 1 speak allegorically of seven dispensations, ending in the reign of Christ on earth after His Second Coming. Genesis 1 does not say this and no other text in the scripture says it. It is philosophy, guess work and the imagination of man. It is not what God says. Allegorizing scripture is often *reading into it* what it does not say.

This is what Paul called "science so-called" (1 Tim 6:20). Paul used the Greek form from *gnosis*, meaning knowledge. Dispensationalism is a modern form of Gnosticism, with all of the same implications for demonism and spiritualism, which we will look at as we further discuss various issues in this book.

Fundamentalism attempts to uphold the veracity of the Bible without its power (2 Tim 3:5). It teaches doctrine, but not *dunamis*. We are not Fundamentalists. The word of God is a person, not a text, or a belief, an idea, or a philosophy; not legalism, nor religion, nor a code, a theological system, or a hermeneutic. He works by the power of the gospel and is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8). This distinguishes biblical *logos* from Greek *logos*.

Textual Transmission

Textual transmission has to do with how the copies of the original Bible came down to us today many years later. No other documents in the world have been so faithfully handed down through the generations in such good original order and with such strong proof of authenticity.

Starting with the Old Testament, the Hebrew nation had a class of scholars that worked on textual copying. They worked out a systematic way of copying scripture before the old copies deteriorated.

They used mathematical checks to ensure that the transmission of the text from one copy to the next was without errors.

They also had the Old Testament translated into Greek before the time of Jesus. This Greek translation is called the *Septuagint*, which means 70, because there were 70 qualified translators involved. Jesus often used the Septuagint when He preached. So, we not only have Hebrew copies, but also ancient Greek copies, by which we can check the authenticity of our current Bibles.

This means allegations that early Christians tampered with the Old Testament texts to insert prophecies after Jesus came are impossible. The Old Testament was already in wide circulation in different languages before Jesus came.

The oldest surviving Old Testament text until 1947 dated back to about 1,000AD. This text was copied about 1,000 years after Christ, but all texts older than that had disappeared. In the 20th Century a boy herding goats in the desert near the *Dead Sea* discovered many sealed clay pots in different caves containing ancient texts. These were put there by the Essenes who dwelt in the region before Christ. The texts had been preserved for more than 2,000 years due to the dry conditions.

These texts, known as the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, contain almost every book in the Old Testament. They therefore serve as an invaluable opportunity to verify the authenticity of the Old Testament we use in our time. Inspections of the Dead Sea Scrolls, by experts, have shown that there are no significant differences between those ancient texts of the Old Testament and the one we use today.

Today we have copies of the Septuagint. We have copies of the Old Testament going back to 1,000AD. We have the Dead Sea Scrolls with copies of most of the Old Testament books dated at 100BC. We have quotations from the Old Testament in many other sources, including old New Testament manuscripts. There are no significant differences between so many copies from so many different sources.

The New Testament

The number of manuscripts we have for the New Testament is even greater. The ancient Greek copies we have today number into the thousands, some dating back to the 4th Century. We have copies of the early *Latin Vulgate* (not the inferior *Jerome Vulgate*) and *Syriac* translations, both dating to the 2nd Century. These help us to confirm the authenticity of the New Testament we have today.

We have two main sets of early manuscripts. One group is called the *Byzantine Text*, sometimes referred to as *Textus Receptus* (the *Received Text*), or the similar *Majority Text*. There are over 5,500 old Greek manuscript text portions in this group, which come from a variety of regions.

Then we have the *Alexandrian Texts*, which number only two copies. One of these was found in a monastery (in a rubbish bin) in the Sinai Desert. Origen, who had Gnostic and pre-Arian ideas (counting Christ as a lower god) and his disciples Pamphilus and Eusebius, altered the traditional text. The other Alexandrian class text is in the Vatican library. This copy has alterations marked by old scribes on every page. These two texts have many variations between them.

It is believed that the two Alexandrian copies are older than any of the Byzantine copies, dating back to the 4th Century AD. They may be the oldest most complete texts, but there are many older text portions. There are some major differences between the Alexandrian Texts and the Byzantine Texts. In the Alexandrian Texts the last 12 verses in Mark are missing, the story of the woman caught in adultery is missing and several verses referring to the divinity of Christ are missing, along with many other verses.

Early Fathers & Erasmus

Until modern times these two Alexandrian Texts were not considered authentic. Early church fathers claimed corrupted copies were made by Gnostics, Arians and other heretical groups. Arians denied the divinity of Christ. These groups had influence in the Egyptian region where it is believed the Alexandrian texts originated. The Jehovah's Witnesses, who deny Jesus is God, today applaud these texts.

Erasmus was a scholar of ancient Greek, who was a contemporary of Luther during the Reformation in the 16th Century. Erasmus used the Byzantine texts to compile a Greek version called the *Textus Receptus*, meaning the text received from the ancient church. This version has been updated several times by reference to other Byzantine texts.

The Reformers used the *Textus Receptus* to translate the scriptures into their various languages. Luther used it for the German Bible and Tyndale for an English Bible, on which later the KJV was based. Erasmus was aware of the Alexandrian Texts, for he had access to the Roman Catholic library. However, Erasmus refused to use the Alexandrian text in his work. He said it was inferior and was not the correct text.

Fenton Hort

This was fine until the 19th Century when Fenton Hort introduced the Alexandrian Texts into translation work. Hort was an Englishman and had sympathies for the Arian position denying Christ's divinity. He was asked to review the KJV due to his expertise in language. However, instead of reviewing it he embarked on a project to adopt the Alexandrian Text.

The Bishops of England told Hort not to use the Alexandrian Texts to this extent, but he ignored them. He claimed that because the two Alexandrian texts were older than the 5,500 manuscripts which support the *Textus Receptus* they must be more original or better. Evolutionists and liberal scholars in British universities supported this idea.

Many modern English translations then began to use the Alexandrian Texts. Some English translations use them in part while using the Byzantine Texts in part also. To the degree they rely on the Alexandrian Texts, several verses are left out. Some of these modern English translations will leave out many verses and even sections of scripture, which are included in the KJV.

The Majority Text

In recent years scholarly opinion is moving back in favour of the Byzantine Texts and away from the Alexandrian Texts. A new *Majority Text* has been made from the older Byzantine texts, which is almost the same as the *Textus Receptus* editions. The Majority Text also does not include the two Alexandrian Texts. There are three strong reasons to discount the Alexandrian Texts and accept the Byzantine Texts as the correct Bible:

1. There is agreement with all scholars that the church has accepted the Byzantine Texts at least since the early 4th Century. Until Hort, this was 1,500 years of undisputed acceptance.
2. The writings of the church fathers, as far back as the early 2nd Century, include the disputed verses the Alexandrian Texts have deleted. Ignatius (35-116AD), Justin Martyr (100-165AD), Irenaeus (130-202AD), Hippolytus (170-236AD), Tertullian (160-221AD), Cyprian (200-258AD) and Dionysius (3rd Cent.), for example, all quote verses that are found in the Byzantine Texts but not in the Alexandrian texts.

3. Translations into other languages known to be before the 4th Century are shown to correspond with the Byzantine Texts. These include strong support from Armenian, Ethiopian, Gothic, Old Latin, Anglo-Saxon and Syriac translations. The Papyrus Bodmer II (also called P66) dating from between 125-200AD verifies many of the disputed passages in the Byzantine Text.

There are counter claims that deny the above points. It is a complicated field of research, but it would appear that the church has not been so stupid all these years as to reject the Alexandrian and other heretical copies without good reason. We also believe that God would not leave the church for 1,500 years with the wrong text.

Matters that Impact Translation

1. The translation work of Wycliffe and Tyndale (later compiled into the KJV) was made with great care, dedication and knowledge.
2. These were also men who loved Jesus and gave their lives for the gospel. Despite claims, today translators do not have more knowledge and may not always have the same level of dedication.
3. The theology that the translator holds impacts upon their translation work. In our view the theological knowledge of the Puritans who compiled the KJV was superior to that held by some in our current day.
4. A strong market or profit motive can affect the work of modern publications. For example, the NKJV had to meet a copyright law demanding a certain number of words be changed.

This is not said to support a *KJV only* debate. The KJV does have faults. It is good to read many translations to help with perspective. This discussion claims that the manuscripts we use and the theology we maintain impact upon the translation work we do. It is good to compare many translations, while being aware of the textual issues. It is good to avoid watered down translations as texts in church.

Due to a lack of knowledge of old English, we can misunderstand the KJV. We do believe that for the reasons outlined here it is one of the best English translations and educating others in English is better than *dumbing down* translations. For example, the old English uses different words for the plural and singular of *you*, reflecting usage in Greek texts, which we miss in modern works.

Translation works are not *inspired* (without error), although God's providence has guided the work. We support continued efforts to research original Greek texts and matters that relate to a proper understanding of them in our own languages. Hebrew and Greek are not difficult to be acquainted with and there are many sources that can help us study the original languages and it helps to be aware that these also are affected by the theological persuasions of the authors.

For more information on this topic see: G. W. and D. E. Anderson, in *A Textual Key to the New Testament, A list of Omissions and Changes* (Trinitarian Bible Society, 2002); and in *What Today's Christian Needs to Know About the NIV* (TBS, 1998); both of which raise several important issues that people may not always be unaware of. The issue in Bible reading is not to take the easiest way, but to become educated.

Date of Authorship

Evolutionary theories are used by some to support the idea that the New Testament was orally passed down and not written until much later. Some suggest that the written form of the New

Testament did not exist until 325AD. At the Council of Nicaea the Canon was confirmed, but this was because it had already been accepted by the church for hundreds of years. It seems apparent from the internal evidence within the New Testament that it was all written in its final form before 70AD, for the following reasons:

1. None of the books in the New Testament mention the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD, though Matthew, Luke, Mark, Thessalonians and Revelation all prophecy of it. The Gospels, Acts, Hebrews and Revelation 11 also assume the temple was still standing at the time they were written.
2. Paul often quoted from the Gospels, as though he had them available at the time in a written and widely known form (1 Cor 7:10, 11:24, 1 Thes 4:15).
3. Paul called the Gospels scripture (1 Cor 15:1-3).
4. Paul instructed that his epistles be copied and read in other churches (Col 4:16).
5. Peter in his epistles called the New Testament scripture, referring to the Gospels and Paul's writings (compare 2 Pet 1:19-21, 3:1-2, 15-16).
6. In Acts, the disciples "continued in the Apostle's doctrine" showing the earliness and spread of the record of the words of Jesus. With such a wide and early circulation of texts it would have been impossible to corrupt any one text without detection.

The Canon

The Old Testament Canon contains the same books today as it did in the time of Jesus. A book in the Old or New Testament is considered canonical if it:

1. Is authored by a genuine prophet or apostle whose word came to pass and was accredited by signs and wonders.
2. Its message is consistent with previous revelations from God, in particular the books of Moses (Is 8:20).
3. Is Messianic. That is, the Messiah is central to the book's teaching. All biblical books fit these criteria. The Canon was closed with The Revelation. No additional writings since then are inerrant.

We believe the book of Hebrews was supervised by Paul, though a team person may have helped to write it. It appears to us that the theology and some of the personal details are Pauline, but the writing style and one or two other issues do not seem to point to Paul. There have been various views on the authorship in history, but its canonicity is not generally disputed.

We disagree with all views that dispute the authorship of any of the Old or New Testament books. The *documentary hypothesis* in regard to the Old Testament is no longer taken seriously by most scholars. The higher critical views on the New Testament are largely imaginative guess work.

Inerrancy and Philosophy

There are some philosophical views that claim the Bible cannot be without error. Philosophical views follow two strands. One is *Platonic* and the other *Aristotelian*. Plato declared that the natural is so far removed from God, that God is so *other* (separate), that there can be no reliable communication from God in written form.

In the 20th Century the Platonic view resurfaced as *Neo-Orthodoxy*, in keeping with the Post Modern society of today. *Neo* means new, so this means new orthodoxy. The most famous propagator of this view was Karl Barth in the 20th Century. We also speak about Barth in the chapter on education.

Neo-Orthodoxy has strengths. First, it places more confidence in the grace of God than in human ability. It rightly claims that reason cannot bring us to God. God reveals Himself in sovereignty to man. It therefore emphasises the importance of experience, the *Christ encounter*. It also charges Evangelicals with *bibliolatry*, which is the worship of the verse of scripture rather than the God of scripture - *Fundamentalism*.

But Neo Orthodoxy claims that God is so distinct from creation that there can be no inerrant expression of faith in human written form. It is claimed that the Bible is a witness to faith, but not an authoritative or normative expression and people must have private spiritual encounters for a more *relevant and contemporary* faith. *Normative* means that the scripture is propositional, i.e. it speaks authoritatively to all men, of all cultures, of all generations.

We strongly affirm that rejecting the inerrancy of scripture is not a Christian position and is outside the Christian faith. Approved church fathers in history held to the inerrancy of scripture.

Authority in Theology

The inerrancy of scripture means that scripture is the only true source of theology. Jesus affirmed this when He said, "The scripture cannot be broken." (John 10:35); "Your word is truth." (John 17:17); "Heaven and earth shall pass away but not one jot or tittle from God's word shall pass away." (Mk 13:21, Matt 5:18) and to the Pharisees, "You make the word of God void by your traditions." (Matt 15:3). Human traditions were not accepted by Jesus as a source of theology, but the scripture was binding.

The Reformation strongly emphasised the word of God as being the only true source of theology. In Latin this is *sola scriptura*, meaning only scripture. The Catholics believed the traditions of the church were of equal authority with scripture. But these traditions often contradicted clear biblical teaching.

Authority in Man

In the first 1,000 years after Christ, the church was influenced by Platonic ideas. Plato was a Greek philosopher who lived before Christ and believed that nature hindered us from knowing God. He believed we had to find the truth by tapping into an experiential or individual encounter. This led to sources of theology outside of scripture – the traditions of "holy men".

In the next 1,000 years Aristotleism became dominant in the Western church. Aristotle was also a Greek who lived before Jesus, who emphasised nature as the source of truth. In this view, one could contemplate nature and from it rationally deduce a theology of the things of God. We also speak on Aristotle later and Thomas Aquinas who followed his ideas in the 12th Century.

Aquinas was thus a challenge to the principle of *sola scriptura*. It is often held that theology can be taken from the natural sciences and from human culture. This is called *Integration*. Most people integrate sources of truth, by mixing them together. We talk about this later, especially in our chapters on mission and education. Here we just point out that people often use different sources of so-called theology.

There is a correct use of *Integration*. We must live integrated lives. This means we learn what the Bible means in relation to the world around us as we grow in Christ. We integrate biblical truths into our daily context. Integration must always start with what the Bible teaches.

Authority in Animism

Platonic ideas are present in *animistic* societies, where thinking is more in line with witchcraft principles. Plato believed in two realities in conflict with each other, namely the spirit and flesh worlds. This is called dualism, meaning *two realities*. This was the belief of Gnosticism in early Greek society.

There are different expressions of dualism. Animism claims that the flesh or natural world must be ruled by obtaining power in the spirit. This has been adopted by many Christians in animistic societies, but also in the West along with the Post Modern view of spiritual conflict.

Platonism, or experience-centred reality, is at the fore in much of today's Christian expression. Many judge truth on feelings, emotions, testimonies, experience or tradition. It is taught that to have success in the physical realm, we must overcome in the spiritual realm by spiritual warfare or denial of the flesh. This is manipulation or works, rather than the gospel of grace through Christ's finished work.

Authority and Culture

Another claim against *sola scriptura* is that theology can be found in culture. This occurs in some mission theory. One claim is that even though man *fell* there is still some resemblance of the image of God in him, which comes out in his culture and religion. We look at this in our chapter on mission.

This is a watering down of the "total depravity" of fallen man. It is claimed that there are customs in culture and religion that resemble God's truth, which Christians can mix with the Bible in local theology. Romans chapters 1 to 3 refute these ideas, showing the inability of man to come to God by any truth of his own.

Authority of Faith

We conclude that there is only one source of theology, no matter who the man is and where he comes from and that that is the Bible. Scripture is truth and none of it will fail and we can neglect no part of it. But the scripture without God does not profit us. It points us to God who personally transforms and directs our life by His Spirit.

The word of God is not scripture, but it is that which proceeds from God's mouth (Matt 4:4). The word of God is alive and powerful (Heb 4:12). It is "yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13:8). Yesterday's account is true, but a mental ascent to that does not bring truth in the form of the present reality of God. It is *today* and *forever* by *His power*.

Authority is in God, the person. God will not deny scripture, but authority comes to us as Christ speaks in and through us. The faith of Jesus Christ is authority, not the letter. "The letter kills; it is the Spirit that gives life." (2 Cor 3:6). We are saved by faith, not by scripture.

Search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me. And you will not come to Me, that you might have life. (John 5:39-40).

And from a child you have known the scriptures, which are able to make you wise to salvation *through faith which is in Christ Jesus*. (2 Tim 3:15).

The scriptures point to Christ, who gives the faith which saves. For Calvin, authority was wrapped in his doctrine of the Holy Spirit, his *charismatic* doctrine. The Spirit bears witness within us to the truth of scripture. God's word is true whether we believe it or not, but it does not have power to change our life without the Holy Spirit. A doctrine of inerrancy that is not Pentecostal is dead.

Theological Groups

There are five main groups in Western theology:

1. *Roman Catholic*: Catholicism recognises the authority of scripture, but also adds to it the apocrypha and Roman Catholic tradition as equal with scripture. They claim that we must use the Catholic catechism to interpret the Bible. It also holds to allegory and authority through personal works-holiness.
2. *Reformed Theology*: This claims that only scripture is authoritative in theology. It further claims that the Bible interprets itself in its own context. It claims that the authority for Christian life is faith, empowered by God's Spirit.
3. *Liberal Theology*: This claims that rationalism is the only authority, not accepting anything by faith or on the authority of scripture. It only accepts what is natural and seems logical.
4. *Fundamentalism*: Authority is in the scripture, but this is a Cessationist, non-Pentecostal authority. It also holds to allegory and Dispensationalism to reinterpret scripture in the *light of science*.
5. *Neo-Orthodoxy*: This claims that experience, culture and religious community are the authorities for theology. It claims theology is progressive and the scripture is not authoritative.

Pentecostalism has its main heritage in Reformed Theology, but with Pietism, *Wesleyanism*, Fundamentalism, Restorationism and more recently Neo-Orthodoxy integrated. *Neo-Pentecostalism* today is in some places shifting away from *sola scriptura* to Neo-Orthodoxy with its human experience centre, embracing more animist and anthropological sources of interpretation.

Theological Centre

Theology is to do with framework. If we are building a house we have materials and we have a framework around which we erect the materials. Theology is the same. People may have similar materials (similar doctrines), but arrange them differently and end up with completely different theologies, meanings and practices.

In theology our starting point is vital. What is at the centre of our framework? What do we build our doctrines around? What gives meaning and definition to our doctrines? What is our central focus that gives meaning to all the doctrines that we interpret?

People can have similar doctrines. We can believe in the divinity of Christ, His virgin birth, atoning death and resurrection. But the significance of these doctrines can be very different. Likewise, our theology will be very different. Doctrine is not the only important thing, but our central focus or how we organise that doctrine, is of vital importance.

The Bible puts God at the centre, not man. There are three main central points one can have in theology. These are:

1. God.
2. Man.
3. The devil.

With a *God centre* we will see God as the Saviour and Keeper of His people. With a *man centre* we will see ourselves as the chooser and keeper of our faith. With a *devil centre* we will see not our own sin, but the plans of others responsible for our *fall*. We will see *original sin* as an attack of Satan and *salvation* in terms of spiritual warfare.

We cannot say that all of these centres are true and that we appreciate one or the other according to where we were brought up. Each centre brings an entirely different meaning to scripture. We cannot have three different views and say they are all true. Only one is true according to scripture. We need to adopt the same central focus that the scripture adopts.

There are several organising factors in good theology. The first is the sovereignty of God. Grace is also a main centre. Paul in his epistles states that grace is the organising principle around which a sovereign God fulfils His plan of salvation, "...it is of faith, so that it might by grace..." (Rom 4:16). All of this is fulfilled through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The *total depravity* of man is a main organising principle of theology. It is only in correctly understanding the nature of man in the *Fall* that the true nature of salvation can be seen. The distinction between the Old and New Covenants is essential in focusing correctly on both the Old and New Testament scriptures and relating them to our lives today.

To be Christian means we put Christ at the centre of theology. He is the fulfilment of the law and the prophets. In Him is the fullness of the Godhead (Col 2:9). We are complete only in Him (Col 2:10). All theology focuses around these biblical statements in Colossians. That is what "Christ-ian" means. We are disciples of Christ. He is first in all things.