



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“Theology, What Is It and Why do We Need It?”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the privilege of the study of the word of God and again as we turn to consider some of the great teachings of the word of God, we pray that the Holy Spirit may be the teacher of the teacher and of each one who listens to the word. May he illuminate our minds and also motivate us to carry out the things that are set forth in Scripture. Above all Lord may we not simply learn things about the Holy Spirit but may in a very real sense he come to be in control of our lives in a deeper measure than ever before. We commit each one present to Thee and pray that spiritual blessings may be theirs through Jesus Christ.

And we ask this, in his name. Amen.

[Message] Now, tonight our subject is Theology, What is it and why do we need it? And I want to read two verses one from Romans chapter 6 in verse 17 and 2 Timothy chapter 1:13 that is if the tape room will allow me. Romans chapter 6 in verse 17. And I want you to notice one particular expression in this verse, we will look at it later, and then we are going to notice one expression in 2 Timothy chapter 1, verse 13. Paul writes in Romans, 6, verse 17.

“Theology: What is it and Why do we Need it?” by S. Lewis Johnson
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“Thanks be to God that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart the form or the mold of teaching under which or to which you were delivered.”

If you don’t find those precise words in your text it’s because I’m reading from the Greek text. Now, 2 Timothy notice the expression the form or the mold of teaching to which you were delivered. The mold of teaching to which you were delivered that is what Paul wrote. Now, 2 Timothy, chapter 1 in verse 13. Paul counsels young Timothy who was one of his legates.

“Hold or hold fast the brief sketch of healthy words which you have received or heard from me in faith and in love which is in Christ Jesus.”

So hold the sketch of sound words which you have heard from me. Hold the outline of sound words which you have heard from me. Now, I think you will notice in both of these passages that there is a reference to a mold of teaching and then there is a reference to an outline of sound words and both of these expressions imply a definite system of truths.

Now our subject tonight, “Theology, what is it and why do we need it?” One of the signs of our decadent age is antipathy toward dogma or doctrine. It is not only found in theology it is found in almost every subject that is taught in our universities. The attitude of many who listen today is we do not wish to be instructed, we do not want to be indoctrinated. We want to have dialogue. We want to converse. We want to enter in ourselves. And while there are, of course, some advantages in dialogue and some advantages in conversation and a great deal of advantage in conversations over whatever realm or field of the truth that we may be discussing this should not lead us to have antipathy towards dogma or doctrine.

The apex of this antipathy is directed toward theology often even among Christians although most often among pagans. Most who are not Christians, of course, do not wish to be instructed in theology. The idea in the middle of the twentieth century or the latter part of the 20th Century is very suspect. But even Christians are affected by this. And you will frequently hear Christians say, “I’m not interested in doctrine, I’m interested in life. I’m not interested in theology. I’m interested in relationship to Jesus Christ personally.” And so the idea of doctrine, the idea of dogma, the idea of theology is discounted even by many of our Christians.

I think this is slyly reflected in Snoopy’s remarks about Christmas theology. And some of you will remember that I referred to this in one of the lessons last year. You remember that in one of our magazines Mr. Shultz has given us a series of cartoons in which he calls a “Christmas Story”. And it opens up with Linus reading out of a little book to Snoopy who is listening very intently and Linus is saying, “And there were the same country shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flock that night”. The next panel is, and Snoopy is looking a little puzzled now, “and lo the angel of the lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord shown round about them and they were sore afraid. And then Linus begins to preach because he has something of the preacher within him and Snoopy is looking sort of dazed now and the angel said unto them “fear not for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord. And then Linus like a good preacher wants to apply it, so he puts his book aside and he’s looking at Snoopy and he’s saying, “that’s what Christmas is all about Snoopy” and Snoopy says as he’s looking now at Lucy putting something in the mailbox a moment later, “how gauche of me not to have known that”. And then he’s following Lucy on home and she’s on the same thing. Then on Christmas Eve he flies through the air in a sleigh with a bunch of reindeer and brings all these kid the things they’ve asked for why I don’t know she says. Snoopy is still listening. So the next time he’s just standing there looking and finally he’s

resting on his doghouse looking up in the sky and he says, “I’m going to have to be careful, all this theology could ruin my Christmas.” [Laughter]

I think you see there is even reflected in that a disdain for theology. Mr Schultz has captured the core perfectly. But this is the way a lot of people feel. If I get too much theology it could ruin things, you know, and my whole Christian life is liable to suffer if I don’t beware of too much of a stress upon dogma and doctrine. It’s blatantly reflected in a hymn book put out by one of the cults in which the stanza from “Just As I Am” reads this way. “Just as I am thou wilt receive though dogmas I may ne’er believe nor heights of holiness achieve oh God of love I come.” Now that, of course, is blasphemous, but it reflects the same thing. Dogma is a non-essential, dogma is expendable; theology is something we can do without. Theology use to be called the queen of the sciences and systematic theology the crown of the queen. But today pragmatism has led to suspicion of doctrine of dogma and having rejected revelation there is no final truth and we are only working with working hypotheses. Relativism is now king and the queen has been divorced and put away. Theology, however, is still the most important study that a human being shall ever undertake. And our studies are intended to restore the queen to her estate.

So let us begin with the question, “What is theology?” I think we ought to begin with the definition and so let me for just a moment say a word about theology. Now, probably most of us know that theology is a word derived from two Greek words. One is the word for God - theos, and the other is the word for word, utterance, or speech. And so theos plus logos equals theology and equals, really, utterance about God. Speech about God that’s really all theology is. It’s just speech about God. It’s God talk in other words. Narrowly, the term theology has to do with certain special teachings concerning God the Father but broadly, and that’s the way we ordinarily speak of it, it has to do with the study of religious doctrines, matters of divinity. The new Webster definition: It’s the study of God. That’s all it is. So we shouldn’t beware of theology if we were thinking

about studying the facts about God. So it’s rational discourse about God. It is the sum of the doctrines about God. It is a study of God. Hooker, one of the theologians, has said “Theology is the science of things divine.” It’s just as simple as that.

Now, second, I want to say a word about some presuppositions. We all have presuppositions and theologians have presuppositions too. Now, if we were to study any field of truth thoroughly we should begin with all of our presuppositions and try to analyze them and support them and go on from there. But it’s obviously impossible for us in a study such as this to deal with all the presuppositions that we might have and, furthermore, theology is not a work done with a view to those who are outside of the body of Christ. Theology is an exercise within the body of Christ. Theology is an attempt on the part of Christians to set forth what Christians believe. That’s theology. So theology is not directed towards the outside world. Theology is not directed toward the man outside of Christ. It is just simply an attempt on the part of the Christian church to set forth what they believe the Bible teaches.

Of course often theology is more limited even than that. You may have Lutheran theology or Methodist theology or Baptist theology, although the Baptists have historically done very little theologizing, the Presbyterian theology or Roman Catholic theology. Now that is the term used in a more specific sense yet. What do Baptists believe? That’s Baptist theology. What do Presbyterians believe? That’s Presbyterian theology? But the thing I want to stress is that theology is a work of the church. It is the work of believers who attempt to set forth what the Bible teaches. So operate on certain presuppositions. We operate on the presuppositions that Jesus Christ exists, that he is the second person of the godhead, the triune godhead. And they operate on the presupposition that Jesus Christ is the second person of the triune God-head and that he is set forth in the inspired and inerrant word of God or the scriptures. And so we shall operate on that presupposition to set forth just in that way. That is that Jesus Christ, the second person of the sovereign triune God, as presented in the inspired and inerrant

scriptures exists and lives in accordance with them. Those are our presuppositions. We don’t try to defend them now that’s the work of Apologetics.

Now C - Is such theology possible? So let’s talk for a moment about a possibility of theology. We may say a little more about this in a few moments when we try to answer the question “Is theology necessary but is it possible?” Now the possibility of theology arises out of these presuppositions that we have just mentioned. To expand it, it arises from these things. Number one, the existence of God. We can have theology because God exists. Now theology would be limited if that was all that we knew about God, that is, that he existed. And consequently, the possibility of theology exists not only because of the existence of God but because of the revelation of God. He not only exists but he has revealed himself to us.

Where has he revealed himself? We shall say something about that in a few moments but at least we, I’m sure, as Christians realize that he has revealed himself preeminently in the Bible in the word of God. This is God’s revelation of himself. In this God speaks. Now, the Bible is just as if God were here. The Bible represents him as here speaking to us. Would you like to speak with God? Would you like to hear him speak to you? Now, who would want to have God speak to men? Well, Christians all want to hear God speak to them. And this is where he does. This is the way he speaks.

Now, some of us when we read the Bible we want to ask the question why do you that way God? But, nevertheless, that is what he has done. He has given us his word and this is how he speaks and our responsibility as human beings is to adjust to his revelation. I am so glad God is not the hidden God. Now some contemporary theologians, he is not *deus absconditus*, as he is often referred to in contemporary theology. He is not that, the hidden God. He is the God who has revealed himself. He is the *deus revelatus*. And I think that deep down within, as we talked two years ago about theology proper, we saw that innate in human nature is the recognition of the

existence of God and that we have to fight against it to keep from affirming the existence of God.

David Hume was a famous Scottish skeptic, he was a philosopher and he was once walking with a friend of his and according to the friend they were walking on a starry night and he suddenly this skeptic turned to his friend and said, “Adam, Adam Ferguson, Adam there is a God.” And his being spoken before his mind had a chance to marshal the ordinary arguments that he had raised against it. Voltaire, perhaps one of the most noted agnostics of all time, is said to have prayed once when he was in an alpine thunderstorm.

Then the other night I was startled listening over the radio about supper time to hear the announcer say that Madalyn Murray O’Hair, and he didn’t say this I’m adding this, but is a noted atheist and liberated female, he said Madalyn Murray O’Hair is now saying that she intends to take to court the issue of young peoples hair length regulations being enforced by some of the Austin, Texas, schools. And the reason for it is that she says that her own son has taken a Nazarite vow and should be permitted to keep it. And that I think was just very startling that this famous atheist should discover, I guess, that her own son, in her own house, if he really is taking a Nazarite vow believes in the existence of God. So no matter what we do deep down within the heart of man there is affirmation there is a God because you see God has implanted that within the hearts of man.

Now, that is another presupposition, the existence of God, the revelation of God, and finally the third basis for the possibility of theology is the endowments of man. Now we have been given mental capacity, that is, some of us. No, really most of us have, haven’t we? It’s very unfortunate when a person does not have mental capacity. It’s part of our human makeup to have mental capacity. We have, for example, the capacity to reason, we have the capacity to judge, we have the capacity to organize, some more or less than others. These are things that are given to us by God. Not only that but we have spiritual endowments if we have been born again. And so because of the existence of

God, because of the revelation of God, and because of the endowments of man theology is possible.

Now, four or D - The materials of theology. The material of theology. What are the materials of theology? Well we have learned enough, I hope in our theology class to be able to answer this. If I were to speak to some of you, who have been here for two years, I don't want to embarrass you tonight but you know this year I just might, you never can tell, what's going to happen this year. I just might be calling on some of you who have been here for two years. And I might ask you a little question like this, what are the sources of our theology? What are the materials of theology? And if you have been here for two years you ought to be able to quickly say well Dr. Johnson, number one there is general revelation that is about us we can see in nature the evidence of God. Not only that but in the government of the universe we can see evidence of providence from God. That too reveals certain things about God. That's part of his general revelation. Also God has revealed himself in history. Remember it was one of one thing with man who said about Waterloo. Waterloo was God and what he meant by that was simply at that point in human history God seemed to intervene. And, I think, those of us who are adults at the time of World War II remember what happened when the British barely escaped with the skin of their teeth back to Great Britain because of a cloud cover that seemed to come up supernaturally. You could almost say that was God. It was his way of stopping Adolph Hitler and the German army. So in general revelation we have some of the material of theology, universe and its constitution, government, providence, history, and in conscience for there are some things we learn from the human conscience. God has implanted within the hearts of man a certain ability to distinguish between what is right and wrong. Now conscience has been affected by the fall, but it is still there.

This is striking, you can read the newspapers and men who are not Christians at all they talk about what's right and what's wrong. They talk about what's moral and

what's immoral. Isn't that striking? Men can deny the Christian faith, can deny the existence of God but at the same time he can talk about what is moral and what is immoral. I always want to get right to that person and say on what, what is your standard for moral and immoral? Please let me know because you cannot have any real alternate standard of right and wrong which does not lead us, inevitably, to the existence of a holy God.

But nevertheless this is part of our material theology, general revelation. But of course, the Bible itself special revelation is the second important source of our theology. So if I'd ask you the question what are the materials of theology you'd say Dr Johnson general revelation of God and nature, mystery and providence and conscience, and then his special revelation in his word. And it is here that we have the preeminent knowledge of God in his word.

Now the method of theology. I cannot spend much time on this. I just want to say that our method in theological study is inductive, inductive. Now just let me say this this is a big question and we could spend the whole night on it but it would be very dull and dry and I cannot do that because my wife is here tonight and she said that if she came she didn't want me to be dull and dry. So I'm going to have to say just a word or two about inductive reasoning and then pass on. Inductive reasoning is reasoning that is based upon the careful perception of all of the facts of theology; a collection of these facts together and an organization of them so that on the basis of our facts and the organization of them we are able to set forth certain teachings or principles.

Now I think we can see that inductive reasoning is designed to take a look at facts as they really are and to allow those facts to speak. We do not assume anything other than self-evident truths which everyone must assume that is if they have the sense to assume. But we try to let the data speak to us. And that is what we try to do in theology. We turn to the revelation of God in nature, in providence, in history, in conscience, and specially his revelation in his word and we look at the facts that are set forth here and

from a study of them and a collection and organization of them we try to let them speak to us in certain truths, certain doctrines, certain dogmas. Dogma is a perfectly good word. And so we shall follow inductive reasoning. All theology which is good follows inductive reasoning.

When we, for example, take a book like this and let it drop it this was the first time this had ever happened we should look at it we’d say, “My did you notice that I held this book here and it dropped and it went that way it didn’t go that way.” And then we should try different other objects and every object we tried we would discover the minute we let go of it, it went toward the center of the earth. And from all of these experiments that we performed, which are our data, we should, ultimately, after we have collected it all together we notice what really happens every time we should form a doctrine and that is that there is such a law as the law of gravitation and that would be inductive reasoning. Based upon our experiments we’ve organized our facts and we set forth a teaching and then we would feel free to deductively apply that to various other situations of which we have not made any experiments. So we shall follow inductive reasoning.

Sixth or F - The aim of theology. The aim of theology, the aim of theology then is to perceive, to arrange, and to systematize the facts of divine revelation. Let me say that again because it is important that you get this. The aim of theology, just as the aim of physics, the aim of any science, the aim is to perceive the data, the facts about God as set forth in the Bible, to arrange them, and then to systematize them and express what we have learned. That’s the aim of theology. To gather all the facts together, and of course, we gather them together about similar topics. If we want to set forth a theology of sanctification, we gather all the facts about sanctification in the Bible whether it be from Genesis or Revelations or books between, whether it be from general revelation or not, we gather all of those facts together, we arrange them logically, and then we set forth our conclusions as the doctrine of sanctification. That’s what we’re seeking to do.

And finally G - The divisions of theology. Now we don't have to do much about this because of we are engaged in systematic theology, but this is not the only kind of theology. There is, for example, exegetical theology. That theology, which is exegetical, is the study of the backgrounds of the books of the Bible. Usually a Bible teacher will give you a little exegetical theology. He won't tell you its exegetical theology when he begins his study of some books. For example, when Bill McRae was beginning the book of Ephesians, he gave you a few facts about the church at Ephesus and where Paul was when he wrote and certain other facts. Now that's theology but is exegetical theology. It's theology that has to do with historical background of a book. And now in the expositions verse by verse of passages from the word, we're doing exegetical theology.

We shortened it and call it exegesis or interpretation or it we're talking about the English Bible people we would say exposition. He expounded the text while he was he really engaging in exegetical theology.

Then there is also historical theology. Now historical theology is theology concerned with the history of the Christian church and the history of the doctrines of the Christian church. It's very interesting, for example, the study of the doctrine of a person of Christ and see what the church says all about the person of Christ for the time of the earliest Christian church. Not all the professing Christians have believed that Jesus Christ was the son of God equal with the father in all of his attributes very God of very God. Remember, we talked one time about the Arians, remember. Now that's a part of the history of Christian doctrine. The Arians were very influential until finally the followers of Athanasius who stood on the other side of the fence theologically won the battle of the counsel. And the Christian church was moved toward the position that Jesus Christ was very God of very God, and remember it all hinged on one little letter, one little iota. The difference between the statement that Jesus Christ was like God and Jesus Christ was God. You see a great truth can often hinge not just on one word but even letter.

Now that was historical theology and we are still interested in historical theology because the expressions of a man like the late Bishop Pike formed part of the material for the history of Christian doctrine or the history of doctrine in his case. It surely was not Christian doctrine. But, nevertheless, he goes down in history now as heretic and a man who had a great following at one time but who was a heretic and who does not belong to the orthodox Christian movement. That’s historical theology.

Then we have systematic theology and systematic theology is what we’re studying. It’s an attempt to gather together the interpretations of the text in the Bible, the contributions of the Christian church as they have discussed theology down through the years, and to set forth what the bible teaches on specific doctrines. That is systematic theology.

And then there is practical theology and practical theology is pastoral theology. It’s teaching that has to do with the work of gifted men. Over at Dallas Theological Seminary, the men were all required to take a course in pastoral theology. And in that course they are taught such things as how to conduct a funeral service, how to conduct a marriage ceremony, how to conduct the Lord’s supper, how to baptize, how to immerse, how to sprinkle, although I don’t think they lay much stress on the latter, as the man who teaches and believes in immersion. Then they talked also about the relationship of the shepherding work of a gifted man of the church of Jesus Christ. They talk about the practical work of elders and deacons, the practical work not the theoretical work, the practical work. And that is pastoral theology.

But we are interested in systematic theology. Now we are coming to the second question. Is theology necessary? It’s not uncommon at all, I said, for sincere believers to elevate devotion to Christ and depreciate theology. As so I’ve got one word for you. If you ever hear anybody talking in such a way as the depreciate Bible doctrine beware of anything else that they say because that man is unbalanced man. The man who says we are not interested in theology, but we’re interested in devotion to Jesus Christ is either a

dangerous misleader of Christians or he is so ignorant that he is not worth listening to either.

Now, I want to give you an illustration, in fact this is one of the reasons why I began again introductory lessons not only because some of you were not here over ten years ago when I spoke on what is theology. But I want to impress upon you the importance of revering the subject of theology. Two weeks ago I was in California for a weekend conference. One of the classes at the Hollywood Presbyterian Church, a very large Bible class, composed of the strangest people, really. Do you know why they were strange? Well the whole class was composed of people who were unmarried. And they were all from the age of sixty-five to twenty-two. But they had one thing in common, they were all unmarried.

Now many had been married, many had not been married, many had children, many did not have children but we had a real good time. It was a strange group, but they had another thing in common, that is that they really love the Lord. Now I was really kidding when I said that. They were really wonderful people but that’s their class. In fact in that class if you got married you had to leave it. There were about one hundred and fifty of them and we went out for three days to Westmont College in Santa Barbara and we had a conference and they had asked me to speak on Isaiah chapter 53, and since that is one of my favorite chapters I gladly obliged. But while I was out there a young man who I had known from Dallas when I was there came out to the meetings and told me about a certain church nearby and the minister there. And I expressed some interest in it because some of the things that that church stood for were things that I thought were scriptural.

And he talked about it very glowingly and enthusiastically and wanted me to meet one of the important men in the church. I told him I would be delighted to meet if I possibly could do it but I was so busy, they had me so busy, it was impossible for me to leave the grounds. Well in one of the question and answer sessions I noticed this young

man come in and with him about ten people. And so after the session he called me over and introduced me to the leader of this group. They had a little church nearby with about a hundred members or a hundred people who attend. In the course of our brief conversation, he launched out immediately, I think due to some things that had been said in the question and answer session, to a description of what his church stood for.

He said we meet around Jesus Christ only. We do not gather around any theology. These were his words, “We do not gather around any theology, we simply meet wholly around Jesus Christ.” I let that pass because I did not want to get in an argument with him the first time I met him. And so we had a pleasant little talk and kept bringing it up. He said, “I’ve heard about your church in Dallas around whom do you meet?” I said “Well we meet around Jesus Christ,” but I said “We also have some theology.” Well that started him off again. He said, “We don’t have any theology.”

And finally I said, “Look, do you believe, does your group believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?” He looked at me and hesitated to answer because I think he saw what I was driving at from the beginning. He hesitated and finally he said, “Yes.” I said that’s the first article of your theology. And I said secondly, do you believe that through Jesus Christ there is forgiveness of sins? He said “Yes.” I said that is the second article of your theology.

Well I didn’t want to follow it up because I was embarrassed that he was so embarrassed over this. So I dropped that and just hoped he would leave and really reflect on this idiotic idea that we meet around Jesus Christ and have no theology because he had more theology than many churches. One of his cardinal doctrines, which the church stands for, is that there is only one church in any one locality and they are so vigorous in the promulgation of that doctrine that piece of theology, bad theology I might say, that that piece of theology, that their whole church is built around it, and he did have the nerve to say he didn’t have any theology.

Well as I left the meeting and started to walk over to the place where I was staying, a nice young man, a real nice young man, walked up beside me and began talking. He said he had been listening to the conversation and he was part of the group. But he followed along with me and he said, “By the way” he said, “I looked up theology in the dictionary.” I said, “You did?” He said “I discovered that theology meant a systematic treatment of God” and he said “The Bible is not systematic so that’s why we don’t have any theology.”

I said “Now wait just a minute. Theology is a term derived from theos and logos and all it means is speech about God. He said, “Oh but it’s a system.” I said “No, its speech about God that’s all it is. It’s just the study of God.” Now, I didn’t remember what Webster’s definition was on the spur of the moment but he kept insisting on the fact that Webster said it had something to do with systems. Well I couldn’t deny that but I just said finally I said “Whether Webster said that or not this is what it is. Theos, logos, I know.” Well, he didn’t accept my word over his Webster’s word so. When I got back to Dallas I started thinking about this and I said I’m just going to look that up in Webster. And so I looked it up in my Webster’s Dictionary. The first statement concerning theology is the study of God, the study of God. Then it did say something in the second meaning about a system of truth, but it was the study of God, that’s all. Well finally it just became obvious the he as so ignorant you couldn’t carry on a conversation with him.

[Laughter]

The whole matter is really this, it is not shall we have a theology or shall we not have a theology. Everybody has a theology. If you say I don’t have any theology that’s your theology, that’s your doctrine. I don’t have any theology. That’s your platform, that’s what you believe. So it’s not a question of shall we have theology or shall we have no theology, it’s are we going to have good theology or are we going to have sorry theology. That’s really the issue. So don’t come to me and say doctrine is not important.

I don't believe in theology. That's your theology. That's what it is and it's awfully poor theology too.

Is theology necessary? Of course, it's necessary. Let me give you some logical reasons first. It seems strange to give some logical reasons why you ought to be logical. Let me set them forth in this way very quickly because I want to spend some time on a couple of texts. First the instinct of the human mind is systematic. Everybody's mind rises from facts to laws naturally. God has made us that way. What science does not have its system? Physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy, logic, rhetoric, philosophy, and theology, they all have this idea of a system because of the instinct of the human mind is to arise from facts to laws. We want to draw conclusions from facts. We are engaging in theologizing and if we have not of it, our theology, then that's our theology.

Second, the collection of the truth pertaining to the same topic aids in understanding the truth. What a great aid to understanding the doctrine of sanctification it is to gather all the truths about sanctification together and arrange them in systematic fashion. It's a tremendous aid to understanding the Bible to arrange the truths systematically so that you can form a doctrine. Bob Theme likes to talk about categorical Bible teaching. Really what he is doing is that. He is arranging truth in categories so that you can understand it better and thousands can testify to the value of categorizing biblical truths, systematizing them. When you do that you see connections between truths, you see the harmony of truth, you see the unity of truth, you see the particular event of the particular contribution of each part of the truth concerning a certain doctrine.

Third it's an aid to memory. Who has not testified to the fact that if someone can give us the truth logically and coherently we can remember it a whole lot better. Haven't you listened to teachers who teach with something over here and something over there and something down there and something up there and something flying across this way and something across this way and when you get through you say boy he sure gave a lot of stuff but it had no organization whatsoever in it and I just don't know what in the

world he’s talking about. A lot of the reason for misunderstanding teachers is that they are disorganized. It’s much easier if someone would say now there are three important tools about such and such a doctrine, one, two, three, and the result is this is the meaning of this truth. Isn’t that simple? Of course it is. If you can’t say yes, you don’t belong to the human race.

Now, Christian writers from ancient times have pointed this out and I think you can also point out that almost all of the great Christian teachers have sought to supply this. For example, Clement of Alexander gave us his Stromata, Origen gave us his Principles, Gregory of Nazianzus gave us his catechism, Augustine gave us the Enchiridion, and Calvin gave us his Institute. All of these were attempts on the part of great Christian teachers to systematize truth. You have it in the creed, you have it in the catechism, well, I’m sure you understand.

Now I want to give you some biblical readings. Now, I want you to turn first of all to our passage in Romans 6:17, Romans 6:17. If we had time we could turn, I think, to the Old Testament and take a look at the Ten Commandments in Exodus, chapter 20, there’s something that’s systematic in the Old Testament. First part of the law directed towards God. The second part of the law directed towards man. Ten Commandments, that’s a theology, a moral theology of Israel. That’s not all but its part of it. We could turn to the system of the offerings in Leviticus. What a beautiful system, Leviticus, chapter 1 through chapter 7. The five great offerings and the laws of the offerings all set forth systematically and logically and coherently. How easy it is to understand the laws of those offerings. But Romans 6:17, notice what Paul says to the Romans,

“But God be thanked that though you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you.”

Now the Greek text says, “Unto which you were delivered” but that form of doctrine, now that little word form is the translation of the Greek word *typos* from which we get type. It’s a word that really means a mode in this place, a mode of doctrine. It sometimes means the mark of blower, sometimes means the print; it was the print of the nails in our Lord’s side. But you can tell from looking at this text that Paul is talking about a definite body of truth. He says, “The mode of doctrine unto which you were delivered.” So God be thanked you were the servants of sin but now you have obeyed from the heart that mode of doctrine that pattern of doctrine unto which you were delivered. A definite body of truth.

Now Paul would have had no sympathy whatsoever with anyone saying well we cannot be sure of theology. He talks about the truth; he talks about the form of teaching under which you were delivered, definite truth. That’s theology. That’s theology. That means that we are to be specific in biblical truth. When we talk about the virgin birth, we are to talk about the virgin birth. If Jesus Christ was not born of a virgin then he is the illegitimate son of reprehensible Jewish parents. When we talk about the deity of Jesus Christ as a teaching, a definite teaching, we are to hold to that teaching as definite not to think loosely about it, haphazardly about it, but definitely about it. For if Jesus Christ was not the God then he was some psychotic Jew going around saying he was God. When we talk about heaven we are talking about a particular place. If heaven is no place then Jesus Christ did not have a material body in his resurrection, he didn’t have a material -- it was spiritual but it was a definite body. When we talk about the resurrection if we deny the resurrection and sort of wish it away in vague kind of language as if the influence of Jesus still lives on today then we are denying the value of the death of Jesus Christ and we are denying the evidence for the forgiveness of sin. We are to be definite in our understanding of the Bible, that is, its theology. It is a specific pattern, mode of truth. Boy, I think, if Paul were here he would say, “Now listen you have an amateur teaching you but now a professional is going to teach you and I’m really going to teach you what

the Bible says.” And he would really put us through the ropes too to be sure we understood the truth because you see if you don’t understand it who’s going to give it to the next generation. It’s important.

Now another text, 2 Timothy, chapter 1 verse 13, 2 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 13. And here’s Paul talking to young Timothy the apostolic legate and in verse 13 Paul tells Timothy.

“Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”

Hold fast the form of sound words. That word translated form is a Greek word that often referred to an artist’s sketch out of which ultimately came a fully developed picture. But, of course, an artist drew a sketch usually to outline the lineaments of whatever he was painting. If it was a portrait the sketch would be a kind of sketch of the person. If it was a landscape it would be a sketch of the landscape.

Now, my wife is a famous painter that is in our house. And we call her Mike, the family does when nobody else is around because that’s short for Michelangelo. And so she paints and I noticed that in all of her paintings, she loves to paint landscapes, and all of her paintings she draws a sketch. And I watched her this summer that is all I had to do on my vacation is to watch her. She sat down and she worked and I watched and she was painting the house that we were staying in she drew a sketch first and then she filled it in. But that sketch was really the substance that developed into the house. It gave it form, its shape.

And that’s the word that Paul used here an outline or a sketch. It was also used of a writer who wrote a rough draft of something that he would ultimately fill in all the details and complete. So when Paul says to Timothy, “Hold fast the sketch of sound words.” He means Timothy there is a system of truth. It’s just like the sketch of a picture.

You may expound it in your own way, I expound it in my way but we are expounding the truth and it has a definite structure, form, and shape. Now that’s theology, that’s theology, the form of helping words. There is a form, there is a shape, there is an outline, there is a sketch of the biblical truth. Theology is necessary. We cannot think, if we do not think theologically.

The reason today why our churches today are so sick, I’m speaking of Evangelical churches, is because the preachers do not preach theology. A lot of you laugh at me on Sunday in Believers Chapel because, and I hop you do to, because we have a lot of fun now Alice. I hope you do laugh at me when I bring up the doctrine of election and irresistible grace and all of the other great doctrines of the Bible. But the reason I do this is because it is tremendously important that you get these great truths so when I’m gone, and that may not be long you know, when I’m gone there will be a form of sound teaching here.

Just the other day one of our faculty members speaking about an Evangelical church said, and this church has had it’s problems, he said about this church what this church really needs is just to get someone to come in and to teach some sound Biblical, theological doctrine for a few years. That’s what our churches need.

Joseph Parker was a great preacher. He had great oratorical powers and his kind of preaching was oratorical. He took texts and gave great oration, but when Joseph Parker died it wasn’t but just a very short time until that church, the City Temple of London, fell into the hands of R.J. Campbell, who was the founder of new theology, and denied the great fundamentals of the faith. DeWitt Talmage was one of the great evangelists and Bible teachers of his day but he was also an orator. He did not teach the word. He was pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle and when he died it was not long before that church fell into the hands of Charles T. Russell and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of the Jehovah Witnesses. You see if we do not teach doctrine, theology,

then won’t have anything. We don’t have anything that we can really rest the foundation of our lives on.

Now finally, what are its hazards? We said theology is possible but in one sense theology is impossible. That is, it’s impossible for us to know God perfectly. Limitations exist in our study of theology. Let me just suggest a few because I think you know them. First there is the finiteness of the human mind. We can never comprehend God completely. “Has thou not searching found out God” Job asks. “Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable are judgments and his ways pass by me now” Paul says. That’s a limitation.

Secondly, the blindness of human sin and even when we are born again we still have an old sin nature which needs renewal, constant renewal. That’s why we always have to question our reasoning even because it stands under the fall also.

Third, the silences of Scripture. Wouldn’t you like to know the rest of the details of the life and death of the Virgin Mary? Wouldn’t you like to know what the Lord looked like personally? Wouldn’t you like to know what we’re going to look like when we get to heaven, the state after death? Wouldn’t you like to know what Paul really thought about slavery? Wouldn’t you like to know if Abraham is looking down right now on us and seeing us or perhaps some of our loved ones who have gone to be with the Lord? Well Deuteronomy 29:29 that famous text says “Remember the secret things belong unto Lord. The things that are revealed are unto us and to our children.” There are some things in theology we cannot know at the present, perhaps never. And then, of course, the imperfect state of science. Now we learn from science, we learn things about God from science if it is true science. Under God and a scientist has been able to give us insights into our universe in which we live. But science is a changing thing.

A few years ago I made reference to Dr. Charles Harrison of the Sandia Corporation in Albuquerque. Dr. Harrison is one of our premier scientists in the United States, but he is a genuine Christian. He is my Pentecost brother-in-law. He’s really an

outstanding scientist, an outstanding man. He is really one of the truly brilliant scientists in our generation. Dr. Harrison told me once that when people ask him does science agree with the Bible he always replies, "What science? The science of 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, 1930, 1940, 1970," he said "Science constantly changes." Then he added to me personally when I was taking him to the airport one morning he said, "Lewis if science and the Bible ever agree I might begin to have some doubts about the Bible."

We can learn from science but remember science is imperfect. The incompleteness of our knowledge of scripture and we as Christians have to admit that. We don't know everything about the Bible. I've been teaching Romans for twenty five years from the Greek text to theological students, now I think I'm ready to begin a serious study of Romans.

And then the inadequacies of human language. How can we really express theology? Paul said he was called up to heaven and heard phrases unlawful for a man to utter. So we cannot even express the things about theology that some of us may feel at times.

And finally, the Holy Spirit has been given us to teach us the things of theology and Jesus said he will guide you into all truth. And apparently that word God suggests a gradual instruction by the spirit so that ultimately we shall be exposed to truth. But since Jesus has not come and the Holy Spirit is still teaching that means that there is still truth that has not yet been revealed to us. All of these things mean theology has its hazards but it is truth about God and it is necessary and we must give ourselves to it.

We are going to close with a word of prayer and I think the men have arranged some refreshment in the next room and after a few moments we will also have an opportunity to ask some questions.

So let's close with a word of prayer.

"Theology: What is it and Why do we Need it?" by S. Lewis Johnson
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[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the opportunity to study Thy word. And as we

[End of Tape]