

## Why We Need Theology, Part 2

### Selected Scriptures

Christ has given us his Spirit and 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. 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, "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 putting together 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 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 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 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 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 very 21<sup>st</sup>-Century-centric in our thinking. Like all that matters is what's going on right now. 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, 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. The goal of studying sound theology is not to turn everybody into pointy-headed academics or scholars, our goal, rather, is to promote a

heart of humility, 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. Christ has given such gifts to the church throughout our history. Two thousand years and going back, 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 thinkers of the church. But church fathers like before and after the Council of Nicaea, church fathers like Ambrose, Augustine, 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, 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've gotten so much help from John Owen. Modern theologians like Warfield, Hodge, Machen, Berkoff, John Murray. 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.

The Bible has creeds and confessional statements in it. One of the earliest you know. It's called the Shema, 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 formula, Matthew 28. That's a confession. 1 Corinthians 8:6, "There's one God, the Father, from whom are all things and 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 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, 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 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 Definition and the Athanasian Creed. I think you’ve probably heard of some of those.



A confession, it's a more filled in form of a creed. Usually, a confession reflects a more systematic treatment of doctrine; 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 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 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.

So sound theology provides protection in the faith, number one, provides instruction in the faith, number two, and here's a third point, sound theology, number three, provides devotion in the faith. Devotion in the faith. And this makes sense to us, doesn't it? Theology, *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 worshiping 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 pockets of faithfulness and strength are not always what gets the Press. What gets the Press is what 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.

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 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 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 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 men's ministry. I think many men 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. 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 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.