

## Why We Need Theology

### Selected Scriptures

March 7, 2021

We're going to be trying to hit this issue of theology from a lot of different angles. So naturally, this leads into me, tonight, kicking off this study, giving you some reasons why we're going to pursue a course of instruction in the doctrines of Scripture and in the theology of Scripture. And I want to start out by giving you a bit of a justification tonight of why we're going to study theology. Several reasons why we study theology. I'm going to start with the outside, kind of what's out there, and then move in closer to the heart.

So I've got three points three tonight. And I'm going to, basically, I'm just going to work through my, walk through my notes. It's going to be a bit of monologue tonight. We will have a time of prayer afterwards. Hopefully, an extended time of prayer. But I am just going to walk through some notes. The, the

next time we come back to this study, I'm going to give instruction, but also have some interaction as well. But tonight is going to be more of me just laying some things out here. So three points to kind of hang our thoughts on.

Number one, reasons why we're going to pursue a study of theology, number one, sound theology provides protection in the faith. Sound theology provides protection in the faith. When I say, *the faith*, I'm not referring to, notice the definite article there, I'm not referring to the notion, the subjective notion of, of believing, you know, our, our, our exercising of faith, our trusting in Christ, relying on God. That's obviously vital. But I am actually referring here to the objective notion, referring to *the faith*, the definite article.

So it's what Jude was appealing for, that we contend for, the, the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. According to the Apostle Paul, this is the equipping work that I, as a pastor, we as elders, have been chosen by God and commissioned by Christ to do according to Ephesians 4:12-13. We are to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the

building up of the body of Christ," and then verse 13, "Until we all attain to the unity of," again definite article, "the faith."

So Paul is referring there, in context, to the objective body of doctrine that has been given to us by God through the apostles and the prophets. When the Spirit regenerated us, the truth into which we were brought by his regenerating work, by his uniting us to Christ, we are united and in a body of doctrine, a body of belief. It, he refers to that in Ephesians 4:4-6.

You might want to look at that. Just, in, in fact, any time I name a Scripture, you could just turn there. Otherwise, you're just going to be sitting there staring at me and there's really interesting stuff in your Bible.

So turn, turn to your Bible in Ephesians 4:4-6. And just see, when I mention a Scripture, see how quickly you can get there because I'm going to keep on moving. Ephesians 4:4-6, there is, there is a body of truth that Paul describes there that we're being instructed out of. "One body and one Spirit," he refers

to. He talks about the "one hope that belongs to your call."

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism," that God and, "the one God and Father of all who's overall and through all and in all." In those verses Paul just laid out for us a structure of systematic theology.

One body is ecclesiology. One spirit, pneumatology. One hope referring to the hope that we have in Christ, that's eschatology. One Lord, Christology. One faith, there it is again, the faith. Biblical theology, systematic theology. One baptism, that's our soteriology. That's our participation in the church. And then one God and Father, that's theology proper. The deeper we go into that body of doctrine that we've been brought into and we study, the faith, we are going deep into what you, truly unites us at the core. And we're raising those issues to the surface. We're bringing those issues to the surface to bring doctrinal clarity and harmony in the church.

So that which was once for all delivered to the saints, the deeper we go into the study of, the faith, "once for all delivered to the saints," the safer we are in the face of all

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social and cultural and political and, by the way, we know that principalities and powers are at work behind all those social, cultural, political forces, right? So we don't "wrestle against flesh and blood." So this spiritual pressure that keeps coming at us externally to cause us, or to lead us or tempt us to compromise and abandon the truth. Sound theology is protection in the faith.

Two of the most impression prophets of the last century were George Orwell and Aldous Huxley. Anybody know of those two names, those two authors? George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, neither of those were believers, but both were able to see pretty far down the road into what was coming our way in the 20th Century and beyond. And for all practical purposes, we're living in what they predicted way back then.

In his 1931 book, *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley delivered a, a vision of a utopian society, a perfect world guaranteed by eugenics. We're seeing that played out now. Sexual immorality in this novel, *Brave New World*, was not only tolerated, but it was encouraged and promoted and celebrated. All sense of guilt and

guilty feelings distracted by copious amounts of entertainment. And if that didn't work, it was dulled by a medication they called, Soma.

One of the characters in the book is a, a guy who's called a World Controller. His name is Mustapha Mond. And he, in the book, made a theological point. He supposed that there, quote, "quite probably is a God," but he, quote, "manifests himself in different ways to different men." He's advocating a spirituality there, but it's absent any organized structure or religion. Mustapha Mond goes on to explain that in premodern times, God manifested himself as the being that's described in these books and he's pointing to books like the Bible.

But now, quote, "he manifests himself as an absence, as though he weren't there at all. Call it the fault of civilization," Mustapha says, "God isn't compatible with machinery and scientific medicine and universal happiness. You must make your choice. We have chosen machinery, medicine, and happiness." Here we are now nearly a hundred years later, and we're seeing how prophetic those words were.

We understand the world has been moving in that direction for quite some time and we're actually right in the thick of exactly what he described in his book. We understand how that's, the world is moving in that direction.

What we're disappointed to see is that the church has been moving there, too. Many in the evangelical church has been moving there, too. Theologian David Wells says, "Evangelicalism has basically followed the world in this, committed a whole myriad of intellectual sins and has been assimilated into a, a set of very compelling lies and heart level worldliness, sins of worldliness."

In his 1994 book called *God in the Wasteland*, David Wells writes this about Evangelical theology. Quote, "It is one of the defining marks of our time that God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that he is ethereal, but rather that he has become unimportant. He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable. He has lost his saliency for human life. Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God's existence may

nonetheless consider him less interesting than television. His commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence. His judgment no more awe-inspiring than the evening news and his truth less compelling than the advertisers' sweet fog of flattery and lies. That is weightlessness. It's a condition we've assigned him after having nudged him out to the periphery of our secularized life." End quote.

When he keeps saying, we, we, we, he's referring to us evangelicals. He's referring to us who have grown up in churches. And I can certainly concur, based on my experience, I can concur that is indeed what has happened even in my experience and in my soul. Into the spiritual void that's been created by several revolutions of the so-called Age of Enlightenment, revolutions in industry, technology, transportation, telecommunications, medicine, information technologies, now the political sphere, the political realm is vying for primacy to govern the whole of human life, the whole of man.



And that's what's taking shape today. George Orwell predicted that in the late 1940s. If any of you have read his book, his 1949 novel, *1984*, it described this intrusive and universal rule of a government called INGSOC. INGSOC is a not-so-subtle abbreviation that refers to English Socialism. So INGSOC, English Socialism. The governments of INGSOC, the governing authority and the power in 1984, it was divided between four ministries. Three of them were the Ministry of Peace, which concerned itself with war. The Ministry of Love, which maintained law and order. So think boot upside the head, that's ministry of love. And then the Ministry of Plenty, which was responsible for economic affairs. That's the promise of English Socialism. That's the promise of American Socialism, as well. The Ministry of Plenty.

The fundamental conditioning ministry, though, the means of control, that came through the Ministry of Truth. And the Ministry of Truth concerned itself with news, entertainment, education, and the fine arts. The Ministry of Truth controlled what people said. They called it, Newspeak, the official language of the party, which was always subject to change, which was the vehicle for conveying the party's message. Particular

words, particular phrases, things that were prohibited and outlawed and things that were okay to say, the right way to say it.

The Ministry of Truth promoted something called, doublethink, among the people such that they could hold two opposing ideas in the mind at once. So this idea of holding and tolerating within the mind contradictions, things that didn't make sense, things that they could see but then had to reinterpret through doublespeak in their head and say, I didn't just see that. I interpret it this way. So doublespeak is evident in the party's three slogans: War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength.

Ministry of Truth also controlled the narrative of the past, what we call history, in textbooks, newspapers. The main character in the book, Winston, that's his job at, at INGSOC, is to go into the Ministry of Truth and go and excise things that don't fit the narrative anymore and put in a different word. It's just like Wikipedia. It doesn't take a whole lot of imagination to see the parallels to developments in our own

time. The past is mutable, it's pliable, it's flexible, it's a useful tool for shaping the present.

For example, think about this: To promote these high ideals of diversity and inclusivity, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and Rules Committee Chairman James McGovern, they introduced a new code of conduct for the House floor to eliminate gender terms. So we're talking about, you can't use words like father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter. Gone. They say that those changes on the House floor would, quote, "honor all gender identities by changing pronouns and familial relationships in the House rules to be gender neutral." End quote.

That is Newspeak. Today's classroom instruction, and this is even prior to Covid, but especially now in this, what they call this online classroom, online classroom is actually many rooms. It's your living room or your whatever, where the kids have to attend online or attend through the portal of a, a Zoom classroom. All the move has been away from books, printed books, actually put together by a publisher and cost involved, to move

us away from that to online resources like Wikipedia articles and all the rest.

Printed books, obviously, they contain errors as well, but they're less malleable, less subject to change, less mutable, more easily verified, more easily held accountable. Again, the one who controls the narrative controls the past and reshapes thinking and reshapes thinking in the present and sets new prejudices by retelling history according to a modern critical theory agenda.

That's what we're seeing in society and culture, in politics and in media all around us. And the same thing has happened in our evangelical churches. For many decades now, and it's directly related to our abandonment of the study of theology. In 1996, there was a document called *The Cambridge Declaration*. You can read *The Cambridge Declaration* in its entirety; it's not a long document, but you can read that on our website. It makes this statement, quote, "The loss of God's centrality in the life of today's church is common and lamentable. It is this loss that allows us to transform worship into entertainment, Gospel

preaching into marketing, believing into technique, being good into feeling good about ourselves, and faithfulness into being successful.”

I just want to stop real quick in that quote, mid-quote, and just say that the loss of God centrality in the church and in our worship has led to all that change. What is the problem? We don't know our God. We don't what he would approve of and what he would disapprove of. We're disconnected and cut off from our history because we think that the present is all that matters. And so many of us are terrible, terrible theologians, terrible church historians, terrible historians all around. We're more into what's on today's news than we are about what's going on 500 years ago and learning from our evangelical forebearers.

“As a result,” continuing the quote. “As a result, God, Christ, and the Bible have come to mean too little to us and rest too inconsequentially upon us. God does not exist to satisfy human ambitions, cravings, the appetite for consumption or our own private spiritual interests. We must focus on God in our worship

rather than the satisfaction of our personal needs. God is sovereign in worship. We are not." End quote.

If we will return to the centrality of God, the one who's sovereign over our lives, over our minds, over our time, over our worship, over our families, then listen, we will find safety in the study of theology. We will be safe in him. Studying theology obviously provides more than just protection from compromise, more, more than just protection from drifting into worldliness, but it will, at the very least, provide some guardrails of safety for us, for our families, and for our church. And we need this safety as we head into the future.

Martin Luther, in his day he knew what it meant to put his life on the line for the sake of theology. He wrote these lines in his famous hymn, you know this, "A mighty fortress is our God." He says, "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; our helper he, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing. For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe; his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate. On earth is not his equal."

Those lines come from, as you probably know, Psalm 46. Psalm 46 in the first few verses start out this way. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling."

That had to comfort Martin Luther as he faced the diet of worms and the prospect of being burned at the stake as a heretic. His hymn ends with these two verses, "And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us. The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure; one little word shall fell him. That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth; the Spirit and the gifts are ours, through him who with us sideth. Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill; God's truth abideth still; his kingdom is forever."

Where did he find the strength to endure what he endured? Where did he find the protection from civil magistrates and religious authorities that sought his life, wanted to put him to death? It was found in his God, immutable, unchanging, powerful sovereign. God was his refuge and his strength. And that's what we need for ourselves. That's what we need to teach to our families. That's what we need to teach to our church. It's what we need to proclaim to everyone outside of our church, as well.

We can't know God as our refuge and our strength if we don't study him. And so, we need to learn to worship him in depth and in wisdom. And so that brings us to a second point here. Sound theology provides protection in the faith. That's the first point. Sound theology, number two, provides instruction in the faith. Sound theology provides instruction in the faith.

One of the fallacies that I grew up hearing in evangelicalism, and especially as I became a Christian, I heard this in certain circles, is this notion that there is no creed but the Bible. Anybody heard that? That is the Bible's all I need. Just don't trouble my mind with all these creeds, confession and all this



extrabiblical stuff. I just need the Bible. You may have heard that before yourself. I'm not sure if the origins of that kind of phrase are noble or not, but the sentiment has been used to promote suspicion in studying doctrine.

That's not a good sentiment. That's not a good impulse. It's, it promotes suspicion in developing the skill and the wisdom of systematizing the doctrines of the Bible into a coherent theology. The problem with that mentality is that everyone is a theologian, whether they know it or not. Everyone has developed a sense of the Bible's doctrines. Everyone has to some degree or another, systematized these doctrines of the Bible. Some to the better, and many to the worse.

Because we're created in the image of God, we can't help but do this. Our minds are wired by God to try to harmonize all the things that we know and think and understand. We can't, being created in his image, we're going to try to systematize and harmonize and put it all together into a coherent way of thinking. Most people are not cognizant or thoughtful about that reality, which means they are susceptible to importing all kinds

of error into their thinking, just swallowing all kinds of stuff from different books that they read or different articles that they download, different things they listen to on the Internet, and they import it into their thinking.

And they don't know, years down the road, Why do I do what I do? And they can't, it's very hard after time to forget what you've studied and you don't realize you, you could trace it back to that really bad seed of bad stuff that was put in your head. The error can start with shallow interpretations of specific Bible passages. It could be aided and imbedded, even deepened by what's taken in from other sources.

We've, we've talked in various venues about something referred to as the theological pyramid. Sometimes we call it the exegetical pyramid. It's just a way, just think of a triangle, it's just a way to illustrate how everything that we consume comes with its own attendant theology and doctrine and exegetical conclusions and assumptions and all the rest. Everything from popular Christian books to scholarly books, to sermons, blog articles, podcasts, YouTube lectures, whether

we're conscience of this or we're totally unaware, all that we take into our minds and into our hearts promotes a particular view of theology.

It's based on certain doctrinal conclusions. And those doctrinal conclusions are built on prior and deeper exegetical decisions. So how do we know what's right? At the most foundational level, we rely on a scholarly discipline called textual criticism. Textual criticism studies what we call the canonicity of the text. That is, what is the standard? Or do we have a reliable Bible in our hands to start with. And once we have a reliable text, we can build from there. It's, it's good for us to know that our English translations are fantastic.

They all haven't always been reliable, but we are, I'm no, no, not, I'm not talking about the dynamic equivalence approach to translation, more of a, more of a thought-by-thought paraphrase. I'm talking about a literal, kind of a literal approach to the text. So with a reliable text in hand, we can set about with confidence to interpret passages of Scripture. So when we talk

about interpretation, we're talking about exegesis. Exegesis is the interpretation of the text of Scripture, or the interpretation of other things as well. You can exegete history, you could exegete old texts, whatever.

But we stay, in exegesis, as Bret has been teaching on Sunday mornings, we stay within the boundaries of what has been set by faithful protestant hermeneutics. He's been teaching the grammatical historical method. And that applies to the rules of grammar, with consideration to the facts of history. Those are boundaries around the text and around our thinking, a discipline we maintain as we come to the text in order to help us get to the meaning of the text, the plain sense of the text to make good observations.

So good exegesis is based on good and valid observations of the text, interpreting the meaning of the text, and coming to that understanding. When we then gather together what the Bible teaches about particular topics, so, all the key passages about Jesus Christ, we put all those together and we call that Christology. If we bring together all the key passages about the

Holy Spirit, the *pneumas*, that is Pneumatology. The key passages about the origin of the universe, the *cosmos*, that's called Cosmology.

When we, when we take all those doctrines and we group the teaching of all those passages together, that's what we refer to as the Doctrines of the Bible. Doctrine is just a big fancy word for teaching. So we're talking about teaching. When we take all those doctrines of the Bible, the Christology, the Ecclesiology, the Eschatology, all these 'ologies, we take all these doctrines of the Bible. I referred to that earlier from Ephesians 4:4-6, we harmonize all those doctrines into a coherent, noncontradictory view of the Bible's overall teaching, that is what we call Systematic Theology. It's very important because it gives us an overall framework about thinking of the whole counsel of God.

So from the text itself as the bottom of that pyramid, the base, from the text itself to the interpretation of the text, to the doctrinal teaching of the Bible, to the systematizing of all the Bible's doctrines. So we're talking about a foundation up

through this big super structure of the Bible, out of that at the very top, at the pinnacle, comes, out of that comes all that we do by way of application in the church.

The preaching you listen to comes out of that top layer. The books that you read comes out of the top layer. Your approach to apologetics and evangelism comes out of the top. Your parenting, your discipleship, your counseling, church polity or governance, philosophy of ministry, what we do in the church and why we do it, all of that comes out of this top layer of the pyramid.

A vast majority of what Christians consume at that high, is at that highest level. It stands to reason we all not textual critics, exegetes, doctrinal students, systematic theologians. So what are we? We're consumers. That makes sense. Most of us have full time jobs. We don't have time to get into all this pyramid. That's why we rely on pastors and teachers and elders and all that in the church. That's what we rely on them to do.

But the vast majority of what we consume as Christians is at that highest level. And that rests, you just need to realize,

that rests on a super structure and a base that is very rarely examined. That is not a cause for you to go into apoplectic fits of anxiety and fear. You don't need to worry that you don't have all of this underneath because Christ has given you his Spirit. He's given you the Spirit who is the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of illumination, the Spirit who gives light and understanding.

That doesn't mean you're not going to defy the Holy Spirit within you and go make your own mistakes anyway, because you will. As John MacArthur said very eloquently, he's says it all the time. "If I could lose my salvation, I would." And you can say that, apply that to a lot of things. If I could misinterpret the text, I would. If I could misunderstand theology, I would and I do and I will.

But Christ has given us his Spirit. And that is, that is a powerful, powerful gift that we have his abiding Spirit who teaches us and trains us and illuminates the truth. John assures his disciples in 1 John 2:27. He said, "The anointing that you have received from him abides in you and you have no need that anyone should teach you." So you don't need to come to church

anymore. You have no need that anyone should teach you? You have the abiding Holy Spirit. It's just you and...no, I'm just, that's not true. You know that's not true because the Holy Spirit abides in you and it's telling you that's not true.

Christ has given his Holy Spirit to all believers, and he will guide and direct us into all truth. He'll keep us safe even if we don't understand all this pyramid, right? But one of the chief ways that Christ keeps us safe in obedience to and in the fear of the Lord is when we practice the discipline of spiritual discernment. If you refuse to practice discernment, you are moving against the Holy Spirit who abides in you.

That is not in cooperation with him. That's not in cooperation with his thinking. That's not keeping in step with the Spirit. When you refuse to think critically about the things that you consume. John finishes that thought in 1 John 2:27 saying this, well I'll, I'll just quote the previous part of it. "The anointing you have received from him abides in you. You have no need that anyone should teach you." And then he says this, "But as his anointing teaches you about everything and is true and is



no lie," okay, so what is the anointing doing? What is the Holy Spirit doing? Teaching you.

What are you learning? A body of doctrine. You're learning truth. You're learning all the things we're talking about. You're, you're learning how to exegete Scripture, interpret for yourself. You're taking what you learn in church and applying it to your own study. You're, you're putting together the, the, the different things that the Bible teaches about Christ and the Spirit and salvation and, and sanctification. You're putting all these things together in doctrines and then coming to understand that. The Spirit is doing that.

You're even systematizing and harmonizing these things. And maybe something down at this level you're like, wait, as I'm systematizing this, something down here isn't fitting. What's going on? How is it that Christ prays to his Father if he is the Son of God? Hmm. That's something I need to understand a little bit better. As his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him. As it has taught you, as the Spirit has taught you, now you have

a rule; now you have a standard; now you have something to guide off of. Things that you've learned that you're to compare now what you're learning now to what you have learned in the past.

So John is saying quite the contrary to, I have an, "I have an anointing from the Holy Spirit; I have no need of teachers." Now he's saying, "You have every need for teachers and the Spirit himself teaches you through teachers that Christ gave to the church. And you have a duty to discern." You have a duty to discern and test what you hear by the truth. That is how that anointing keeps us safe. That's how the Spirit keeps us safe. By us participating in that work and discerning the truth.

Later in 1 John, 1 John 4:1, John says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God. For many false prophets have gone out in the world." Many false prophets. I think I mentioned this in another time that the, me and, me and the fellow pastors here, we were talking to a couple other pastors and the pastor is newer to town. He's been here maybe for a couple years, and he said, "You know, Greeley is filled with false gospels." He could have said that

about any town in our country. But he said, "Greeley is filled with false gospels." It's true. Many false prophets have gone into the world. Many false gospels are out there. John continues saying, "Test all things. Don't believe every spirit, test the spirits." And then he gives them tests they can use.

So it's not a cause for anxiety or fear that you don't understand the entirety of a theological or exegetical pyramid. But it is a reason to exercise caution, to know that what you consume up here at the pinnacle, at the top, is informed by all of this down here. You need to grow in discernment. You need to exercise discernment. Think of your spiritual discernment like physical nerves in your body that keep your body away from pain when you get too close to a flame. You pull your hand back because you know that's going to burn up your flesh.

In the same way, spiritually, you need to grow and strengthen your discernments, you have a sense that if I get close to error, I pull away because it's going to harm me. It's going to harm my family. I'm not going to consume that. I'm not going to look at that. I'm not going to go there.

We have many reasons today to grow in discernment and test all things and hold fast to what is good and abstain from every form of evil. Challenges are coming to the church, at the church fast and furious. And we may have some significant consequences to live through for what we believe. And as a pastor, I'm mindful, and as are the other pastors and elders, who are just as mindful.

We're all aware that we have inherited a very weak ecclesiology from our evangelical forefathers. A very poor understanding about the nature and the mission of the church. A very, we're, we're very 21<sup>st</sup>-Century-centric in our thinking. Like all that matters is what's going on right now. We, we've, we've been cut off in a lot of ways from the continuity of the past, to appreciate what has been granted to us by others.

There have been very few, because of a very poor ecclesiology, very few expectations that have been placed up on professing Christians in the American church about coming into church membership, about the meaning of church membership, about what

the discipline of the church is, how it's a blessing and a protection. Through the years, we had a number of enthusiastic prospects for church membership and for one reason or another, they fall away. They've been so trained in weakness that their hearts are hard toward submission to the church.

It's so sad to see that because they have no appetite for the good food that we so desperately want to feed them. We want to help them understand. But they're not accustomed to good food. Many of these weak, sickly evangelicals, they are the ones who, in pride, refuse to support faithful men, like James Coats, now still in prison. Pastor John MacArthur, Pastor Tom Ascol. Some even heap on those kinds of men scorn and contempt, disdain, mocking. It's so sad.

So our pastors, our elders, myself included, we see that we have a steep learning curve here in the realm of systematic theology, church history, doctrine. We have so much to learn for ourselves and so much to teach you, as well. And so we're going to solicit your prayers for our growth in and our attainment in, in understanding so that we can turn around and teach you.

The goal of studying sound theology is not to turn everybody into pointy-headed academics or, or scholars or whatever. Our, our, our goal, rather, is to promote a heart of humility, a, a mind that learns to appreciate what's been handed down over the course of the church's history. We stand on the shoulders of giants in our past. We have, Christ has given such gifts to the church throughout our history. Two thousand years and going back, we just, we stand on the shoulders of those scholars throughout the centuries.

I'll just name a few of them looking at different eras. You probably are familiar with these different, different thinkers of the church. But church fathers like before and after the Council of Nicaea, which we'll talk about at some point. But church fathers like Ambrose, Augustine, or you can say Augustin, Chrysostom, Athanasius. Those are just a few names. The Cappadocian fathers who did so much to help us with our formulation and understanding, articulation of the Trinity. So Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus.

The Scholastics Period after the Cappadocians and into just before the Reformation. So Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, Thomas Aquinas. Some of their thinking has been so helpful. In fact, the Reformers stood on their shoulders to bring about the reformation of the church. So John Wycliff, William Tyndale, Martin Luther, we've mentioned. John Calvin, Theodore Beza, Ulrich Zwingli, John Knox, just to name a few.

Puritans. Who doesn't love Puritans Theology? John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Thomas Watson on the beatitudes. Thomas Watson on, well, basically anything. William Perkins, Jonathan Edwards, John Owen. I, I've gotten so much help from John Owen. Modern theologians like Warfield, Hodge, Machen, Berkoff, John Murray, others. So many helpful voices. Even contemporary voices, people who are still alive, or just passed like R.C. Sproul. What a, what a gift to the church.

We are so eager to learn and to study and to teach and recite together the ecumenical creeds and confessions. The evangelical confessions of the church. We, as pastors and elders, we're, I was telling you a couple weeks ago, I think, that we had planned



before Covid to start to roll out a few things. And one of them was, we want to start reciting some creeds and confessions in our worship service together. But we wanted to not do that immediately.

We want to teach you through some of that so you could hear the reason for it, hear the good theology and so that when we recite those things together, we have an understanding and an appreciation for what we're saying. Covid was an interruption. That's a, interruption planned by the providence of God, so we know it was good. And we can see that oh, as the year has passed, our, our commitment to that, our desire for that has just grown stronger. So we're going to pursue that.

The Bible has creeds and confessional statements in it. One of the earliest you know. It's called the Shema, right? Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." It's a confession of faith. Peter's confession, Matthew 16:16, "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God." It's on that confession that Christ said, "I'll build my church."



Baptismal, baptismal formula, Matthew 28. That's a confession. 1 Corinthians 8:6, "There's one God, the Father, from whom are all things and from, for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." Remember the mystery of godliness in 1 Timothy 3:16. "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."

So those are confessions and creeds right in our, right in our Bible. But the Bible witnesses to the use, the valid use of creeds and confessions just to solidify and give a memorable expression, articulation to the substance of our faith. The word, creed, if you're unfamiliar with that word. It's, it, the, another way to say that is a rule of faith, creed. It comes from the Latin word *credo*, *credo*. If you've ever heard of that word *credo*. It means, I believe.

So, a creed, is just a statement, a formal statement of I believe. This is what I believe. So it's a formal statement of Christian orthodoxy. It draws boundary lines between what's

orthodox and what's heterodox or heresy. So some of the early Christian ecumenical creeds, I mean ecumenical in the sense of catholic, small "c." So it's the, it's the whole church. All the different local churches, the true believers in those churches, all of them considered together is the idea of the ecumenical or catholic faith. So those creeds are the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Caledonian confess, Definition and the Athanasian Creed. I think you've probably heard of some of those.

A confession, it's a, it's a more filled in form of a creed. Usually, a confession reflects a more systematic treatment of doctrine. So it's kind of worked its way through that pyramid, going up to the top and out from the top, comes this expression of a systematic treatment of doctrine. Kind of, it's often times a confession can reflect the teaching of a denomination. There are many confessions of faith.

We find some basic agreement with the confessions of the Protestant Reformed Tradition. Many of you have maybe heard of the Three Forms of Unity, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg

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Catechisms, the Canons of Dort. Those are Three Forms of Unity that Protestant churches hold to. We, here in our church, have a great respect for the Westminster Confession of Faith. But that is a, a more of a Presbyterian Confession, so we do not subscribe to that, even though we really learn a lot from it.

We hold to the London Baptist Confession of 1689. It's a Baptist Confession, a congregational form of government confession. I realize just, I'm and I'm just reviewing some of that to tell you some of the things that we're going to unpack and un, unpack for you in the months to come. And this may be raising more questions than providing answers at this point, I'm just. But that's the nature of an overview, is to raise those things to your mind and give you something to kind of mull over and chew on.

But stay tuned. Of all the council that we heard this morning from the farmer and the woman baking bread. Be patient. Be patient. Give it time to grow, mature and saturate. We're going to get there together being faithful to Scripture and faithful to the doctrine and theology.

So sound theology provides protection in the faith, number one, provides, provides instruction in the faith, number two. And here's a, a third point for tonight : Sound theology, number three, provides devotion in the faith. Devotion in the faith. And this makes sense to us, doesn't it? Theology, *thay, theos* and *logia*, is to study God, to study *theos*, to study God.

Sound theology provides devotion in the faith as we study and worship God. You're not going to do a good job of worshipping someone you don't know. We don't admire or revere someone that we just know on a superficial level. Sadly, that's what evangelical theology has done over the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. There are pockets of strength. There have always been pockets of strength and pockets of faithfulness.

But the, the pockets of faithfulness and strength are not always what gets, gets the Press. What gets the Press is what seems to be, like we were talking about this morning, seems to be successful, seems to be big, seems to be numerous with a lot of

money and all the rest. Those places that are pockets of faithfulness and strength are oftentimes small and easily passed over, easily not seen.

Theo, evangelical theology has done a lot to promote what's big and seen, it's a mile wide and an inch deep. Evangelicals, over the past I'd say probably hundred years, have been uncomfortable with the idea of God's transcendence, that God is high and lifted up, majestic, holy, separate from us. They don't like, they don't like the sound of that because it makes God seem unfriendly. And because of a, really a wrong view of evangelism. Oftentimes bad theology comes in the form of, we need to get people saved, and that then, that desire for a pragmatic outcome, to see people follow Jesus and pray a sinner's prayer or walk an aisle.

That has a, a, a, kind of a blowback effect on the theology of the church and it warps it. So uncomfortable is God's transcendence, his immutability, his impassibility, divine simplicity, some of these doctrines, the, of the classical view of God. Evangelicals have tried to accentuate God's nearness to

the exclusion of his transcendence. Or even try to bring him down from such a lofty perch and make him more accessible, make him more friendly.

So without a real appreciation of what they have inherited from pious scholarly forefathers, many evangelicals have tried to improve God's image, to soften it a bit, make God more palatable to unchurched Harry and Mary. And by doing that, they have unwittingly distorted who God really is. And they have presented to people what is amounts to a false God or an idol. So they've attempted to defang God, declaw him, filing off the sharp edges, making him more pliable, even mutable, make him feeling so that he is passible and actually has hurt feelings.

So this squishy view of God is what's been passed down to so many of us. And this, in essence, as I said, what they have now is another God who is made in their own image. David Wells wrote a very insightful sentence and once again, I'm quoting from *God in the Wasteland*. He says, "A god with whom we are on such easy terms and whose reality is little different from our own, a god

who is merely there to satisfy our needs has no real authority to compel and will soon begin to bore us."

I read David Wells' book, that's his second in a series of four. And I read all four of those books and it's had a profound impact on the way I think and especially an impact on the way I think about, about men's ministry. I think many men, that's why we're doing our, our STM study because many men, I think, have come to church and have been absolutely bored to tears about the God who's presented. What they hear is a religion of old women, old women who want to scold them into some kind of morality.

But they have no substance. There's no substance to it. It's just a bunch of finger-wagging and pointing and demanding. And men, at the end of the day, they're like, you know what? I don't, I don't have time for this. I work 60, 70 hours a week. And you're going to come and give me no substance, no depth, no strength, nothing that compels my mind and tells me what is the demand on my heart to bow before God. It soon begins to bore us.

I think this describes the death of so many churches because people, men and women alike, children in Sunday School classes, they become bored stiff in the weekly presentation and doing external, rote rituals in honor of a dead idol. Why should they come? Why should they stay interested?

We serve the living and true God. We don't serve a dead idol. We serve one whose word is living and active, one who has power, in whom is life and grace and truth. There is nothing boring in God at all. If there's any boredom in our halls of worship, it's us at fault, not God. A.W. Tozer, in his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, he writes this, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God.

"Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason, the gravest question before the church is always God himself and the most portentous fact



about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.

"We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the church. Always the most revealing thing about the church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech. She can never escape the self-disclosure of her witness concerning God."

In another place, Tozer says, "The man who comes to a right belief about God is relieved of ten thousand temporal problems. For he sees at once that these have to do with matters, which at the most, cannot concern him for very long. But even if the multiple burdens of a time may be lifted from him, the one mighty single burden of eternity begins to press down upon him with a weight more crushing than all the woes of the world piled one upon another. And that mighty burden is his obligation to God.

"It includes an instant and lifelong duty to love God with every power of mind and soul, to obey him perfectly and to worship him acceptably. And when the man's laboring conscience tells him that he has done none of these things but has from childhood been guilty of foul revolt against the Majesty in the heavens, inner pressure of self-accusation may become too heavy to bear.

"The Gospel can lift this destroying burden from the mind, give beauty for ashes and the garment of praise for the Spirit of heaviness. But unless the weight of the burden is felt, the Gospel can mean nothing to the man and until he sees a vision of God high and lifted up, there will be no woe and no burden. Low views of God destroy the Gospel for all who hold them." End Quote.

This is why, when we evangelize people, we don't soft-sell anything. We don't soft-pedal. We take time with the sinner, and we teach. And we teach in order that their conscience is informed about who this God is with whom they have due. We take time with people. Along the same lines, listen to this quotation

from John Calvin, Volume One of his Institutes. And this will, I'll wrap it up with this.

Calvin says this, "Although our mind cannot apprehend God without rendering some honor to him, it will not suffice simply to hold that there is one whom all ought to honor and adore and thus, we are also persuaded that he is the fountain of every good and that we must seek nothing elsewhere than in him. This I take to mean that not only does he sustain the universe as he once founded it by his boundless might, regulated by his wisdom, preserved it by his goodness, and especially rule mankind by his righteousness and judgment, bear with it in his mercy, watch over it by his protection, but also that no drop will be found either of wisdom in light or of righteousness or power or rectitude or of genuine truth, which does not flow from him, and of which he is not the cause.

"Thus, we may learn to await and seek all these things from him and thankfully, to ascribe them once received to him. For this sense of the powers of God is for us a fit teacher of piety from which all religion is born. I call piety that reverence joined

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with the love of God, which the knowledge of his benefits induces.

"For until men recognize that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that he is the author of their every good, that they should seek nothing beyond him, they will never yield him willing service. Nay, unless they establish their complete happiness in him, they will never give themselves truly and sincerely to him." End Quote.

I think that's a man that's in touch with who God really is. He's compelled, not bored, but compelled by a God who's great, majestic, high and holy and this is the God that we have come to know. We've come to love and worship as well because he's been gracious to us, he's shown mercy to us.

So folks, this is what our souls need, our families need. This is what our church needs. These are desperate times, and our need is desperate for God, to study him and the whole counsel of his Word and it's for our soul's protection, it's for our soul's instruction, and for our soul's deep devotion.