



**DAILY
DOCTRINE**

A One-Year Guide to Systematic Theology



KEVIN DEYOUNG

“You hold in your hands a smorgasbord of theological delights. *Daily Doctrine* is at once a daily devotional, a mini systematic theology, and a reference tool. It is deep but delightful, profound but practical, comprehensive but concise, and accurate but accessible. May the Lord use this manual to raise up more systematic theologians in our pews!”

Joel R. Beeke, Chancellor and Professor of Homiletics and Systematic Theology, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary; Pastor, Heritage Reformed Congregation, Grand Rapids, Michigan

“A few years after I broke my neck, I wanted to know everything about God. That prompted someone to give me a thick theology textbook, which I read but had a hard time grasping. Oh, if only this fine book had been around back then! Kevin DeYoung has packaged the fundamentals of our faith in a work that is thorough, uncomplicated, and a lot lighter than your average theology book. In all my suffering, the bedrock of great doctrine has always been a comfort, and it is why I heartily recommend this one-of-a-kind work!”

Joni Eareckson Tada, Founder and CEO, Joni and Friends International Disability Center

“In a fragmented age, connecting the dots—between the biblical text and Christian doctrine, between different Christian doctrines, and between Christian doctrines and daily life—is imperative for all Christians, and yet many simply do not have time to read and digest the great classic tomes of systematic theology. This is where this book is so helpful. Using the time-honored genre of a daily devotional, Kevin DeYoung has produced a book that looks at the great doctrines that the Bible teaches. And in doing so, he enables us to grasp more fully the beauty and significance of Christian doctrine both for Bible reading and for how we live our lives.”

Carl R. Trueman, Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Grove City College; author, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*

“What a great idea! Who wouldn’t want to work through the major issues in systematic theology under the faithful teaching of Kevin DeYoung and structured as *Daily Doctrine*? This book will be so helpful to Christians, day by day, doctrine by doctrine, truth after truth. I am so thankful for DeYoung as a great gift to Christ’s church. You will also be thankful for this book as a conduit for truth, doctrine, and spiritual health.”

R. Albert Mohler Jr., President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Those who care about their spiritual health would do well to read Kevin DeYoung’s daily diet of doctrine. Theology at its best ministers understanding of God and the gospel, helping people of faith grow in their faith toward maturity in Christ. This is a one-of-a-kind systematic textbook, the daily doses of which are small yet potent vitamins for the heart and mind.”

Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Research Professor of Systematic Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“God’s command to ‘remain steadfast’ and ‘grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior’ comes with a warning: those who backslide fall prey to false teachers and heresies. But how does the layperson obey this command to grow in knowledge without seminary training? This book is the answer. Kevin DeYoung masterfully translates complex and necessary systematic theology into ‘daily doctrine.’ There is no more important time for lay Christians to be firmly rooted in systematic theology, and this accessible and trustworthy book will surely become a classic. I read *Daily Doctrine* devotionally and left each reading in awe of the majesty of God and the richness of the Reformed church’s teachings throughout the ages.”

Rosaria Butterfield, former Professor of English and Women’s Studies, Syracuse University; author, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* and *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age*

“I cannot remember the last time I kept turning the pages of a book with so much curiosity, eager to find out what difficult question the next chapter would answer. The beauty of this book is Kevin DeYoung’s ability to navigate the sophisticated scholastic distinctions that hold our theology together while making them sing with fervency for life in the church. This book is no mere manual but an adventure that charts that ancient course of classical Reformed theology. May this book kill doctrinal indifference wherever it lives and summon a new generation to revel in the deep things of God once more.”

Matthew Barrett, Professor of Christian Theology, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Simply Trinity* and *None Greater*

“*Daily Doctrine* is an extraordinary gift to anyone who yearns to grow significantly in the knowledge of God but will never enjoy the benefit of a seminary education. It brings the brilliance of a Kevin DeYoung systematic theology class to your favorite chair with a kindly blend of readability and rigor. An excellent companion with the daily reading of Scripture, this remarkably organized work will also be among the handiest of theology reference books long after it has been devoured cover to cover.”

Paul McNulty, President, Grove City College; former US Deputy Attorney General

“This book is about systematic, doctrinal theology. If those three words make your eyes glaze over, fear not, my friend. This isn’t Big Scary Theology for brainy people droning on and on with long-winded, obscure sentences. Quite the opposite, this is theology as it was meant to be. Not suffocating but lifegiving, not esoteric but doxological—ideal for believers wanting to deepen their knowledge of God in brisk installments. Here you’ll find daily encouragement to know and love God forever and ever. Highly recommended!”

Hans Madueme, Professor of Theological Studies, Covenant College

“What a great way of reflecting daily on the triune God! This daily devotional inspires as it educates.”

Michael Horton, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary California

“Kevin DeYoung has been especially gifted by the Lord to translate complex ideas into simple truths. He has the mind of a scholar and the heart of a pastor, employing his academic gifts to serve the people of God with what Calvin called ‘lucid brevity.’ In this volume, DeYoung applies those gifts to the task of systematic theology, and the result is a clear, simple, and accessible articulation of Christian doctrine—helpful for busy pastors, overwhelmed seminary students, and interested laypeople alike. Even those of differing theological traditions will be well served by this faithful and spiritually enriching work.”

Michael Riccardi, Assistant Professor of Theology, The Master’s Seminary; author, *To Save Sinners*

“Your family and church will be strengthened and encouraged by reading and sharing these theologically enriching, spiritually uplifting, daily doses of Kevin DeYoung’s accessible summaries of the great truths of Scripture.”

Peter A. Lillback, President, Westminster Theological Seminary

Other Crossway Books by Kevin DeYoung

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The Biggest Story ABC (2017)

Crazy Busy: A (Mercifully) Short Book about a (Really) Big Problem (2013)

Don't Call It a Comeback: The Old Faith for a New Day (2011)

Grace Defined and Defended: What a 400-Year-Old Confession Teaches Us about Sin, Salvation, and the Sovereignty of God (2019)

The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness (2012)

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DAILY DOCTRINE

A One-Year Guide to Systematic Theology

Kevin DeYoung

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To
David F. Wells

Who taught me systematic theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

and who taught many of us—through his books and his example—
about the importance of theology in the church and in our world

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Introduction

THIS IS GOING TO SOUND over the top but writing this book has been a dream come true.

I hesitate to share this personal anecdote, lest it sound like a humblebrag or just hopelessly nerdy, but here goes: ever since I was a freshman in college, I have wanted to write a systematic theology textbook. Granted, this is not a textbook per se, and it is certainly not as long or as learned or as sophisticated as the classic systematic works out there. It is also not as in-depth and intellectually conversant as the many fine doctrinal magnum opuses still being written. But for me, this is just the book I wanted to write (at least for now).

I believe my niche as a writer is translation—not from one language to another, but from one register to another. That is to say, I think I can best serve the church by reading the old, dead guys (and some living people too), digesting their technical arguments and terminology, taking the best of their insights, and then writing with clarity and concision for busy pastors, students, leaders, and laypeople.

In the spirit of John the Baptist, I confess and do not deny, but freely confess, that this is not a groundbreaking work of systematic theology. I do not press for any new doctrinal innovation or synthesis. I do not interact with the latest monographs and scholarly articles. I do not attempt to be comprehensive. And I make no attempt to survey all the theological options from the different traditions (e.g., Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Anabaptist, Wesleyan, Pentecostal, liberal).

I am a Presbyterian minister, and while I am confident this book can be helpful for all Christians, you will readily see that my understanding of theology has been shaped by the confessions and catechisms of the Reformed tradition and by Reformed theologians like John Calvin (1509–1564), Francis Turretin (1623–1687), Charles Hodge (1797–1878), James Bannerman (1807–1868), William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894), Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), and Louis Berkhof (1873–1957).

Most importantly, of course, I endeavor on every page to be biblical. A big part of systematic theology is learning the proper terms and debates and distinctions. I make no apology for teaching these things. But the overarching goal in all this

learning is to understand what the Bible teaches, defend what the Bible teaches, and enjoy the God whom the Bible reveals.

Choose Your Own Adventure

There is an old comedy skit that came out before I was born about Shimmer, the amazing product that is both a floor wax *and* a dessert topping. I've thought of that comedy skit more than once while working on this project. *Daily Doctrine* is not just one thing; it's at least three things.

1. You can read *Daily Doctrine* as a year-long devotional. Each day is around five hundred words and can be read first thing in the morning, at the dinner table, or just before bed as part of a daily routine. Instead of organizing the entries by months, I thought it would be more useful (and more doable) to include five entries for each week. Most of us, when attempting a yearlong discipline, need small breaks and catch-up days. Five entries per week instead of seven allows for that wiggle room. The days themselves will be numbered consecutively, totaling 260 (52 x 5), so you can read the daily devotionals taking breaks when you need them, or (as they are organized) you can read five entries per week each week of the year.

2. You can use *Daily Doctrine* as a reference tool. All the topics are listed in the contents page, so you can easily look up “original sin,” “impeccability,” or “*perichoresis*” and get a five-hundred-word synopsis of the term or idea.

3. You can read *Daily Doctrine* straight through as a mini systematic theology. The topics are organized around the traditional systematic categories (often called *loci*). I've grouped the chapters under eight *loci*: prolegomena, theology proper, anthropology, covenant theology, Christology (in two parts), soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. If it suits you better, feel free to ignore the weekly rhythms and move through the material as if it were a Tiny Turretin or a Baby Berkhof.

The pessimist could argue that this book is too many things—too deep to be a devotional, too small to be a reference work, and too streamlined to be a systematic theology. “Just pick a lane, DeYoung!” I hear you. But the optimist in me thinks the book can be stronger by being more than one thing at the same time. It's a floor wax and a dessert topping!

Bits and Bobs

Two quick notes about sources and citations and then some gratitude.

Sources. Because economy of words is critical in a book like this, I will refer to theologians without giving any biographical comment. If the names are unfamiliar to you, that's fine. You can consult the appendix where I give a few sentences about the people and resources I cite most often.

Citations. I reference Bible verses (e.g., John 3:16) and confessional documents (e.g., WCF 1.1) in parentheses in the text. The footnotes are organized by day for handy reference. Shortened citations are used throughout. You'll

find full bibliographic information in the Works Cited section beginning on page 379.

It's been great working with my friend Justin Taylor and with all the talented men and women at Crossway. Thank you for taking a risk on a daily devotional loaded with Latin words and scholastic disputations.

This book would not be possible without the support, encouragement, and time provided by Christ Covenant Church. It's a blessing to serve such a theologically minded congregation.

Along with my full-time job as senior pastor, I also have the privilege of teaching systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte. Not surprisingly, much of this content began as course lectures at RTS. I'm grateful to my students and my colleagues for giving me the opportunity to teach and for refining my articulation of Reformed theology. In particular, I owe an immense debt to several of my colleagues in the systematic theology department (across the RTS system) who read portions of the book and provided extremely valuable feedback. Their comments improved the book in dozens of ways.

I am thankful for Barry Peterson's and Andrew Wolgemuth's support as well.

Most of all, I'm grateful for the love and grace from my children—Ian, Jacob, Elsie, Paul, Mary, Benjamin, Tabitha, Andrew, and Susannah—and, especially from my wife, Trisha.

The only one to whom I owe more than my wife is God himself. What a joy it has been to think deeply about Father, Son, and Holy Spirit during the years it took to complete this project. It's been a long road, but a good one.



PROLEGOMENA

*Preliminary Considerations
and Doctrine of Scripture*



DAY 1

Theology

The aim of Christian theology is to know, enjoy, and walk in the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The word *theology* comes from two Greek words: *theos* meaning “God” and *logos* meaning “word,” “speech,” or “statement.” Most simply then, theology is the study of God.

But surely we need to say more than that about theology. The problem with a basic etymological definition is that it makes God sound like another object we analyze and dissect, when theology for the Christian must always aim at more than bare facts and observations. That’s why William Perkins defined *theology* as “the science of living blessedly forever,”¹ and Petrus van Mastricht called *theology* “the doctrine of living unto God through Christ.”²

The goal of theology must never be reduced to merely getting right ideas into our head. The reason we care about theology, the reason we write about theology, the reason you are reading a book about theology is so we can *know* God more deeply, *enjoy* him more fully, and *walk* with him more obediently. We do the hard work of careful, precise, intellectually demanding theology that we might see and savor the glory of God in the face of Christ.

How then should we undertake the task of theological study? In four ways.

Biblically. We must test every theological conviction and conclusion against the Bible. While church tradition is important and human experience cannot be ignored, theology is ultimately not an exercise in explaining what the church has taught or what we feel in our consciousness. We must always search the Scriptures to see if these things are so (Acts 17:11).

Rationally. Reason is not the foundation of faith, but it is the instrument of faith. For two years, Paul reasoned daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9). He reasoned with Felix and Drusilla (Acts 24:24). And he pleaded with Festus, “I am speaking true and rational words” (Acts 26:25). The truth of the Bible may be beyond reason’s comprehension, but it is never nonsensical and irrational.

Humbly. We approach the task of theology utterly dependent upon God and eager to learn from those who have gone before us. Mindful of our finitude and

our fallenness, our posture is not proud and puffed up, but prayerful and grateful. There is no room for big heads when learning about such a big God.

Doxologically. We learn that we might love. We grow as we behold glory. We dig deeper in doctrine that we might soar higher in worship. God is not just the object of our study. He is the one who reveals all there is to know about himself and the one in himself who is worthy of all our devotion.

1 Perkins, *A Golden Chain*, 14.

2 Van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, 98.



DAY 2

Systematic Theology

In doing systematic theology, we are trying to answer the question, “What does the whole Bible say about this?” The “this” could be angels, sin, faith, works, law, grace, the death of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, or a hundred other things.

Many prefer the title *Dogmatics* to *Systematic Theology*. While *dogmatics* may sound pretentious and stuffy, it is in some ways a richer term. *Dogma* refers to an accepted doctrine of the church—the mature fruit of the church’s reflection on Scripture—while *systematic* speaks to the way in which doctrine is studied. Both terms have their place, and Christians often use the terms interchangeably.

Systematic theology is a specific type of theology, having its own method and structure. If historical theology looks at how doctrine has developed over the centuries, and natural theology examines what can be known about God by reason and observation, and biblical theology traces big themes across the redemptive storyline of Scripture, systematic theology organizes doctrine logically around topics and questions. These topics are sometimes called *loci* (Latin for “places,” the plural of *locus*). Systematic theology as we know it is only a few hundred years old, but many trace the discipline back to Origen’s *Peri Archon* (c. 220). Philip Melancthon’s *Loci Communes* (1521)—which organized biblical teaching around common topics—is often considered the beginning of the Protestant tradition of systematic theology.

There are many ways to organize systematic theology. Some use a key theme, be it love, or covenant, or Christ, or lordship, or the Trinity. None of these approaches is wrong. Traditionally, however, systematic theology has been comprised of seven main topics: *prolegomena* (literally “first words,” where ground rules and the doctrine of Scripture are usually covered); *theology proper* (covering the doctrine

of God, the Trinity, the decrees, creation, and providence); *anthropology* (the doctrine of man's creation and fall); *Christology* (the person and work of Christ); *soteriology* (how we are saved and how saved people live by the Spirit); *ecclesiology* (the doctrine of the church); and *eschatology* (the doctrine of last things, both personally and cosmically). Others make pneumatology (the doctrine of the Holy Spirit) a separate category. I've included *covenant* as a separate category for ease of reference, but it often forms the last part of anthropology.

Systematic theology is not the only way Christians can learn about God's word, but it is one invaluable way. It builds on the insights of church history and seeks to defend the historic doctrines of the church. Systematic theology helps us put together the whole counsel of God. Even more importantly, it helps us see more of God. Our goal must never be the bare minimum amount of knowledge necessary to get us into heaven. We want to move from platitudes to particulars, from generalities to technical terms and concepts, from seeing the hills of God's glory to seeing the mountains of God's glory. That's why we study, why we learn, and why we need systematic theology.



DAY 3

Divisions of Theology

Most of us think of theology as basically one thing: the study of God. But Reformed theologians have long understood theology to be comprised of various divisions and distinctions. The most influential approach comes to us from Franciscus Junius (1545–1602). His *Treatise on True Theology* (1594) established many of the categories, and set in place the basic outline, that later systematians would use in defining and delineating the nature of theology. Junius's scheme is too complicated to examine in exhaustive detail, but the main divisions he employs are relatively straightforward and (once we get used to the vocabulary) extremely useful.

According to Junius, theology can be categorized as *true* or *false*. Technically, false theology is not really theology at all since it is based on human opinion alone. But insofar as we call it “theology,” false theology can either be *common*, which is not disciplined by reason, or *philosophical*, which is aided by reason. Philosophical theology flourished among the Greeks and Romans in the time before Christ.

Not surprisingly, Junius spends most of his time discussing true theology. Using a distinction that would be foundational for the entire Reformed tradition, Junius taught that true theology is either *archetypal* or *ectypal*. Archetypal refers to God's

knowledge of himself. This is the theology only available to God. Ectypal theology, on the other hand, is that knowledge fashioned by God from the archetype of himself and then communicated by grace to his creatures. This is a key point: only God makes true theology possible.

Ectypal theology can be communicated in three ways: by *union*, by *vision*, or by *revelation*. The first is the theology of Christ as the God-man. The second is the theology of spiritual beings and glorified saints in heaven. The third is the theology of human beings on earth. This last category is what we might call “our theology.” It is the theology of pilgrims.

Continuing with his careful distinctions, Junius explains that God communicates this revealed theology in two ways: by *nature* and by *grace*. God is the author of both natural theology and supernatural theology. Natural theology is a type of true theology and a species of divine revelation. The knowledge from natural theology can be either innate (known internally by the book of conscience) or acquired (observed externally in the book of creatures). We can know true things about the Creator and his creation from natural theology.

But natural theology, especially on this side of the fall, is imperfect, uncertain, and unable to save. We need supernatural theology and the saving grace that comes only through the perfect revelation found in God’s word.

Theology is not just one thing. There is true theology and false; the theology that only God knows and the theology he gives to us; the theology he reveals in Christ, in heaven, and on earth; the imperfect theology made known in us and around us and the infallible theology made known by the miracle of our speaking God. It is this last type of theology that we (mainly) study in systematic theology, and it is the only kind of theology that can save wayward sinners.



DAY 4

Religion

The etymology of the word *religion* is unclear. Over the years, many have agreed with Cicero (106–43 BC), who derived *religio* from *relegere*, a Latin word meaning “to gather together” or “to reread.” On this account, religion is the diligent study of the things pertaining to God. Others have preferred the explanation given by the church father Lactantius (c. 250–325), which Augustine (354–430) adopted, that *religio* comes from *religare*, meaning “to fasten” or “to bind.” With this etymology, religion is the binding or reattachment of man to God.

In contemporary parlance religion is often construed in entirely derogatory terms. Even by Christians, religion is supposed to be the opposite of a relationship with God. Or religion is about trying to earn God's favor. Or religion is about a stultifying system of rituals, dogmas, and structures. The problem with this disparaging understanding of religion is threefold.

1. This is a relatively new way for Christians to speak. John Calvin wrote the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Jonathan Edwards wrote on *Religious Affections*. Pastors and theologians, especially in the age of awakenings, often wrote about "religion" or "true religion" or "real religion." Our forefathers were well aware of religious hypocrisy and false religious systems, but they did not equate religion with works righteousness.

2. The word *religion* occurs five times in the Bible (ESV) and is, by itself, a neutral word, translating either *deisidaimonia* (reverence for the gods) or *threskeia* (religious worship). Religion can refer to Judaism (Acts 26:5) or the Jewish-Christian faith (Acts 25:19). Religion can be bad when it is self-made (Col. 2:23) or fails to tame the tongue (James 1:26). But religion can also be good when it cares for widows and orphans and practices moral purity (James 1:27). There is no biblical ground for making the practice of religion a uniformly negative phenomenon.

3. In castigating religion, we may be unloading more baggage than we realize. People tend to equate commands, doctrines, structures, and rituals with religion. That's why people want to be "spiritual but not religious." And yet Christianity is a religion that believes in commands, doctrines, structures, and rituals. As a Jew, so did Jesus. Jesus did not hate religion. On the contrary, Jesus went to services at the synagogue and operated within the Jewish system of ritual purity (Mark 1:21, 40–45). He founded the church (Matt. 16:18) and established church discipline (Matt. 18:15–20). He instituted a ritual meal and called for its perpetual observance (Matt. 26:26–28). He told his disciples to baptize people and teach them to obey everything he commanded (Matt. 28:19–20). He insisted that people believe in him and believe certain things about him (John 3:16–18; 8:24).

It's true: for some people *religion* means ritual instead of relationship and earning favor instead of receiving grace. But that's not what the word has to mean or has normally meant. In today's usage, being against "religion" usually means someone is against much that is important to Christian discipleship. We can easily give people the wrong impression about Jesus and affirm unbiblical instincts about true spirituality when we quickly dismiss religion as antithetical to the gospel and at odds with God-honoring piety.



DAY 5

Science

In some circles, Charles Hodge is most famous for this (supposedly) cringeworthy statement:

The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is his storehouse of facts; and his method of ascertaining what the Bible teaches, is the same as that which the natural philosopher adopts to ascertain what nature teaches.¹

Critics caricature Hodge as a naïve rationalist who approached his Bible as if he were on a treasure hunt for wooden and timeless principles. Those Christians who stand in the tradition of Hodge, it is said, treat the Bible like a dead insect to be examined or a cold collection of lifeless propositions.

But is that what Hodge really believed? For Hodge, theology was like a scientific discipline because in theological reflection the Christian must arrange the facts of Scripture in their proper order and relation.² Hodge never thought of systematic theology as the recitation of barren propositions. But he likened theology to science because he believed the work of the systematician was to show how all the parts of the Bible relate to each other with logical consistency and harmony.

The question of whether theology is a science did not start with Hodge. Medieval theologians, employing traditional categories from Aristotle, talked about five types of intellectual dispositions: *intelligentia* (understanding), *scientia* (science), *sapientia* (wisdom), *prudentia* (discretion), and *ars* (technique).³ Protestant scholastics agreed that theology was not *intelligentia*, which dealt with principles but not conclusions; was not *prudentia*, which was unconcerned with things to be believed; and was not *ars*, which was directed toward practical results but not to virtuous action. Some Reformed theologians like Francis Turretin and John Owen rejected the label “science,” arguing that *scientia*—meaning a type of knowledge more than a distinct academic discipline—involved only self-evident principles to the exclusion of revealed principles. Other Reformed theologians, like William Perkins, had no problem calling theology a science.

By the time we get to the end of the nineteenth century, on the other side of Darwin, Reformed theologians were more uniform in their acceptance of theology as a science, and Bavinck is typical in asserting that dogmatics can rightly claim to be a science because it deals with true and trustworthy knowledge of God.⁴ Likewise, Shedd maintains, “Theology, then, as a science of God aims to obtain

a knowledge of him free from contradictions and is as profound as is possible, considering the nature of the subject and the limitations of the human mind.”⁵ Theology is a science insofar as it deals with true knowledge, entails inductive analysis, and seeks to gather biblical facts and conclusions into a unified whole.

- 1 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:10.
- 2 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:19.
- 3 Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:324–40.
- 4 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:42–43.
- 5 Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 56.

WEEK 2



DAY 6

Speculative or Practical?

The question is an old one but surprisingly relevant: Is theology chiefly speculative or practical?

From our vantage point, the answer seems obvious. Surely theology must be practical. It must result in faith and obedience. It must bear fruit. The great danger, we are apt to think, is that too much of our theological discourse has become hopelessly theoretical and needlessly esoteric, good for nothing but puffing up small-hearted people with big brains.

And yet the question is not as simple as it sounds. Thomas Aquinas argued that sacred doctrine is more of a speculative science because practical science is concerned with human operations, while Christian theology is chiefly concerned with God. The goal of theology, he maintained, is “the perfect knowledge of God, in which consists eternal bliss.”¹ I appreciate Aquinas’s emphasis on the knowledge of God for its own sake, but we can still say with Francis Turretin that true theology is “mixed,” partly theoretical and partly practical.²

We can understand the practical side of the equation. The mysteries of the faith “are impulsive to operation.” That is, they are meant to incite us to love and worship. “A practical system is that which does not consist in the knowledge of

a thing alone, but in its very nature and by itself goes forth into practice and has operation for its object.” Right doctrine counts for nothing if it does not sink into our hearts and find expression in our lives. We want a knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness (Titus 1:1).

But theology is also theoretical. This is not a pejorative term for Turretin. Rather, “a theoretical system is that which is occupied in contemplation alone and has no other object than knowledge.” Here Turretin is affirming that we have something to learn from the Thomist emphasis on the beatific vision (i.e., beholding God face-to-face). Knowing the truth and reveling in the truth are worthwhile in themselves (Jer. 31:34; John 17:13). A sermon without any application can still be a life-changing sermon if it causes us to see the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Turretin feared that heretical groups in his day were keen to make theology exclusively practical so as to minimize the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation and to pave the way for a universalist religion of good deeds. By contrast, Turretin insisted that knowing what is right and doing what is right must never be separated. The Christian faith unites theory and practice. Theology is theoretical insofar as it points us to God as the chief end in all our knowing and delighting, but we also insist that this *beholding* should result in us *becoming* more like Christ.

1 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.1.4.

2 Turretin, *Elenctic Theology*, 1:20–23. These pages include all the Turretin quotations in this week.



DAY 7

Ad Fontes

Ad fontes is a Latin phrase meaning “to the sources,” or literally “to the fountains.” It comes from the Vulgate version of Psalm 42:1. The Vulgate was the Latin Bible used almost exclusively in the church for a thousand years, until men like William Tyndale and Martin Luther began to translate the Bible in the common language of the people. During the Reformation this little phrase, *ad fontes*, became a rallying cry for those who wanted Christian learning to go back to the sources, back to the original fountains, which meant back to the Greeks and the ancient writers and ultimately back to the Scriptures themselves.

This impulse came from the humanist movement that grew out of the Renaissance in Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This form of humanism—as opposed to today’s secular humanism—was a reaction against the scholasticism that

was dominant in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Scholasticism and humanism were diverse and overlapped in some ways. But in broad terms, the two movements differed in their approach to education and in what they saw as the goals of education.

The scholastics approached their subject by comparing the views of past authorities. The task was to sift through the tradition and learn to harmonize divergent viewpoints. The result was often dense intellectual inquiry and speculation. It was a method of education suited for professional lawyers, doctors, and theologians. The humanists, by contrast, wanted to be practical, edifying, and useful. They had little patience for speculation. They read classical authors in the original languages and urged the study of ancient authors, not just commentaries on those authors.

Humanism was not a set of philosophical beliefs, but a set of intellectual interests, specifically about the value of classical antiquity. It gets this name partly because of a renewed emphasis on the human person, but mostly because of its insistence on studying the humanities, which was the general term for the study of history, grammar, rhetoric, poetry, and moral philosophy. In each of these subjects the humanists wanted to revive the legacy of classical antiquity, skip over the scholastic commentaries, and go back to the original fountains (*ad fontes*).

The humanist movement was not without its weaknesses. At its worst, leading humanists were concerned about what was helpful over what was true and could give priority to good living and civic usefulness over doctrinal defense. And yet humanism laid the groundwork for some of the most important advances of the Reformation. Influenced by humanists like Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536) and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (1455–1536), the Reformers emphasized close attention to texts (the older the better), prioritized education for the laity, and sought a practical combination of head and heart. Humanist-inspired Reformers like John Calvin devoted their lives to the text of Scripture and cultivated an educational and ecclesiastical environment where such word-centered devotion would flourish for centuries to come.



DAY 8

Principia

In philosophy, a *principium* is a fundamental or foundational principle. The plural *principia* has often been used to describe truths that are self-evident and from which other truths can be known or derived. The corresponding Greek term

arche, when used philosophically, refers to the same thing—a first principle or a primary source.¹

We can distinguish between two kinds of *principia*. First, there are principles of being (*principia essendi*). These principles form the ground or basis by which something is. Second, there are principles of knowledge (*principia cognoscendi*). These are the principles by which something is known. The first type of *principia* has to do with essence (how things exist), and the second has to do with cognition (how we understand the things that exist). The principles of knowledge can be further divided into the *principium cognoscendi externum* (the external source of knowledge outside ourselves) and the *principium cognoscendi internum* (the way in which knowledge is internally apprehended).

According to the Reformed scholastic tradition, these three categories—*essendi*, *externum*, *internum*—help us understand how to approach every kind of science.

For nontheological sciences, the *principium essendi* is God. He is the ultimate source and fountain of all our knowledge. He is also the reason for the existence of the created world. Everything that is, is because God is. The *principium cognoscendi externum* in the nontheological sciences is God's creation (whether in nature or in man). The *principium cognoscendi internum* is human reason. That is to say, we apprehend the knowledge available to us in God's creation by the intellectual activity of the human mind.

In theology, God is once again the *principium essendi*. All our knowledge of God is rooted in God himself. Only God knows God fully. Everything we know about God is because the one with archetypal knowledge has chosen to make himself known in ectypal fashion.

For the task of theology, special revelation is our *principium cognoscendi externum*. Our authoritative textbook is not the world, our thoughts, or our experiences, but the Bible. Whatever we know by general revelation must be clarified, confirmed, or critiqued by the clearer knowledge we gain through special revelation. Natural theology is a species of true theology, but special revelation is required to interpret it fully and adequately employ it.

Finally, when it comes to theology, faith is the *principium cognoscendi internum*. By faith we accept God's revelation as true, we embrace it as having authority in every area on which it speaks, and we respond in obedience and worship. We receive God's word about himself not by empirical observation, or speculative reason, or by personal experience or religious consciousness. Faith is the organ by which God's special revelation can, and must, be received. We know God because God chooses to be known, and what he has chosen to be known must be believed in order to be truly understood.

1 My discussion of *principia* summarizes many of the definitions and categories found in Berkhof, *Introductory Volume*, 93–186. Berkhof's exploration is a distillation of Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 207–621.



DAY 9

Faith and Reason

Over the years, many people—both friends and foes of Christianity—have talked about faith and reason as if the two were mutually exclusive opposites in perpetual war with one another. And yet the best theologians of the church have always insisted that faith and reason, though operative in Christianity in different ways, are ultimately not in conflict. This is not a modern idea or an Enlightenment conviction. Rather, it has been the witness of the historic Christian tradition that when used properly, reason is a support, and not a threat, to genuine faith.

Here, then, are six propositions about faith and reason. All quotations below come from Francis Turretin, who modeled as well as any Reformed theologian a rational faith that never gave way to rationalism.

1. Human reason is not the rule by which the doctrines of Christianity are to be judged. “The proper rule of things to be believed and disbelieved is not the apprehension of their possibility or impossibility, but the word of God.”¹

2. Reason does not have a principal office in matters of faith, but an instrumental one. Reason does not tell us whether something is to be believed, but it is the instrument we use in understanding and explaining what ought to be believed.

3. Because reason is properly used in an instrumental sense, we are right to draw necessary consequences from the teaching of Scripture. Jesus and the apostles did this all the time (e.g., when Christ proved against the Sadducees the resurrection because God is the God of the living and not the dead). Likewise, the judgment of noncontradiction can be properly brought to bear on matters of Christian faith.

4. Reason does not carry a primary force in religious debate, but it can be used in a secondary or auxiliary sense. Christian truths are received in faith, but not a blind faith. Our beliefs are supported and defended by reason.

5. “Reason is perfected by faith and faith supposes reason, upon which to found the mysteries of faith.”² This is another way of saying that we do not build Christianity upon reason, but we cannot comprehend the faith or explain it without using reason. We must distinguish between an incomprehensible thing (which cannot be grasped) and an impossible thing (which cannot be conceived). “Although every truth cannot be demonstrated by reason . . . yet no lie against the truth can be sheltered under the protection of true reason.”³

6. Philosophical reasoning can be used in theology. Although false dogmas from philosophy can creep in, and philosophy runs the risk of introducing esoteric and unnecessary terms, philosophy (properly conceived) can be a valuable handmaiden to theology in providing categories of thought, in convicting the unbeliever of inconsistency, and in preparing the mind for the greater truths of faith.

¹ Turretin, *Elenctic Theology*, 1:28.

² Turretin, *Elenctic Theology*, 1:30.

³ Turretin, *Elenctic Theology*, 1:44.



DAY 10

Inner Testimony of the Holy Spirit

Why should we accept the authority of the Bible? Do we start with a blank slate and reason our way into accepting the Scriptures? Should we base the Bible's trustworthiness on historical proofs? Do we rely on archaeological evidence and textual consistency? In short, what is the surest and best reason for believing and obeying the word of God?

While historical evidence and rational deduction have their place, the final authority for the word of God must always be God himself. We accept the authority of the Bible because through the Bible God speaks to us. Our confidence in the Scriptures is that in them we hear the very voice of God. As Calvin put it, those “who strive to build up firm faith in Scripture through disputation are doing things backward.” We have a better foundation for our faith than human proofs and arguments. “The testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason,” Calvin observed. “For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaim what had been divinely commanded.”¹ This doctrine of the *testimonium spiritus sancti* is critical if we are to believe the Bible on its own terms and for its own sake.

At the same time, we must be clear what the doctrine is *not* teaching. By insisting upon the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit, we are not suggesting that there are no other reasons for trusting the Bible. We *should* talk about the many historical, archaeological, and textual reasons for confidence in the Scriptures.

The *testimonium spiritus sancti* is the most convincing and most important reason for believing the Bible, but not the only one.

Moreover, we should not confuse this doctrine with new revelation or an argument from experience. The Spirit speaking to our hearts is not motivation for faith but the efficient cause of faith, not a feeling upon which our faith rests but the sight whereby our faith sees. As Berkhof puts it, “We believe Scripture, not because of, but through the testimony of the Holy Spirit.”²

We must be careful to place our faith in Christ, not in our experience of Christ. Likewise, we must understand that the testimony of the Spirit in our hearts is the means *by which* we believe, not the grounds for believing. God must shine in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). The *testimonium spiritus sancti* is the work of the Spirit in the heart of the believer granting us eyes to see the infallible truth of the divine word, ears to hear what God has to say, and lips to taste that the Lord is good.

¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4.

² Berkhof, *Introductory Volume*, 185.

WEEK 3



DAY 11

Fundamental Articles

“In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, liberty. In all things, charity.”

Sounds great, but which are which?

Some Christians have a list of essentials that reads like a three-volume systematic theology. Other Christians can list their core doctrines on the backside of a business card. Some Christians never met a hill worth dying on. Other Christians charge every grassy knoll with bayonets fixed, ready to kill or be killed. Determining the fundamental articles of the faith is not easy.

But that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try to sort out primary, secondary, and tertiary doctrines. As Calvin reminds us, “not all the articles of true doctrine

are of the same sort.” Some allow for differences of opinion, while “some are so necessary to know that they should be certain and unquestioned by all men as the proper principles of religion.”¹ The question of fundamental articles became a major issue following the Reformation as Roman Catholics insisted that true Christians must agree on almost everything, Socinians insisted that Christians only needed a shared morality, and Reformed and Lutheran Christians tried to find a way to work together. The topic was a standard in theological textbooks during the period of Reformed and Lutheran orthodoxy.

While there is no simple and agreed-upon formula for making these determinations, we can make progress by making the right distinctions. Some doctrines are necessary for the existence of faith, others for the perfection of faith. Some errors are about the way we say things; others are about the beliefs themselves. Some truths must be known to be saved, while others must not be denied. Some doctrines are essential for entrance into heaven; others help us on the way to heaven. We are also helped to look at what the church has believed at all times and in all places. The Nicene Creed, for example, while not a sufficient statement of “mere Christianity” (whereas it developed in response to specific controversies), is at least a starting point. A doctrinal floor, not a ceiling.

Of course, when it comes to determining the fundamental articles, the most important place to look is in the Bible. The Pastoral Epistles are particularly helpful because in these three letters Paul deals explicitly with false teaching (1 Tim. 1:3; 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:8) and the need to guard the good deposit of faith (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:13, 14; Titus 1:9, 13).

And what did this good deposit look like? The gospel message that Paul preached and expected all Christian to adhere to looked something like this: God is glorious; we are sinners; and Jesus Christ is our Savior and God. Jesus Christ is the Son of David and God in the flesh; he died and rose again; he ascended into heaven; he is coming again. Salvation is by sovereign grace, according to the converting power of the Holy Spirit, through faith, not according to works. Jesus Christ saves us from sin, saves us for eternal life, and saves us unto holiness. Notice that this summary touches on the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, the atonement, faith and repentance, justification, sanctification, and heaven and hell. The fundamental articles of the faith may say more than this, but they must not say less.

¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.12.



DAY 12

Knowing God

The God of the Bible is, from start to finish, the God who makes himself known. Though not fully comprehensible by his creatures, God has given us the ability to know him truly and savingly.

But how? In what way does God make himself known? Before answering that question positively, let's approach things negatively. Broadly speaking, there are two means by which Christians have wrongly sought to know God.

The first wrong way is rationalism. As an epistemological approach, rationalism "rejects any other source of knowledge than that which is found in nature and in the constitution of the human mind."¹ The problem with rationalism is not that it values reason or that it finds truth about God in nature. Christianity is not antireason; it is not irrational. But rationalism is something different. Rationalism admits no higher source of truth than reason. As a result, rationalism often becomes antisupernatural and finds itself tied to the latest whims of science and tossed to and fro by the latest intellectual fads.

The second wrong way to know God is mysticism. While Christianity is "mystical" in that it deals with heavenly realities and spiritual truths that go beyond human comprehension and explanation, this is not the same as mysticism. As an epistemological approach, mysticism "assumes that God by immediate communication with the soul, reveals through feelings and intuitions, divine truth independently of the outward teaching of his Word."² Mysticism should not be confused with the Spirit's work of illumination. When we pray for illumination, we are not praying for new information or looking to hear from God apart from his appointed means. We are asking for divine light to see and understand the Spirit-inspired Scriptures. Mysticism directs the Christian toward a subjective, inner light and away from the objective truth of the Bible.

Positively, the Bible teaches that the only proper way to know God is by way of objective revelation. Rationalism and mysticism may seem like opposite errors, but at the heart of both mistakes is an attempt to place the locus of authority in the human person instead of outside of ourselves (*extra nos*). This is also the problem with liberalism. As one of the movement's leading scholars puts it, liberal theology "is the idea that Christian theology can be genuinely Christian without being based upon external authority. Since the eighteenth century, liberal Christian thinkers have argued that religion should be modern and progressive and that the meaning of Christianity should be interpreted from the standpoint of modern knowledge and experience."³ By contrast, historic Christianity has maintained

that only God can adequately reveal God (1 Cor. 2:10–16). Modern knowledge and personal experience must be tested by God’s revelation (and not the other way around). We must apprehend God’s revelation by reason, and we need the illumination of the Spirit to lead us into truth, but reason is not independent of revelation, and the Spirit’s illumination is not independent of the Scriptures. We don’t want to be subject to our experiences at the expense of the intellect, and we don’t want to follow the intellect at the expense of faith.

- 1 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1.4.
- 2 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1.7.
- 3 Dorrien, *Imagining Progressive Religion*, xii.



DAY 13

Natural Law and Natural Theology

Natural law refers to the rule of right and wrong implanted by God in the minds of all people (Rom. 2:14–15). Sometimes called the law of nature, the law of nations, the divine law, or the eternal law, the important point is that natural law is God’s law even if this law is ascertained by reason and observation (and conclusions deduced from these principles) rather than from the study of Scripture. The conscience bears witness to the law of nature, and the Ten Commandments are a divinely revealed summary of the law of nature.

Closely related to natural law, but not to be confused with it, is natural theology. Natural theology is the philosophical study of what can be known about God apart from special revelation. The Bible itself teaches that we can naturally know something about God—that he exists, what he is like, and what he requires (Ps. 19:1–4; Acts 14:16–17; 17:26–27; Rom. 1:19–20). All this can be known—imperfectly and insufficiently for salvation—because God reveals such knowledge to his creatures (even the unregenerate) by way of natural revelation.

Natural theology, then, refers to the knowledge of God that can be known by reason and by the light of nature. As Archibald Alexander puts it, natural theology “consists in the knowledge of those truths concerning the being and attributes of God, the principles of human duty, and the expectation of a future state derived from reason alone.”²¹ Typically, theologians have argued that this natural knowledge of God is both *innate* (i.e., implanted in us by God as a seed of divinity or “eternity written on our hearts”) and *acquired* (i.e., deduced by rational observation of the works of creation). Acquired knowledge can be further divided into three parts:

we know something of God and his ways by *investigating creation*, by *studying human nature*, and by *observing the works of providence*.

Although natural theology has been held in suspicion by some Protestants over the past century, most theologians throughout the history of the church have believed in the positive and apologetic purposes of natural theology. From the classical tradition of Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, to early Reformed thinkers like John Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, Franciscus Junius, Wolfgang Musculus, Peter Martyr Vermigli, William Perkins, and Amandus Polanus, to Westminster divines like William Twisse, Samuel Rutherford, Thomas Goodwin, and their contemporary colleague James Ussher, to the line of Old Princeton stretching all the way from Francis Turretin and Benedict Pictet to John Witherspoon, Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, and B. B. Warfield, natural theology has been affirmed by the best minds in the church for two thousand years.² As a divine image bearer, man has the capacity, even after the fall, to know true things about God apart from supernatural revelation. This is why “the sacred writers in contending with the heathen appeal to the evidence which the works of God bear to his perfections.”³ Thus Hodge concludes that it “cannot, therefore, be reasonably doubted that not only the being of God, but also his eternal power and Godhead, are so revealed in his works, as to lay a stable foundation for natural theology.”⁴

1 Alexander, *God, Creation, and Human Rebellion*, 13.

2 See Haines, *Natural Theology*.

3 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:24.

4 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:25.



DAY 14

General Revelation and Special Revelation

The only way we can know a transcendent God is for God to make himself known. In *general revelation*, God makes himself known in the works of creation and providence. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Ps. 19:1). The creation speaks across the entire world, testifying to the power and majesty (and existence) of God (Ps. 19:2–6; Rom. 1:19–20). Strictly speaking, general (or natural) revelation refers

to God's communication to his creatures, while natural theology refers to the human appropriation of that revelation. Natural theology, rightly conceived, is not man's attempt to work his way up from bare reason to a knowledge of God. Natural theology is what man derives from God's initiative to be known through general revelation.

General revelation is a gracious act of divine condescension, but it does not make known the way of grace. "Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary until salvation" (WCF 1.1). In order to be saved, we need *special revelation*—a declaration of God's will to his people, communicated in former days in manifold ways, and now committed unto writing in the Holy Scriptures (WCF 1:1).

The phrase "light of nature" occurs five times in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1.1, 1.6, 10.4, 20.4, 21.1) and three times in the Westminster Larger Catechism (Questions 2, 60, 151). The phrase, used in contrast to the light of the word, is shorthand for that sense of God all humans are born with. According to general revelation, man can know of God's existence, his power, his judgment, and a general sense of his commands. Supernatural theology, however, is necessary for man to know how to be justified before God and how to be reconciled to him. In other words, our knowledge of God is twofold (*duplex cognitio Dei*): we can know God as Creator by natural theology, but we can know him as Redeemer only by special revelation.¹ The heavens may declare the glory of God, but the law of the Lord is perfect, the testimony of the Lord is sure, and the word of the Lord is more to be desired than gold (Ps. 19:7–11).

A Christian understanding of revelation provides a basis for science, and it limits science at the same time. Because the world reveals God and something of his creativity and order, it can be studied and analyzed. There is an objective universe that can be the subject of evaluation and investigation. There are spiritual truths for us to see in the farthest galaxies and in the smallest quarks. But because of our own blindness and ignorance we should not think that science answers all our questions. There are some truths—truths about God's will for us and the means of salvation—that require God to speak more clearly. Science is good and necessary, but it is not final or absolute. To know God and his ways, we need the Bible, the surest and clearest word and the last word concerning every subject on which it means to speak.

1 See Fesko and Richard, "Natural Theology and the Westminster Confession of Faith," 3:223–66.



DAY 15

Inspiration

The doctrine of inspiration is taught in dozens of places throughout the Bible, but two passages are especially important.

The first passage is 2 Timothy 3:16–17: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” The English phrase “breathed out by God” translates a single Greek word: *theopneustos*. The Latin term *afflatus* (a breathing on someone or something) gets at the same idea. When we speak of the doctrine of inspiration, we don’t mean that the Bible is inspiring, in an active sense (though that is also true). We mean the Bible is inspired, in a passive sense. The inspiration of Scripture is a past established fact, not a future hoped-for occurrence. Scripture is absolutely, authoritatively, and completely trustworthy because it is nothing less than divine exhalation.

We don’t believe that only part of the Bible is inspired. *All* Scripture is the breathed-out word of God. Not just the obviously theological parts. Not just the memorable passages. Not just the verses that resonate with us. History, chronology, anthropology—every word in the Bible is there because God wanted it there. We should listen to the Bible and submit ourselves to its teaching as if we were hearing from God himself (which we are). And if someone objects that Paul’s idea of Scripture only included what we call the Old Testament, recall that Paul considered his apostolic preaching to be the very word of God (1 Thess. 2:13) and that Peter considered Paul’s writings to be holy Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15–16).

The second key text is 2 Peter 1:19–21: “And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” There is a lot to say about these verses but notice two things in brief.

1. When Peter says “no prophecy of Scripture,” he has in mind written texts. That’s what the Greek word *graphe* (scripture) means. This is significant because neo-orthodox theologians like Karl Barth argued that the Bible *contains* the word of God or that in the *event* in which God speaks to us through the Bible, we encounter that as the word of God. Some Christians will gladly speak of inspiration, but then they will quickly distance the concept from the written words of

Scripture. But the Bible knows of no such distinction. The inspiration of Scripture is an objective reality outside of us and our experience of God. The Bible does not become the word of God; it *is* the word of God.

2. The goal of inscripturated revelation is not merely information, but worship. We are told to pay attention to the word until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts. This is likely a reference to Christ being exalted in us on the day of his return (Num. 24:17–19). The point of inspiration is never orthodoxy by itself, or even orthopraxy, but ultimately doxology.

WEEK 4



DAY 16

Concursive Operation

Having established the fact of inspiration, we still have to consider the *how* of inspiration. Generally speaking, there are three views concerning the nature of inspiration.

Some hold to a *dynamic view of inspiration*. This was the view of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and is often taught (usually implicitly rather than explicitly) by theological liberals. According to this view, the biblical authors came under divine influence to write down exalted works of religious insight and life-giving spirituality. This theory does not argue for God's direct influence upon the biblical authors, but rather insists on a generic illumination enlightening the consciousness of men. Biblical inspiration differs in degree from the Spirit's work in our lives but does not fundamentally differ in kind. A dynamic view of inspiration does not deny that the Bible is a special book, but it does not require the individual words of Scripture to be divine, let alone infallible or inerrant.

At the other extreme is the *mechanical dictation view of inspiration*. According to this view, the words of Scripture were taken down by the biblical authors as one would write down dictation. While many fine theologians have remarked that the Bible is so trustworthy that it's *as if* the biblical authors simply transcribed what they heard from God, verbal plenary inspiration does not require or insist

upon mechanical dictation. Indeed, those holding to verbal plenary inspiration have almost always argued against such a view. The mechanical dictation theory has more in common with Muslim and Mormon views of revelation than with historic Christian teaching.

In contrast to the two views mentioned above, the Bible teaches that the word of God was spoken and written down by means of *concurrent operation*. According to this view, God did not use the biblical authors in a mechanical way (e.g., moving their pens like typing on a keyboard). He did not whisper in their ears what words to write down. Instead, he “acted upon them in an organic way, in harmony with the laws of their own inner beings.”¹ God used the intellect, skills, and personality of fallible men to speak and write down what was entirely infallible. We can say the Bible is human and divine, so long as we understand that “human” means the Bible uses human language and employed human authors, not that the Bible contains human errors.

Again, the passage from 2 Peter 1 is key. Verse 21 tell us that “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” The verb “carried along” is the Greek word *phero*, translated earlier in the verse as “produced.” It’s the same word translated as “borne” in verse 17 and in verse 18. The words from heaven (on the Mount of Transfiguration) and the words from the prophets (written down in Scripture) came from the same place: they were borne from God. Though spoken and written down through the instrumentality of men, the words of Scripture are at the same time, by virtue of being carried along by the Holy Spirit, nothing less than God’s own words.

¹ Berkhof, *Introductory Volume*, 153.



DAY 17

Perfections of Scripture

Just as God has attributes, so does the Bible. The classic perfections of Scripture can be remembered (in English) using the acronym SCAN: sufficiency, clarity, authority, and necessity.

Sufficiency. Scripture does not tell us everything about everything, but it tells us all we need to know to make us wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). In Christ we have the fullness and the finality of God’s redemption and revelation (Heb. 1:1–4). We must never separate fullness and finality, nor must we separate redemption

and revelation. Both pairs stand or fall together. In these last days, God speaks to us not by many and various ways, but in one way, through his Son, those former ways of revealing God's will having ceased (WCF 1.1). And how does God speak through his Son? By the revelation of the Son's redeeming work—the saving work announced in the Gospels and then interpreted by the Spirit through the apostles in the rest of the New Testament (John 16:12–15). The Son's redemption and the Son's revelation must both be sufficient. As such, there is nothing more to be done and nothing more to be known for our salvation and for our Christian walk than what we see and know about Christ in the Bible. Scripture is enough because the work of Christ is enough.

Clarity. The clarity, or perspicuity, of Scripture does not mean that everything in the Bible is easy to understand (just like sufficiency does not mean the Bible tells us everything about everything). Rather, perspicuity means that even the unlearned, if they are willing to think and study and pray, can understand the Bible in such a way that they can be saved and live a life pleasing to God (WCF 1:7). God's word is not beyond us (Deut. 30:11–14). That's why the Bible frequently compares the word of God to a lamp (Ps. 119:105, 130) or to light (Ps. 19:7, 8). When the book of the law was rediscovered in Josiah's day, the people read it and knew what to do in response (2 Kings 22). Likewise, when Ezra read the law to the returned exiles in Jerusalem they were able to understand the reading (Neh. 8:5–8, 12). Jesus often referenced the Scriptures to the effect that his opponents should have understood the meaning of the text (Matt. 21:13, 42–44; Mark 7:6–7, 10; 10:4–9; John 3:10; 10:34–35).

Authority. Every Christian and every church will affirm that our theology must accord with Scripture. But what is our *ultimate* authority? How do we make our closing arguments? Do we give the final word to reason and experience? To science? To tradition? To our confessions? For Christians, our final authority must be the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture (WCF 1:10). That's what we mean by *sola Scriptura*, not that we only study the Bible but that when it comes to our final authority, we rely on the Bible alone. Like the Bereans, we are eager to let the Scriptures have the last word (Acts 17:11).

Necessity. The only being knowledgeable enough, wise enough, and skillful enough to reveal God is God himself (1 Cor. 2:6–13). As long as the apostles were alive, the spoken word and the written word existed side by side. Tradition and Scripture could be equally authoritative for a time. But with the close of the apostolic age, the writings of the apostles became absolutely necessary. We need God's book if we are to know God and his ways. The church is built not upon impressions and ecstatic revelations but upon the words of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20).



DAY 18

Inerrancy

There are many texts we could use to show that the Bible is without error, but here's the simplest argument: no word of Scripture came from the will of man, but from God (2 Pet. 1:21). And if the Bible is truly God's word, then it must all be true. As Romans 3:4 says, "Let God be true though every one were a liar."

Some prefer the term *infallibility* to *inerrancy*, but the words by themselves hardly mean anything different. *Infallibility* refers to the inability to be wrong. *Inerrancy* means without error. I fear that oftentimes *infallibility* is used to signify: "I don't want to be associated with inerrancy." At any rate, the word we use is not as important as the conviction that the Bible is unfailingly true in all that it affirms. After all, it was Jesus who—in emphasizing one word in an obscure psalm—maintained that the Scriptures cannot be broken (John 10:35). It was Jesus who said he did not come to abolish one jot or tittle of the Law or the Prophets (Matt. 5:17–19). It was Jesus who assumed a straightforward reading of the chronology and the miracles of the Old Testament (Matt. 12:38–42). And it was Jesus who cited the Scripture as coming from the Creator himself (Matt. 19:4–5; cf. 12:36; Rom. 9:17; Gal. 3:8; Heb. 3:7).

The Bible can no more fail, falter, or err than God himself can fail, falter, or err. Calvin claimed that if we follow the Scriptures, we will be "safe from the danger of erring." We ought to embrace "without finding fault, whatever is taught in Sacred Scripture." We "owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God." In Scripture, God "opens his own most hallowed lips," and the apostles were "sure and genuine scribes of the Holy Spirit."¹ We could easily multiply quotations like this from Calvin, and his view of inspiration was far from novel.

Inerrancy means the word of God always stands over us, and we never stand over the word of God. When we reject inerrancy, we put ourselves in judgment over God's word. We claim the right to determine which parts of God's revelation can be trusted and which cannot. When we deny the complete trustworthiness of the Scriptures, then we are forced to accept one of two conclusions: either the Scripture is not all from God, or God is not always dependable. To make either statement is to affirm what is sub-Christian. These conclusions do not express a proper submission to the Father, do not work for our joy in Christ, and do not bring honor to the Spirit who carried along the men to speak the prophetic word and author God's holy book. As J. I. Packer puts

it, “One cannot doubt the Bible without far-reaching loss, both of fullness of truth and of fullness of life. If therefore we have at heart spiritual renewal for society, for churches and for our own lives, we shall make much of the entire trustworthiness—that is, the inerrancy—of Holy Scripture as the inspired and liberating Word of God.”²

- 1 These five quotations come from, respectively, Calvin’s *Commentaries* (on Matt. 22:29); *Institutes*, 1.18.4; 1.6.1 (cf. 1.8.5); *Institutes* 2.12.1 (see also 1.8.5; 3.22.8; 3.23.5; *Commentaries* [on 1 Pet. 1:25]); *Institutes*, 4.8.9; and *Commentaries*, 3:50.
- 2 Packer, *Truth and Power*, 55.



DAY 19

The Question of Canon

The Bible is a single book made up of many books. There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. Together these sixty-six books make up the Christian Scriptures. This collection of authoritative books is called a canon, meaning a fixed rule or standard.

The question of how we got our present canon is complex but not impossible to trace. Let’s start with the Old Testament. We know that Jesus and the apostles recognized the inspiration of the Hebrew Scriptures. We also know that their Hebrew Bible consisted of the thirty-nine books—in a different order, and sometimes called by different names—that make up our Old Testament. For a long time it was thought that the Council of Jamnia (AD 90) fixed the Old Testament canon; now scholars believe the canon was already well established and the Council less decisive than we once thought. The assortment of books called the Apocrypha, which Roman Catholics include in their Bible, was not included in the Hebrew Scriptures, though they were found in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures). The church father Jerome included the Apocrypha in his Latin Vulgate, but he made clear that the books in the Apocrypha belonged to a different class and were not the same as the canonical books. Over time, as copies were made of the Vulgate, Jerome’s original distinctions were overlooked, and the Apocrypha came to be seen as equally authoritative.

Turning to the New Testament, we find that the early church believed in an expanding canon (1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Pet. 3:16). While it may seem strange that Jewish Christians added to their Scriptures, this was in keeping with

their understanding that God had initiated a new covenant with his people (2 Cor. 3). Covenants typically included written texts to testify to the terms of the new arrangement. We can trace the development of this new canonical awareness from Papias at the beginning of the second century, to the Muratorian Fragment and Origen's writings in the third century, to the list provided by Eusebius in the first part of the fourth century. Although several books were disputed during this period, we should not exaggerate the level of disagreement. None of the twenty-seven books in our New Testament were ever rejected, and no books besides these twenty-seven were ever clearly accepted. Our present canon was accepted in the East with the publication of Athanasius's *Festal Letter* (367) and in the West at the Synod of Rome (382). In 397 the Synod of Carthage formally recognized the biblical canon for the entire church.

The idea of a fixed list of books is not a foreign imposition on the Bible. The New Testament canon was always tied to apostolic authority. Apostolicity explains why the canon had to grow (the apostles spoke with divine authority) *and* why the canon would eventually be closed (once the apostles died, that level of divine authority also passed way). When we see how deliberately Revelation 22:18–19 (do not add or subtract from this book) echoes Deuteronomy 4:2 and how Revelation concludes like a bookend with rich imagery pulled from Genesis, it's hard not to conclude that John understood his Apocalypse as the closing of canonical revelation. God's inspired word was now tied to this authoritative collection of inspired texts.



DAY 20

Which Books Belong in the Bible?

Once we establish the biblical justification for a canon, a further and more difficult question remains: How do we know which books *belong* in the canon? We need to explore not just who wrote what canonical list when, but how the books in our Bible were determined to be canonical.

One response is to suggest that the canon was *historically determined*. To be sure, the formal recognition of the canon was a historical process, but this is not the same as saying the canon was determined by historical forces. Evidence was important, and texts were scrutinized for apostolicity, catholicity, and orthodoxy, but it wasn't as if the church wrote up a job description for canonical

books and then interviewed potential candidates. No church leader or church council determined the criteria for canonicity. The process was much more organic. The church never saw itself as picking new Bible books from a list of competitors.

A second response argues that the canon was *community determined*. Roman Catholics often criticize Protestants for having inspired books without having an inspired table of contents. In Catholic theology, the creation of the canon demonstrates the need for an infallible magisterium. The reason we can trust the canon, they insist, is that the church was given supernatural and unerring authority to determine which books belong in the canon. The problem with this approach (besides the circularity of arguing for the authority of the church to determine the rule of Scripture when we need the Scriptures to teach us about the authority of the church) is that it runs counter to the examples in redemptive history. The word summoned Abraham, the word constituted Israel as a nation, the word called the disciples. The word of God always forms the people of God, not the other way around.

The third and best approach maintains that the church did not choose the books of the Bible as much as the canonical books were *self-authenticating*.¹ There is no reason to think that Israel had an infallible revelation from God to help them select their Scriptures. And yet Jesus accepted them as divine and authoritative. Why? Because the writings themselves proved to be inspired. The church did not give us the canon any more than Isaac Newton gave us gravity. There's a reason Eusebius referred to the canonical books as "recognized," not as "chosen" or "selected." Within a generation of John's death as the last apostle, the four Gospels and thirteen Pauline epistles were already widely accepted as canonical revelation. The church did not pick canonical winners and losers. Just as a child making her way through a mass of people does not choose her parents from the crowd but finds them and recognizes them, so the church did not create the canon. The church accepted the authority that the canonical books already possessed.

¹ Kruger, *Canon Revisited*.