

Building Your Theology

Lesson Guide

LESSON
ONE

WHAT IS THEOLOGY?



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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:24)

II. Definitions (1:34)

A. Typical Definitions (1:55)

1. Thomas Aquinas (3:06)

Roman Catholic theologian; represents traditional definition of theology as “sacred doctrine.”

“A unified science in which all things are treated under the aspect of God either because they are God himself or because they refer to God” (*Summa Theologica* 1.1.7).

Science: an intellectual or scholarly pursuit.

Theology has two levels:

- *Theology proper*: issues pertaining to God himself.
- *Theology*: any other subject that relates to God or refers to God.

2. **Charles Hodge (6:01)**

Theology is “the science of the facts of divine revelation so far as those facts concern the nature of God and our relation to him” (from *Systematic Theology*).

“The facts of divine revelation:” emphasis on the importance of God’s revelation, especially the Bible, as the main resource for theology.

Science: an academic discipline.

“The Bible contains the truth which the theologian has to collect, authenticate, arrange, and exhibit in their internal relation to each other” (from *Systematic Theology*).

Two main topics in theology:

- *Theology proper*: nature of God.
- *Theology*: our relation to him.

3. William Ames (8:48)

The heart of theology is “the doctrine or teaching of living to God” (from *Marrow of Theology*).

- “Doctrine or teaching:” an intellectual pursuit of ideas and teaching, but deemphasizing the close association with other academic disciplines

- “Living to God:” how one is to live to and for God

4. John Frame (10:25)

Theology is “the application of the Word of God by persons to all areas of life” (from *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, ch. 3).

Theology is application. It is applying the teachings of Scripture to the broad range of life.

B. Tendencies (11:11)

1. Academic Orientation (11:33)

Aquinas and Hodge represent the majority of Christians:

- *theos*: God
- *logos*: the science, or doctrine or study of

Application is often seen not as essential to formal theology, but as a second step, sometimes called “practical theology.”

2. Life Orientation (13:08)

Ames and Frame represent a minority view.

Theology is deeply and essentially concerned with living for Christ.

C. Evaluations (15:11)

1. Academic Orientation (15:33)

Strength: capitalizes on our rational abilities.

Danger: theologians' lives receive very little attention.

2. Life Orientation (18:57)

Strength: encourages us to observe some important biblical values.

Good theology will lead to proper living.

Danger: anti-intellectualism; opposition to the careful study of theological doctrine.

III. Goals (22:52)

A. Primary Goals (23:27)

1. Orthodoxy (24:56)

Right or straight thinking.

The goal of orthodoxy is to reach right or true doctrines.

Challenge: theological diversity outside and within the church

2. Orthopraxis (28:23)

Right behavior or practice.

Challenges:

- People outside the church say there are no moral absolutes, that no behaviors are particularly good or bad.

- Christians have failed in orthopraxis in the past.

Our behavior matters to God.

Humility and love must characterize our actions at every turn.

3. Orthopathos (31:59)

Right or correct feelings or emotions.

Our joys, our disappointments, our yearnings, our anger, our exhilaration and a host of other emotions must be brought into conformity with the will of God.

Reasons for neglecting the emotional dimension of theology:

- Academic theologians are often psychologically inept at expressing or exploring emotions.

- Many evangelicals believe that feelings are amoral; that they are morally neutral.

B. Interdependence (35:31)

We cannot be strong in one area without strength in the other two.

1. Orthodoxy (36:06)

What we understand to be true will either confirm or challenge our behavior and emotions.

2. Orthopraxis (37:45)

Our praxis or actions can confirm or challenge what we believe to be true.

Practices also influence the emotional dimensions of theology.

3. Orthopathos (39:59)

Our feelings influence what we believe and do.

C. Priorities (41:50)

Beliefs, actions and feelings form webs of multiple reciprocities:

- multi-linear
- reciprocal
- we cannot always assign one priority

We must develop the wisdom to give priority and emphasis to the goals of theology that are needed most in any given situation.

Because the deck of life is always shifting, balance can be nothing more than momentary synchronicity.

There is no single prescribed way to pursue every theological task:

- What is needed?
- What is needed most at this moment?

Establish the appropriate orientation for the time, and pursue all the goals of theology with all of our hearts.

IV. Topics (46:25)

A. Options (47:08)

Theology covers a long list of subjects:

- Practical topics:
 - missions
 - evangelism
 - apologetics (defending the faith)
 - worship
 - mercy ministries
 - counseling
 - homiletics (preaching)

- Theoretical or abstract subjects:
 - soteriology (the doctrine of salvation)
 - ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church)
 - anthropology (the doctrine of humanity)
 - pneumatology (the doctrine of the Holy Spirit)
 - Christology (the doctrine of Christ)
 - theology proper (the doctrine of God)
 - eschatology (the doctrine of end times)
 - biblical theology (theology of redemptive history recorded in the Bible)
 - systematic theology (the logical arrangement of biblical teaching)
 - historical theology (tracing the development of doctrines in the history of the church)
 - hermeneutics (interpretation)

Available approaches:

- orthodoxy
- orthopraxis
- orthopathos.

B. Selections (49:48)

The long list of options leads to the necessity of selectivity.

Pastoral theological concerns: The set of beliefs, practices and pathos that are more directly beneficial for pastors and church leaders.

Typical seminary curriculum:

- Biblical
 - Old Testament
 - New Testament
- Historical and Doctrinal
 - Church History
 - Systematic Theology
- Practical
 - Personal spiritual development
 - Practical ministry skills

V. Conclusion (54:20)

Review Questions

1. Briefly state the four definitions of “theology” provided by Aquinas, Hodge, Ames and Frame.
2. Describe the two tendencies or perspectives most people have when approaching the study of theology.

3. Contrast the relative strengths and weaknesses of an academic orientation and a life orientation.

4. Describe the three primary goals of theology.

5. In what ways are the three primary goals of theology interdependent?

6. How should a person prioritize the three goals of theology?

Application Questions

1. How would you explain the term “theology” to someone who was unfamiliar with the concept?
2. Which approach to theology do you think is more valuable? Why?
3. Explain how you might successfully approach theology with a life orientation.
4. What does it mean to say that “our beliefs and our actions and our feelings form webs of multiple reciprocities”? Why is this concept important to understand as you begin the study of theology?
5. Dr. Pratt stated that, “because the deck of life is always shifting, balance can be nothing more than momentary synchronicity.” What does this mean, and what implications does it have for the study of theology?
6. How can we avoid the trap of intellectualism as we study theology?
7. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study? Why?