

Friday Bible Study - Week One

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[0 : 0 0] Hello, welcome. My name is Brian Hart, one of the pastors at One Harbor Church, and it's my privilege to introduce you to a short video series that we're going to be running on Fridays, looking at theology and doctrine and the study of God's Word.

Now, the timing of this may seem a little bit strange. Why would we be, you know, wading into the waters of theology when there's a full-blown crisis happening? And there are two reasons for that. First of all, quarantine has freed up a lot of time. So we are taking advantage of that and trying to do something uniquely constructive.

Scripture tells us that we should make the best use of time. But the second reason, and the more important reason, is that the study of God is actually meant to practically help us when things are difficult.

What you do with your grief, what you do with your frustration, the decisions that you and I are going to be undoubtedly making in the coming weeks should all be influenced by what we know about God.

And if it does seem maybe a little bit strange that theology would practically help you in a crisis like this one with the coronavirus, then hopefully this course will be a pleasant surprise for you.

[1 : 1 0] Each week, we are going to consider the things that we've learned and how they practically affect the way that we live. Now, today in this opening video, I'm just going to give you an introduction to this course.

We're going to familiarize ourselves with some ideas that will be helpful in the coming weeks. And we'll look at a common misconception that a lot of people have about theology because we want to avoid that. But first, I want to answer this question.

What do theology and doctrine matter for the everyday Christian? For the man who is struggling to make ends meet? For the single mom who barely has enough energy to keep all of her responsibilities balanced as it is?

Why would they need theology? And some of you may even think, isn't theology and doctrine, aren't they things for nerds who like to read big books and like big words and complicated ideas?

And then there are some who go even further and say that actually theology and doctrine are bad things. Like it's better if Christians don't get into that because what we're really supposed to be doing is focusing on loving God and having faith.

[2 : 1 7] But the question then becomes, what version of God? And how do you begin to love him and have faith in him? Where do you even start with those things?

See, the reason that the everyday Christian needs theology is because loving God and having faith in him are actually impossible without it.

So why don't we start by considering what theology actually is? This will probably not surprise you, but theology is the study of God. Now we could add to that.

Theology is the study of God and his works. And there are many different kinds of theology. There are branches of theology and different ways of doing it. But fundamentally, they all have this as their essential goal.

When we do theology, we want to examine, to consider, to study, to increase our understanding about God. Now that's what theology is. Doctrines are specific beliefs.

[3 : 15] And there's all kinds of doctrines. There's doctrines about who God is in a very proper sense. There's doctrines about the things he's created. There are doctrines about how he saves. And so this course is going to be a focus on the study of God in which we will consider one or two key doctrines each week.

Now, this probably goes without saying, but this course is going to be highly condensed, very abbreviated. And we're going to give you just a little taste of each one of the subjects that we're going to consider.

At times, we may recommend a book or resource that can help you in your own education. But our goal here is really, it's more to whet your appetite for the study of God than it is to satisfy your hunger.

Now, it might not have been surprising to think of theology as study. But what might surprise you is to know what kind of study theology actually is.

I bet most people would say that theology is more like philosophy, where we sit around and we think very deeply, using very complicated ideas to try to consider what we think God might be like.

[4 : 22] We probably, a lot of us might think theology looks more like that than it looks like science. But actually, the reverse is true. And the reason for that is that theology is based on revelation.

In other words, when we do theology, we only study the things about God that he has revealed to us, which is why many theologians have said that theology is actually like a science. Science is all about observation.

And in the same way that science, good science, shouldn't go past what is observed, it shouldn't cause you to speculate, in the same way good theology shouldn't go past what is observed.

We don't want to speculate about what God is like. And so the natural question becomes, well, what are we to observe? In science, the world is all around us, but we can't see God. So what is there to observe about him?

Well, theologians have said for a long time that there are two different categories for the kinds of knowledge we can have about God. The first is that knowledge that can be gleaned from the world around us.

[5 : 27] In fact, creation itself gives us hints, tells us things about what God is like. Even relationships and the arts, even philosophy, there are things to be learned about God. And we can call all of those things general revelation.

Alternatively, there's another kind of knowledge that we have about God, and that comes specifically from what God has told us himself. And we call that special revelation.

And special revelation is found exclusively in the scriptures. We've called this series Bible study because everything we're going to be learning about theology and doctrine is going to ultimately be traced back to what scripture tells us.

Now, these two categories that I just mentioned, those phrases are not in the Bible, but the ideas are there. In fact, they're famously in Psalm 19, which talks about these two different kinds of ways of knowing the Lord.

Psalm 19 opens by saying, The heavens declare the glory of God. The sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge.

[6 : 37] So there's a kind of learning about God that can happen just by looking at the world around us. But the song goes on to say there are more specific ways of learning about God. Verse 7, The law of the Lord that he gave to the Israelites.

The law of the Lord is perfect. Reviving the soul. It actually helps us and blesses us. The testimony of the Lord is sure. Making wise the simple. The things, the testimony of the Lord, the things that he tells us we can trust and depend on.

So, what I want you to see is that theology has less to do with philosophical reasoning about what we think God might be like. And more to do with careful study and observation of what God has said he actually is like.

But there is, of course, a very big difference between science and theology. And that is this. In any other field of study, any scientific field of study, there is the hope that one day we are going to discover everything that there is to know.

I mean, there's no geologist, I don't think. I wouldn't imagine there's any geologist that thinks that rocks have some kind of secret, mystical, secret knowledge that, you know, like we're never going to attain to.

[7 : 54] You know, there is the hope that maybe not in our lifetime, but in some lifetime, we're going to discover everything that there is to know about these rocks which we're examining. Theology, however, is very different.

It takes for granted and assumes that when it comes to God, you will never figure it all out. And so the effect that theology has on you should be and often is the exact opposite of what will happen in other fields of study.

In science, the more that you learn, the more you feel you are mastering the subject. But in theology, the more you learn, the more you realize how much larger God is than you will ever comprehend.

And you find that the subject seems to be mastering you. And so we can say that theology should always make you humble. It should never make you proud.

If it makes you proud, then you're doing it wrong. You are probably only learning about God. You're actually not getting to know him. And this is very important to understand before you ever get into any kind of theological study.

[9 : 06] There is a big difference between knowing about God and knowing him personally as your father. If theology makes you know things about God but doesn't make you know him as father, it is probable and likely that you would have been better off not doing theology in the first place.

And that may sound like an exaggeration. That may sound like I'm being a little bit over the top. But it's true. Think about it. What would it look like to learn all about God but not love him as your father?

Well, that is actually a fantastic description of what Satan does. To have information about God but not love of God is the devil's work.

In 1 Corinthians 8, the scripture actually warns us of this. It tells us that knowledge puffs up but love builds up. And so we want to make sure if we're going to do theology that it's all about loving God, not just learning.

Now there is a, as I mentioned a minute ago, there is a very common misconception that a lot of people have about theology that I want to make sure we address. And that is that a lot of people think theology is a matter of academics.

[10 : 23] That it's very impractical information. That it has nothing to do with the way you actually get on living your life. And that is not true. Theology should always be practical.

It is not impractical. The author, pastor, and theologian J.I. Packer addressed this fallacy, this wrong view at the beginning of his book called Knowing God.

Which I would highly recommend to you and I would imagine some of you have read. He contrasts the way that two different people might look at a road. One person is on a balcony.

Perhaps sitting in a lounge chair with a friend. Discussing the road beneath them. Discussing the different routes that this road leads to.

Considering the different obstacles that are there. The other person is actually on the road. And he is also observing the obstacles but not out of mere curiosity.

[11 : 24] He's observing them as somebody who actually has to deal with them. And he's also considering the routes that this road will lead to. But it's not a theoretical exercise for him. He actually needs to know where he's going.

Packer says this. Balconiers, that is those who sit on balconies. And travelers may think over the same area. Yet their problems differ. Thus, for instance, in relation to evil.

The balconiers problem is to find a theoretical explanation. Of how evil can consist with God's sovereignty and goodness. But the traveler's problem is how to master evil. And bring good out of it.

Or again, in relation to sin. The balconier asks whether racial sinfulness. And personal perversity are really credible. While the traveler, knowing sin from within.

Asks what hope there is of deliverance. Or take the problem of the Godhead. That's the doctrine of the Trinity. That God is three in one. While the balconier is asking how one God can conceivably be three.

[12 : 26] What sort of unity three could have. And how three who make one can be persons. The traveler wants to know how to show proper honor. Love and trust.

Toward the three persons. Who are now together at work to bring him out of sin to glory. What I want you to see. Is that theology is not for academic theoretical armchair conversations on balconies.

It is for tired weary travelers. Who need to know how to get where they're going. Because that is what we are. That's actually the language that the Bible uses to describe us.

Scripture calls us pilgrims. Exiles. Sojourners. And the only way to know where we're going. Is to pay very close attention to the one who tells us how to get there.

And this is what Jesus was getting at when he said. One of the most profound things written about him in the whole Bible. In John 14 verse 6. Jesus said. I am the way.

[13 : 30] The truth. And the life. No one comes to the Father. Except through me. Jesus says. He affirms. We are traveling to God. But he says. There's one way.

To get there. And so we're not merely traveling to God. Jesus is the way. By which we make the trip. He's both the destination. And the road itself. And so.

Is it possible. To stick to the way of Christ. If we are not intimately familiar with who he is. I mean. Won't we quickly lose the way. Theology then.

It's not about knowing big words. It is about keeping our way. I have. I've read that those whose job it is to spot counterfeit money.

Train themselves. By spending lots of time. Looking at real money. So they spend much more time looking at real money. Than they spend looking at the fakes. And the reason is. After all that time.

[14 : 26] Looking at the real thing. They quickly can tell. When something is not the real thing. Now you and I probably. Don't pay nearly. That much. You know. We don't pay that kind of attention. To the money in our pockets. And so the result is.

When a fake gets mixed in. We're easily duped. We're none the wiser. Those who have studied the real thing though. And looked at the real thing at length. Are quick to spot the lie. Jesus.

Gave us a very sobering warning. In Matthew chapter 7. He said. So theology then.

Is the study of the one. Who is the way. The truth. And the life. And so when we're doing theology. We're keeping our eye on him. Because if we're not careful.

We risk. Wandering off. So during these very. Uncertain times. Around the coronavirus. And all the impacts.

[15 : 33] That it's had. We are going to be. Be continually. Disoriented. From the. The norms. That we become. Accustomed to. But there is.

A Christ-like way. Through all of this. However. It's narrow. It's easily missed. And the. The best way. To stick to God's way. Is to keep our eyes on him.

Observing him. Carefully. Paying attention to him. Pondering him. So that we can. Know him. Now we said. You. You can know. About God.

Without loving him. We also said. It's impossible. To love him. Without knowing him. So how do we. Take our knowledge. And make sure. It doesn't just. Stay as information.

Well there's only. One way. To take your knowing. About God. And turn it into a. Knowing of God. And a loving of God. And that is. To take what you learn. And turn it into. Prayer and praise.

[16 : 30] Theology. Should always. Lead us. Into worship. And that will be your challenge. During this course. No one. No one will be able to do. This part for you. And if you don't do it.

You'll likely. Misuse. The doctrines of God. By maybe. Enjoying them. Enjoying the ideas. More than. Enjoying God. For who he is. So my encouragement. To you.

Each week. When you watch. These videos. Is to. Take an extra. Five or ten minutes. At the end of each video. And just. Prayerfully respond. To the things. That you've learned. Maybe take a journal.

And write to the Lord. About. What he's. Putting in your heart. And. And. And reflect on. On the things. That have been discussed. Or perhaps. Turn on a song. Or a hymn.

And. And sing. Let the. The truths about God. Come out of your mouth. In song. Remember that. The study of God. Is not about. The goodness. Of studying.

[17 : 25] It's all about. The goodness. Of God. Who we want. To behold. So I'll leave you today. With this wonderful. Reminder from scripture. About what happens. When we behold.

Our great. God. Second Corinthians. Three eighteen. Says. And we all. With unveiled face. Beholding the glory. Of the Lord. Are being transformed. Into the same image.

From one degree. Of glory. To another. May this. Very concise. Introduction. To doctrine. And theology. Help you. Behold. The glory. Of the Lord.

So that you. You may be transformed. More and more. Into his likeness. And come to love him. We will. Next week. We're going to consider. The question. Who exactly.

Is God. And. We are going to turn. Our attention. To the doctrine. Of the Trinity. Until then. May God. Richly bless you. May he keep you safe. And we'll see you next Friday.