



THE WELL INSTITUTE

**INTRODUCTION TO
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE**

*“The secret things belong to the Lord our God,
but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons
forever, so that we may follow all the words of this
Law.” Deuteronomy 29:29*

Introduction:

Can you remember a time when you got a favorite toy or new gadget and it came with a huge set of directions or an instructional manual how to assemble it? The more complicated the gadget the bigger the set of instructions. As you read through it, it may have been really daunting – “where to start?” “will it look right when I’m done?” “can I even do this or do I need help to figure it out?” Studying the deeper things of God in Scripture can seem to be a daunting task as well. In school many people spent lots of time studying and discovering new subjects such as mathematics, the sciences, languages, etc., but when they graduated they were fine never to pick up another book for deeper study again -thinking their learning and knowledge of such subjects irrelevant to their life. Most of us have forgot how to really study and engage both our mind and our heart toward a single subject or task. We need to “dust off” our unused portions of our brains and re-engage our hearts toward more challenging tasks and learning new things. This is part of our personal growth toward spiritual maturity, becoming a “life learner” since none of us ever truly “arrive” spiritually until we die and go to heaven. All of us have lots to learn about God/Truth.

When it comes to studying the Bible and the deeper things of God, many of us do not feel prepared for the task ahead. Some theology can be hard, even the Apostle Peter thought so (2 Peter 3:16). The Bible being a large and complex collection of books and letters, seems like a really large “instruction manual” translated from ancient languages which at times seems far away from anything practical to your own life in the 21st century. Because most have not felt an ease with deeper philosophy and theology, it has been too easy to just allow theologians and pastors to do the “work” of ministry and more in-depth research into the finer theological realms. However, God is not satisfied with the Church being less engaged into His spiritual and theological reality. God has called the Church to 1) Know Him and His work within this universe and 2) teach others the same – since greater knowledge of the One true God changes lives (starting with yours). Consider the charge to the Church in **Ephesians 4:11-16**.

This semester you have the opportunity to begin your journey into the discipline of biblical and theological study, deeper study into the mind, nature, and heart of God (Deut. 29:29). It is God’s desire that **you know** what you believe about Him (and why), His Son Jesus, His Word -the Bible, how one is saved, and how to share salvation (Good News) with others and disciple another into spiritual maturity. **-Your beliefs critically inform your every act and intention**, and things involving the spiritual realm are no different.

You are about to be introduced to Ten basic doctrines (teachings) concerning the nature of God and His relation to this world. These doctrines are considered “basic” because they claim what **EVERY** true CHURCH of God on this earth has **ALWAYS** believed, **EVERYWHERE** – regardless of time, language, or culture – all these churches being bound to Holy Scripture and being led by the Holy Spirit. In other words, we are studying the foundational core doctrines (beliefs) of the Christian Church (the beliefs which make a Church “Christian”) which have been held by all faithful Christians since the beginning of the Christian Church (33 AD).

[The definition of what makes a Church Christian derives from the oft quoted “Vincentian Canon” in the Ancient Latin phrase: “*Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*” -translated as (Moreover, in the Catholic [Universal] Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold to that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all). It comes from [The Commonitory](#) (ch. 2) by Vincent of Lérins.]

Another theological word to describe this type of study would be “orthodoxy” (Greek: *Right Beliefs*), such as we are studying the orthodoxy of the Christian Church. For now, however, let’s stick to the words **DOCTRINES** (Teachings) and **THEOLOGY** (Study of God).

-**Theology** is the discipline of the overarching (general) study of God and *all* that is related to Him. **Doctrines** are *specific* teachings concerning particular subject matter within the greater realm of theology (such as the study of Christ, or the study of End Times). Let’s begin with a quick introduction to what Theology is and why it matters at all:

Introduction to Theology

Theology is the study of God and the universe that God created, a universe which also reflects God’s divine character (**NATURE**) and **WORKS**. Attempting to better understand what “Theology” is or does or what the point of it is, there are several types of particular frameworks within the discipline of theology such as Biblical Theology, Pastoral Theology, Historical Theology, and Systematic Theology among others—each with their own unique parameters, taxonomies, and aims. For the purpose of this brief study, we will focus on *Systematic Theology* which can be defined most precisely as the **[synthesizing and analyzing of Christian Doctrines found within both natural and special revelation.]** Well, wasn’t that easy? Maybe not. In essence, Systematic Theology consists of organizing biblical, theological, and spiritual ideas, propositions, and scriptural events in order to best understand how they rightly relate both to God and each other.

Definition: A more concise definition of Theology would be “The study of God and His **RELATIONSHIP** with His creation in general and human beings in particular.”

Why does studying “theology” matter? What we believe about God affects every area of our life (whether we admit it or not). Our very perspective on life, our worldview, our biases, our interests, our relational ability, and our temperament are ALL affected by who we believe God to be and “if” or “whether” we feel God has any bearing on our life.

Our concept of God absolutely affects how we answer life’s greatest questions:

- 1) Why am I on earth?
- 2) How did I get here? (Created and purposed OR chance)
- 3) What happens when I die?
- 4) Is there any meaning to (my) life?
- 5) By what rules will I choose to live my life?

(How one answers these basic life/meaning questions determines their “**WORLDVIEW**” & is the foundation of all one’s beliefs concerning their reality of the world and their self.

-**Worldviews**: **Naturalism** (*Agnosticism, Atheism, Existentialism, Marxism, Materialism and Secular Humanism*)
Pantheism/Panentheism (*Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, New Age*)
Theism/Deism - Monotheism (*Islam, Judaism, Christianity*)

One’s belief about God and what God claims for **HIMSELF** is vital to any Christian’s (and non-Christian’s) life and eternity (Matthew 10:33). As a believer in Christ, God has called you to not only trust in Him but to know Him (study & learn about Him), His Nature, and His works within creation – to study Him in order that your life would be eternally **CHANGED** (Life transformation)(Romans 12:1-12); that you would become more like Christ (Romans 8:29); and that you would begin to mold your life around the ideas, truths, and realities that God loves. Consider: (Colossians 1:9-14; Philippians 1:9-11)

***READ 2 Peter 1:2-3:**

To know/learn more about God is both a mental ascent and a spiritual experience. To Know more about God is to know more about yourself, and to understand just how different you are than God. *Probably the greatest step toward our own human maturity is embracing the stark realization that you are **NOT** God; you are absolutely dependent upon God for everything in your life. The sooner you realize this, the sooner you can focus on knowing more of Him and living with eternal peace (John 14:27; 10:10a). Your task in theology is to learn more about God in order to learn more about yourself, yielding a life abandoned to worship God alone and allowing His truth to change every aspect of your life for His glory!*

-What is the opposite of desiring to learn more about God?

-God's Rebuke for those who ignore theology:

Jeremiah 4:22 (NIV) *"My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled at doing evil; they know not how to do good."*

C.S. Lewis states: "Everyone reads, everyone hears things discussed. Consequently, if you do not listen to *Theology*, that will not mean that you have no ideas about God. It will mean that you have a lot of wrong ones--bad, muddled, out-of-date ideas. For a great many of the ideas about God which are trotted out as novelties today, are simply the ones which real theologians tried centuries ago and rejected. To believe in the popular religion of modern England [or America] is retrogression--like believing that the earth is flat."

- Scripture's admonition to embrace theology:

1 Tim. 6:20-21 (NIV) *"Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith."*

Eph. 3:17b-19 *"And I pray that you, rooted and founded in love yourselves, may be able to grasp (with all Christians) how wide and long and deep and high is the love of Christ--and to know for yourselves that love so far above our understanding. So will you be filled through all your being with God himself!"*

C.S. Lewis also states: "The only really adequate instrument for learning about God, is the whole Christian community, waiting for Him together. Christian brotherhood is, so to speak, the technical equipment for this science, the laboratory outfit. That is why all these people who turn up every few years with some patent simplified religion of their own as a substitute for the Christian tradition are really wasting time. Like a man who has no instrument but an old pair of field glasses setting out to put all the real astronomers right. He may be a clever chap, he may be cleverer than some of the real astronomers, but he is not giving himself a chance. And two years later everyone has forgotten all about him, but the real science is still going on."

2 Cor.10:3-5 *"The truth is that, although we lead normal human lives, the battle we are fighting is on the spiritual level. The very weapons we use are not human but powerful in God's warfare for the destruction of the enemy's strongholds. Our battle is to break down every deceptive argument and every imposing defense that men erect against the true knowledge of God."*

- Holding the Knowledge of God In Contempt

Christians believe in *revelation* -i.e. the unveiling of a person or truth previously unknown: We know God today because he has *revealed* himself to us in the past (through His Prophets, miracles, The Bible, and the Holy Spirit). The knowledge of God is a great gift to us. Were it not for this, it would be impossible for us to "figure him out." But the revelation God *has* given may not fit our notions of how we think He ought to be/act. Thus, many have rejected the knowledge of God and follow their own ideas, detached

from the scriptures and the Church (the living body of Christ today).

Rom 1:22,25a, 28 (NIV) *"Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.... They exchanged the truth of God for a lie.... Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not be done."*

*A.W. Tozer: "We can hold a correct view of the truth only by daring to believe everything that God has said about Himself... Much of our difficulty as seeking Christians stems from our unwillingness to take God as He is and adjust our lives accordingly. We insist on trying to modify Him and to bring him nearer to our own image."

1 Sam. 2:12 (NASB) *"Now the son's of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the Lord."*

1 Cor. 15:34b (NIV) *"For there are some who are ignorant of God--I say this to your shame."*

1 Cor. 15:34 (TEB) *"Come back to your senses and stop your sinful ways. I say this to your shame, some of you do not know God."*

Titus 1:16a (NIV) *"They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him."*

Rom 10:2 (TEB) *"I can be a witness for them that they are deeply devoted to God. But their devotion is not based on true knowledge."*

Mat 22:29 (NIV) Jesus replied, *"You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God."*

2 Thes. 1:8 (NIV) *"He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."*

Gal 4:8-9 *"Once you were ignorant of God, and enslaved to 'gods' who are not really gods at all; but now that you have come to a knowledge of God--or rather, now that God has acknowledged you--how can you go back to elemental things like these, that can do nothing and give you nothing, and be their slaves?"*

- Spiritual Advice to those who lack Theology:

John 8:31-32 (NEB) Jesus said, *"If you dwell within the revelation I have brought, you are indeed my disciples; you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

Prov 2:1-5 (NIV) *"My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God."*

Col 2:8 (NIV) *"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."*

Prov 1:7 (NIV) *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline."*

- **Right Theology is an entrance into a deeper relationship with God**

*Jer. 9:23-24 (NIV) **"This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, or the strong man boast in his strength, or the rich man boast in his riches; but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the Lord."**

Eph. 1:17 (NIV) *"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you **may know him** better."*

1 Jn. 5:20 (NIV) *"We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we **may know him** who is true."*

John 17:3 (NIV) *"Now this is eternal life: that they **may know you**, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."*

- **The Church and World are adversely affected by our Theology:**

Eph 4:13 (NIV) *"Until we all reach unity in the faith and **in the knowledge** of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."*

2 Cor 2:14-16 *"Thanks be to God who leads us, wherever we are, on Christ's triumphant way and makes **our knowledge of him** spread throughout the world like a lovely perfume! We Christians have the unmistakable 'scent' of Christ, discernible alike to those who are being saved and to those who are heading to death. To the latter it seems like the deathly smell of doom, to the former it has the refreshing fragrance of life itself."*

- **The Doctrines of the Bible:**

- Now that you have a better understanding that God really does care about what you believe and how your beliefs affect every part of your life, it is absolutely worth your best effort to dig in and study well each of the following ten doctrines of the Christian Church.

1. Bibliology:
2. The Trinity:
3. Theology Proper:
4. Christology:
5. Pneumatology:
6. Anthropology:
7. Hamartiology:
8. Soteriology:
9. Ecclesiology:
10. Eschatology:

NOTES/Questions: