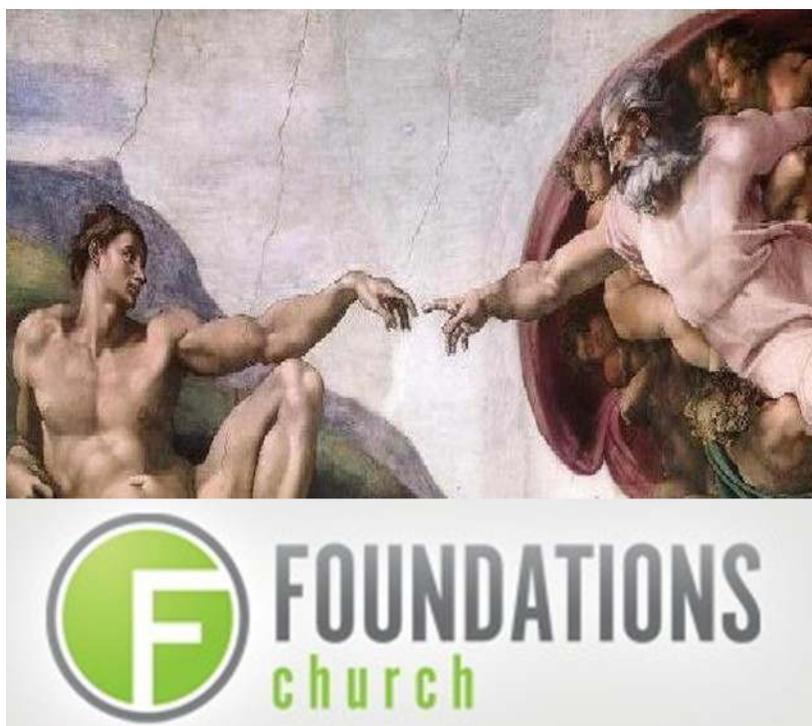


Foundations Theological Training Course



Jesus said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

--□--□ Matthew 22:37

Key References

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Foundations Theological Training Course

Week 1 – Introduction to Theology and
the Bible

1) What is theology?

"The study of the nature of God and the relationship of the human and divine." (Merriam-Webster, Concise Encyclopedia)

According to Millard Erickson in his book *Introducing Christian Doctrine*...

"Christian theology seeks to understand the God revealed in the Bible and to provide a Christian understanding of God's creation, particularly human beings and their condition, and God's redemptive work."

"Christian doctrine is simply statements of the most fundamental beliefs that the Christian has, beliefs about the nature of God, about His actions, about us who are His creatures, and about what He has done to bring us into relationship with Him."

According to Erickson...

1. Theology is biblical. Its primary content comes from the Old and New Testament. We can learn about God through the creation and through what we call general revelation, but the primary content of theology comes from God's Word, referred to as special revelation.
2. Theology is systematic. It doesn't look at the content of individual books separately but attempts to draw together as a coherent whole, what the entirety of Scripture says about particular topics, such as sin or salvation.
3. Theology is done in the context of human culture. Particularly in its more technical sense, theology must relate the teachings of Scripture to data and information that are generated from other disciplines that deal with the same subject matter, including areas of science and history.
4. Theology is contemporary. An important outcome of theological studies is to explain timeless theological concepts so that they are understandable and applicable to current activities and events.
5. Theology is practical. The understanding of sound biblical doctrine is not simply an academic exercise but meant to be learned, applied, and practiced in our daily lives as Christ followers.

2) Why study theology?

Knowing and understanding the basic teachings of the Bible is important for every believer. It enables us...

- To be effective ambassadors

- To glorify God and to enjoy Him
- To have an accurate understanding of God's will for our lives, i.e. the Bible is our 'instruction manual'
- So that we can teach our children the ways of God
- To guard ourselves, our families, and our church against false teaching and to distinguish truth and error, i.e. to recognize the deceptiveness of the world and the evil one
- For personal enrichment and a deepened love and appreciation for God
- To become a **mature, Christ-centered disciple**, i.e. one who...
 - thinks and lives biblically
 - who walks in the power of the Holy Spirit
 - and who is engaged in the mission of Christ

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4)

...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (Ephesians 4:14)

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. (Deuteronomy 6: 6-7)

3) How should we study theology?

We should study theology with...

- **Prayer** – that the Holy Spirit would open the eyes of our hearts and teach us His truth
- **Humility** – God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble
- **Reason** – We are exhorted to “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your **mind**.*”

- **Help from others** – recognizing that there are those whom God has given to the body of Christ who have gifts of wisdom, discernment, and teaching
- By collecting and **understanding** all of the relevant passages of scripture on a specific topic – the context for any single passage is the entire rest of the Bible
- **Rejoicing** and praise – how can we study the very words of God without engagement and passion!
- The goal of personal **application**

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.. (Ephesians 1:18-19)

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. (James 1:22-23)

4) Why is the Bible so important?

Key terms...

1. Revelation – God has revealed His truth to man
 - Through the creation, nature, and our conscience (General Revelation, i.e. God the Creator)
 - Through the Holy Scriptures (Special Revelation, i.e. God the Redeemer)
2. Inspiration – God guided the authors of Scripture, giving them His words while empowering them to use their unique and individual qualities of human expression.
 - At Foundations Church, we believe in the verbal and plenary inspiration of Scriptures. (Verbal = each individual word and phrase; Plenary = the entirety of the Bible).
3. Illumination – God enlightens His followers through the Holy Spirit within to understand His words and its application to our lives.

Four Key Characteristics of the Bible...

1. **Authority**

“The authority of scripture means that all the words in the Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.” -- Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

- The Bible is the inspired word of God – both the Old and New Testaments.
- At Foundations Church, we believe in the inerrancy and infallibility of the Scriptures.
 - Inerrancy: that the Bible is without error in its original transcriptions
 - Infallibility: that the Bible teaches truth and does not lead astray

All Scripture is inspired¹ by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (1 Timothy 3:16-17)

¹Theopneustos: Literally, *God-breathed*

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved¹ by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

¹Enegko: Literally, *Borne up or carried like a burst of wind*

2. Clarity

“The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it.” -- Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

- Although some passages may seem difficult to understand, the Bible is written so that all we need to know for salvation and for abundant living can be clearly understood without formal theological education.
- This does not mean that we cannot learn more from the scriptures that is very useful for living and builds our relationship with God if we will...
- Become a diligent student of the entire Bible
- Learn from the wisdom of gifted teachers
- Master the use of key Bible resources

3. Necessity

“The necessity of Scripture means that the Bible is necessary for knowing the gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for knowing God’s will, but is not necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about God’s character and moral law.” --Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

- If we are to know God personally as our Lord and Savior, it requires that we know and understand, either by reading or hearing, the main content of Gospel as recorded in the Bible.

4. Sufficiency

“The sufficiency of Scripture means Scripture contained all of the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly.” --Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

- We do not know everything there is to know, but we know all that we need to know and all that God wants us to know. (1 Corinthians 13:12)
- There are many mysteries in Scripture and in life.

5) Who chose the books of the Bible and how?

Canonicity

- The canon of Scripture consists of all of the books that belong in the Bible – 66 in total: 39 OT books and 27 NT books.
- Inclusion was based on both internal and external evidence.

Five tests for canonicity of the Old Testament:

1. The New Testament recognized its authority.

“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Luke 24:44

2. The extra-biblical Jewish writers recognized it.

“After the latter Prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel.” Babylonian Talmud

3. It is consistent with other revelation -- without inconsistencies or contradictions
4. It was written by a prophet or someone of divine authority.

Examples: Moses, David, the prophets, and the apostles

5. Christ recognized its authority.

- The Scripture Christ used in His teachings is the same we use today.
- The Scripture of the Palestinian Jews in the 1st Century contains the exact same 39 books that are in the OT today.

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill..., until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” Matthew 5:17, 18

What about the Apocrypha?

- The 11 additional books (7 plus extra passages) were not accepted by the 1st century Jews, either Palestinian or Alexandrian.
- The early church did not recognize them as the inspired word of God.

New Testament Canonicity – General Comments:

- The NT affirms the authority of the words of the Apostles as being equivalent to the words of God.
- The NT accepts the other NT books as being Scripture.

Four tests for canonicity of the New Testament:

1. Was it written by an **apostle** or someone closely associated with them whose writings the Apostles sanctioned and/or recognized?
2. Does it **agree in content** with the rest of Scripture, without contradiction?

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! Galatians 1:8,9

3. Is it **self-authenticating** bearing claims of inspiration?

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. Thessalonians 2:13

4. Did the **early church** accept it as the inspired word of God?
- The early church recognized the books of the NT as God’s word and there has been no significant debate on this since around AD 400.

“One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognising their innate worth and general apostolic authority, direct or indirect. The first ecclesiastical councils to classify the canonical books were both held in North Africa — at Hippo Regius in 393 and at Carthage in 397 — but what these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities but to codify what was already the general practice of those communities.” F.F. Bruce, The Canon of the New Testament

Some additional considerations:

“The Bible has a unique makeup. It is different from any other book that has ever been composed. Over forty different authors wrote it over a period of fifteen hundred years. These authors came from all walks of life. They include fishermen, shepherds, a doctor, and a tax collector. The biblical authors lived on three different continents -- Africa, Asia, and Europe. They also wrote under a number of different circumstances -- including persecution and prison. The authors of Scripture wrote in three different languages -- Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The Bible was written in a number of different literary forms such as narrative, poetry, and law. The writers of the various books cover many different topics such as the existence of God, the creation and purpose of humankind, the explanation for the origin of evil and the coming of the Savior. Although most of the writers did not personally know the other writers, they all speak on these topics with complete harmony and continuity. This marvelous feature of Scripture is a testimony to it being the Word of God -- exactly what it claims to be.”

Source: http://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/stewart.cfm?id=269

6) How do we interpret scripture?

Key terms

- Interpretation – understanding the meaning of Scriptures
- Hermeneutics – rules and methods of biblical interpretation
- Exegesis – the process of elucidating the original intent of a biblical text, “bringing it out” through study

General concepts

- **Scripture** interprets Scripture
- The Bible should be interpreted **literally**
- Literal interpretation, however, means that we should interpret the Bible **the way it is written**, treating...
 - Poetry as poetry
 - Historical narratives as historical narratives
 - Hyperbole as hyperbole
 - Parables as parables
 - Figures of speech as figures of speech
 - Phenomenological and anthropomorphic language as such

Principles of Biblical Interpretation

- Christians are the only ones who can truly understand Scripture, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit within.
- Be aware of your preunderstandings and prejudice, including your theology, religious tradition, culture, family background, emotional makeup, socioeconomics, politics, race/ethnicity, etc.
- View the text through the intentions of the author (his purpose in writing).
- Remember the grammatical context: Testament, book, section, paragraph, sentence, words
- View the text from within its historical and cultural context: author, date, circumstances, religious and political culture, etc.
- Consider issues of variation in writing style (Paul versus James regarding declarative versus demonstrative righteousness)
- View passages within the framework of progressive revelation... Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Matthew, Paul, and John
- The author had a specific intention in writing; therefore, while there may be many potential applications for a single passage, there is only one correct interpretation, even though there may exist different opinions on what that might be.

7) How does Foundations Church view major and minor theological issues?

On issues of orthodoxy and biblical morality... standing firm and without compromise. On issues of theological variation... showing deference and mutual respect. On all issues... demonstrating grace, mercy, humility, and charity.

8) What does Foundations Church believe about the Bible?

The Bible

We believe in the inspired word of God -- that the holy scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, were spoken by God and recorded in the words of human authors. We believe that the Bible is without error in its original writings and that it represents God's complete revealed will regarding salvation. We believe in the infallibility of the Scriptures, and that the Bible is the ultimate authority upon which all human knowledge and actions are to be judged. The Bible is to be believed, obeyed, and trusted in all matters of life.

-- Foundations Church – Statement of Faith, paragraph 2

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is it important that the Bible is the basis for our beliefs?
2. Will the Bible definitively answer every question that we have? Why or why not?
3. Why is there so much disagreement among Christians about the teaching of the Bible?
4. What are some common mistakes that are made in biblical interpretation?
5. Which statement is correct?
 - A. For any particular passage in the Bible, there are many interpretations but only one application?
 - B. For any particular passage in the Bible, there are many interpretations and many applications?
 - C. For any particular passage in the Bible, there is one interpretation with many possible applications?
 - D. For any particular passage in the Bible, there are endless possibilities for truth that may or may not be embraced, depending on personal preference?