

Building Your Theology

Study Guide

LESSON
ONE

WHAT IS THEOLOGY?



THIRD MILLENNIUM
MINISTRIES

Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.

STUDY GUIDE

CONTENTS

Outline.....	3
Notes.....	4
Review Questions	18
Application Questions.....	22

How to use this lesson and study guide

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Preparation** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule breaks** — Review the outline and the time codes to determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions in the outline.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Notes** — Use the Notes section to follow the lesson and to take additional notes. Many of the main ideas are already summarized in the notes, 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.
 - **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**
 - **Review Questions** — Questions on the basic content of the lesson. Answer review questions in the space provided. Review questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Application Questions** — 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.

Outline

- I. Introduction (0:24)
- II. Definitions (1:34)
 - A. Typical Definitions (1:55)
 - 1. Thomas Aquinas (3:06)
 - 2. Charles Hodge (6:01)
 - 3. William Ames (8:48)
 - 4. John Frame (10:25)
 - B. Tendencies (11:11)
 - 1. Academic Orientation (11:33)
 - 2. Life Orientation (13:08)
 - C. Evaluations (15:11)
 - 1. Academic Orientation (15:33)
 - 2. Life Orientation (18:57)
- III. Goals (22:52)
 - A. Primary Goals (23:27)
 - 1. Orthodoxy (24:56)
 - 2. Orthopraxis (28:23)
 - 3. Orthopathos (31:59)
 - B. Interdependence (35:31)
 - 1. Orthodoxy (36:06)
 - 2. Orthopraxis (37:45)
 - 3. Orthopathos (39:59)
 - C. Priorities (41:50)
- IV. Topics (46:25)
 - A. Options (47:08)
 - B. Selections (49:48)
- V. Conclusion (54:20)

Notes

I. Introduction

II. Definitions

A. Typical Definitions

1. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274)

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 (1797-1879)**

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 (1576-1633)**

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 (contemporary)

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

1. Academic Orientation

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

Ames and Frame represent a minority view.

Theology is deeply and essentially concerned with living for Christ.

C. Evaluations

1. Academic Orientation

Strength: capitalizes on our rational abilities.

Danger: theologians' lives receive very little attention.

2. Life Orientation

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

A. Primary Goals

1. Orthodoxy

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

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

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

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

1. Orthodoxy

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

2. Orthopraxis

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

Practices also influence the emotional dimensions of theology.

3. Orthopathos

Our feelings influence what we believe and do.

C. Priorities

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

A. Options

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

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

3. Contrast the relative strengths and weaknesses 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?