

Topics in Practical Theology – Introduction
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School
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Introduction to Practical (Applied) Theology

Theology comes from the Greek *theos* meaning “God,” and *logos* meaning “word”; hence, a word or discussion about God or simply the study of God. However, theology can be understood to be the general study of Christian doctrine – the discovery, organization, and presentation of the truths about God. To the degree that our beliefs and behavior align with God's will, as revealed in His Word, we will be good theologians. This must be the ultimate goal of the study of God.

Understanding theology not only will help us to mature as Christians, it helps us to serve others. If people are led astray by false teaching, we will be better equipped to help them. If someone is struggling with various life issues, we will be better able to bring the Word to bear on their circumstances and direct them toward particular passages of relevance. By studying theology, we are enabled to teach ourselves and others what God says, thus fulfilling the second part of the Great Commission, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

There are several presuppositions that are required if we are to adequately study theology.

1. Absolute truth exists and the only source of truth concerning God is the Bible.
2. The Bible must be approached with a plane, literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic.
3. Since the student of theology is attempting to understand what the Bible, it is necessary that the student be a Spirit led believer (1 Cor 2:10-16).
4. Since God has progressively revealed more truth about Himself and His plan through the ages, it is important to understand that the New Testament takes priority over the Old Testament as the source of doctrine.

We just finished a multi-part study on Systematic Theology. Systematic Theology is the study of theology by examining the totality of Scripture and presenting doctrines by coalescing the whole. It is a correlation of the total structure of biblical doctrine. This systematization of Bible doctrine is not found categorized in defined topics in the Bible, but rather has developed over the years. In systematic theology all major doctrines can be grouped into approximately ten subcategories:

Bibliology – Doctrine of the Bible
Theology Proper – Doctrine of God including the Trinity and God the Father
Christology – Doctrine of Christ
Pneumatology – Doctrine of the Holy Spirit
Angelology – Doctrine of Angels, Satan, and Fallen Angels
Anthropology – Doctrine of Man
Hamartiology – Doctrine of Sin
Soteriology – Doctrine of Salvation
Ecclesiology – Doctrine of the Church
Eschatology – Doctrine of Last Things

Now we will move into an area of theological study called “Practical Theology” or “Applied Theology”. Practical Theology may also be called the study of the Christian life and includes topics like: prayer, God's will and decision making, money, marriage, parenting, etc.

Topics in Practical Theology – Lesson 1 – Prayer

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Definition

Prayer – 1. a devout petition to god or an object of worship; 2. a spiritual communion with God or an object of worship, as in supplication, thanksgiving, adoration, or confession. (dictionary.com)

Prayer is personal communication with God (Grudem).

Prayer is the act of pouring out our heart to our creator in adoration/praise, repentance/confession, thankfulness, and supplication.

The Westminster Catechism (Question 178) defines prayer this way:

Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God^a, in the name of Christ^b, by the help of his Spirit^c, with confession of our sins^d, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies^e.

^a Psa 62:8; ^b John 16:23b; ^c Rom 8:26; ^d Psa 32:5-6; Dan 9:4a; ^e Phil 4:6

Some Applicable Theology Proper

The character of God in relation to prayer.

1. Immutability – God is unchanging and unchangeable; never inconsistent or growing or developing.

¹⁷Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. James 1:17

2. Sovereignty – God is the supreme ruler – in control of all events. He is sovereign over nature (Gen 1:1; Job 37:3-13; Amos 4:7-9); controls the rulers of nations (1 Chron 5:26; Prov 21:1) and entire nations (Psa 33:10-11; Isa 40:15); is sovereign over the course of history (Isa 46:10); sovereignly works evil for His good (Gen 50:20; Acts 2:22-23; 4:27-28); is sovereign over the plans and actions of man (Prov 16:9; James 4:13-17); and is sovereign over the hearts and wills of man (Rom 9:18)

²⁵Have you not heard? Long ago I did it; From ancient times I planned it Now I have brought it to pass, ... 2 Kings 19:25

²"I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. Job 42:2

³But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. Psa 115:3

²¹Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand. Prov 19:21

¹The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes. Prov 21:1

²⁴The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, "Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand, Isa 14:24

⁹"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, ¹⁰Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; ¹¹Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it. Isa 46:9-11

¹¹also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, Eph 1:11

3. Omniscience – God knows all actual and possible things.

²¹"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Matt 11:21

4. Omnipotence – God is all-powerful and able to accomplish anything consistent with His nature.

⁶Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Rev 19:6

The truth of God's omnipotence clearly should give us confidence in our prayers since God is capable of doing anything that is consistent with His nature. Nothing is too difficult for Him. However, what about the other attributes (omniscience, immutable, and sovereign)? Why should we pray at all? Because:

1. God commands us to pray – out of love for Christ (John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 1:6) we should yield to this command even if we cannot reconcile the Biblical truth regarding God's attributes with the command to pray.

¹Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, Luke 18:1

¹⁷pray without ceasing; 1 Thess 5:17

²Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; Col 4:2

Jesus also clearly expected prayer to be a part of His disciples' lives.

⁵"When you pray, ... Matt 6:5

⁶"But you, when you pray, ... Matt 6:6

⁷"And when you are praying, ... Matt 6:7

⁹"Pray, then, in this way:... Matt 6:9

2. Jesus' example – Jesus prayed often and fervently. Even though Jesus was Himself God very God and knew all things including that he was to be *delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God*, ... to be *nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men* (Acts 2:23), He saw no conflict between pouring His heart out to the Father and submitting to the Father's plan.

³⁵In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. Mark 1:35

²³After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. Matt 14:23

¹²It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. Luke 6:12

³⁵And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. ³⁶And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will." ³⁷And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?" ³⁸"Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." ³⁹Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. Mark 14:35-39

²⁵Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. Heb 7:25

3. God responds to prayer – The Scriptures are clear in teaching and example [Moses (Ex 32:10-14); Jabez (1 Chron 4:10); Elijah (James 5:17-18); Daniel (Dan 9-10); Amos (Amos 7); Peter and the believers (Acts 12)] that God responds to prayer.

⁷"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸"For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Matt 7:6-8

⁶And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you. Luke 17:6

¹⁶"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. John 15:16

4. God's decree includes the means to accomplish that decree – God is sovereign in all things, yet uses various means to bring about that sovereign purpose. God has elected certain individuals for salvation, but He uses the preaching of the gospel to bring them to Himself (Acts 10). Similarly, God has ordained all things that will come to pass and He uses prayer to accomplish that means.

God has decreed that certain events shall come to pass, but He has also decreed that these events shall come to pass through the means He has appointed for their accomplishment. God has elected certain ones to be saved, but He has also decreed that these ones shall be saved through the preaching of the Gospel. The Gospel, then, is one of the appointed means for the working out of the eternal counsel of the Lord; and prayer is another. God has decreed the means as well as the end, and among the means is prayer. *The Sovereignty of God* by A. W. Pink

God's plan is so comprehensive that it not only includes the final destinies of things but also includes the secondary, creaturely processes that work together to accomplish these ends. *Pray With Your Eyes Open* by Richard Pratt

Example: Jeremiah's prophecy of the length of the Babylonian captivity (70 years) and Daniel's prayer (Dan 9).

¹¹This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. ¹²Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation. Jer 25:11-12

¹⁹O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name." Dan 9:19

Example: Abraham, Abimelech and Sarah in Gen 20.

Example: Job and Eliphaz in Job 42.

God uses Prayer to Bless Us

God uses prayer to bless us. Not to get what we want for selfish motives, but to get what is in accord with God's perfect sovereign will for us.

Good Gifts

¹¹"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! Matt 7:11

³You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. James 4:3

Peace

⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil 4:6-7

Joy

²⁴"Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full. John 16:24

Encouragement

¹Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, Luke 18:1

Fruit

⁷"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. John 15:7-8

Mercy and grace in time of need

¹⁶Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Heb 4:16

Barriers to Prayer

Unrepentant sin

¹⁸If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear; Psa 66:18

Wrong motives

³You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. James 4:3

¹⁴This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

¹⁵And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. 1 John 5:14-15

Idolatry

³"Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity Should I be consulted by them at all? Ezek 14:3

Hypocrisy

⁵"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. Matt 6:5

Anger

⁸Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. 1 Tim 2:8

Indifference to needs of poor

¹³He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be answered. Prov 21:13

Unforgiving spirit

²⁵"Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. Mark 11:25

Inconsideration towards wife

⁷You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. 1 Pet 3:7

Persistent Prayer

¹Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, Luke 18:1

⁵Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; ⁶for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸"I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. ⁹"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰"For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. Luke 11:5-10

The "Lord's Prayer"

A central passage on the topic of prayer is Matt 6:5-15. The "Lord's prayer" or "disciple's prayer" or "model prayer" teaches some significant aspects of prayer. The sermon on the mount was preached by Jesus during His "Great Galilean Ministry" approximately one and a half years into His earthly ministry.

The "Sermon on the Mount" explains what it is like to be a kingdom person and what a kingdom person is like. Gordon Kemble's Bible Survey Class Notes on Matthew

By this time in the Lord's ministry He had demonstrated a commitment to prayer for the disciples (Luke 5:16; 6:12). Now He will detail three errors concerning prayer and provide a model for His disciples.

- I. Error #1 – Praying with wrong motives (6:5-6)
 - A. Prayer should not be for the proud purpose of being seen (c.f. Luke 18:9-14)

Hypocrite – an actor, stage player, pretender
 - B. Prayer should be to God – Not to be seen, but privately with God (c.f. Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12)

inner room: tameion – storage chamber; a chamber esp. an inner chamber; a secret room; i.e. privately in contrast to publically for the purpose of being seen.

your Father: indicating a personal relationship

sees... secret: omniscient
- II. Error #2 – Disengaging our minds – Prayer should involve our intellect and emotions (6:7)
 - A. Prayer should not be meaningless repetition: refers to idle, thoughtless chatter.

Meaningless repetition: battalogeō – to repeat the same things over and over, to use many idle words, to babble.

Jesus here is not condemning persistence, He is condemning the mindless recitation of spiritual sounding phrases or formulas.
 - B. Prayer should be pouring out our heart to our Father (6:8)
- III. Error #3 – Harboring sin in our hearts (6:14-15)

Since prayer is communion with God we must make sure that our relationship with Him is right. We cannot do this if we are harboring unforgiveness toward others. (Psa 66:18)

IV. Prayer has Four Parts – This has to do with personal prayer because the passage context deals with personal righteousness.

“in this way” – not a formula for liturgy, but an example of the types of things to pray for.

A. Adoration (6:9)

Prayer should begin with a reverence for God. Praying in this manner is praying to our Father – to our personal, loving Father (8 times as Father in 6:5-14) whom we have a relationship with. Our Father dwells in holiness and is holy.

Examples:

Ex 15:1-3; 1 Sam 2:1-2; 1 Kings 8:23-24

⁴I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said, "Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, ⁵we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. Dan 9:4-5

B. Subjection – That I would be in-line with His will. (6:10)

C. Requests (c.f. Heb 4:14-16)

Prayer for physical necessities (6:11)

Repentance (6:12)

Debts = spiritual debts (sins) (see Luke 11:4)

Strength through trials and obedience in temptations (6:13)

Temptation: could mean temp or test. Since God does not tempt (James 1:13)

“Do not allow us to be led into temptation.” Word Pictures in the NT

D. Praise (6:13)

So we have 3 errors in prayer: 1) to pray to be heard and not to God; 2) to disengage our mind and use meaningless repetition; and 3) to pray while harboring sin in our hearts. And we have a model that has 4 parts: 1) Adoration of God; 2) Subjection to His sovereign and moral will; 3) Requests; and 4) Praise.

Things to Pray For:

- Matt 5:44 pray for those who persecute you,
Matt 19:13 For children
Matt 26:41 deliverance from temptation
Luke 21:36 But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.
Luke 22:32 that your faith may not fail
Luke 22:40 Pray that you may not enter into temptation.
Rom 1:10 Direction in Ministry
Rom 10:1 Salvation of individuals
2 Cor 1:11 For ministries / answered prayer brings thanks to God
2 Cor 9:14 For all believers
2 Cor 13:7 That believers may do no wrong / do right
2 Cor 13:9 For spiritual maturity
Eph 1:18 That we would know the greatness of our salvation
Eph 6:19 for boldness and words in evangelism
Phil 1:9 love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment
Phil 1:19 for the trials of believers
Col 1:3 continually for others
Col 1:9 that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,
Col 4:3 doors of ministry opportunity
Col 4:12 that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.
2 Thess 1:11 that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power,
2 Thess 3:1 that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified
1 Tim 2:1 that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,
Philemon 1:6 that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.
Jam 5:16 therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.
3 John 1:2 I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.