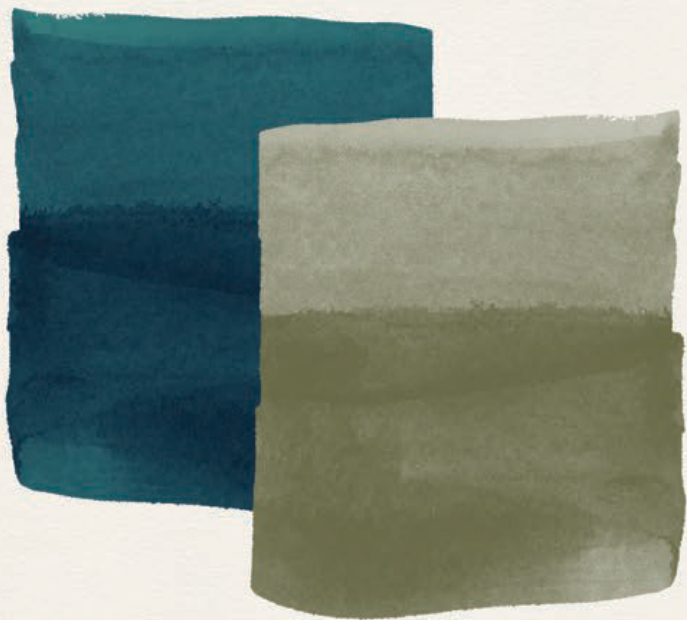


QUICK THEOLOGY

Interpreting the Bible Correctly



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Published by Every Woman a Theologian LLC

Cover design by Eric Novak.

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Printed in the United States of America.

INTRODUCTION

This booklet explores how we can make our theology sound. Everyone, even atheists, has a theology—a view of God and how He works. For Christians, the question is: is your view consistent with God’s nature? Is the theology you hold the one God teaches in Scripture? Is it the theology that leads to the freedom and holiness that Jesus has for you? This may be repeat information. But even if you know, hearing it again equips you to share with others who think theology does not matter.

Before we get into practical details, let’s define what theology is. Many Christians associate theology with dusty books and seminary degrees—things beyond them or that they do not have time for—but it is not about a library of books or going to seminary. Theology is about cultivating a view of God, a curiosity about our beliefs, and a willingness to own our faith through wrestling with difficult topics.

Some people inherit faith from their parents. They grew

up in a Christian home or were raised in the Church. Even people who did not grow up that way might spend 10 or 15 years in a church without questioning their beliefs or checking what they are taught against Scripture. Even those who do check their theology against Scripture may not own that faith for themselves. How much impact does following Jesus have on your life? A deep, thriving, growing faith will affect every choice you make and show in every relationship you have.

Our theology already dictates our choices. It affects how we parent our kids: when we teach them right and wrong; when we explain why they need to honor others; or why they should respect their parents. All of that is theological. When we discuss workplace rules we do not agree with ethically, we communicate our theology. When we decide how much time to give Bible study and how much time to give to other commitments, we base our priorities on our theology.

We must understand what we believe about God, His purpose for us, our humanity, our salvation, and the end times to know how to live well. That is why this is worth discussing again and again. We only have one life: one chance to live well for God and with God. This should not make

us live in paranoia; we should live with intention, and we should ground that intentionality in our understanding of God's nature. This understanding is not just for seminarians and people with big book budgets. All our questions about God's nature are answered in Scripture.

CHAPTER ONE

Growth in Theology

If we do not pursue theological growth, we will have a static understanding of God. Where is the harm in that? To understand, we must first understand the damage an unhealthy or unbiblical theology can cause.

Suppose you hold a theology of guilt or legalism: “I go to church three times a week. If I do not, God is angry at me.” Where did that theology come from? Maybe no one expressly taught it to you. Maybe you absorbed it from the culture you grew up in. Perhaps your family went to church three times a week, and your parents seemed anxious if anything prevented that. What consequences did they fear? God’s judgment or human judgment? Perhaps they did not

know themselves. But you absorbed their fear into your view of God: it became part of your theology. As you got older, perhaps going to church three times a week became impractical. That guilty weight could make you question whether going to church less than three times a week is worth anything at all. Or perhaps you go to church three times a week, regardless of the struggle. Pride in that decision might make you look down on people who do not do the same.

Does Scripture say you have to be in church three times a week to please God? Hebrews 10:24, says:

“We should keep on encouraging each other to be thoughtful and to do helpful things. Some people have given up the habit of meeting for worship, but we must not do that. We should keep on encouraging each other, especially since you know that the day of the Lord’s coming is getting closer.”

According to biblical scholar Justo González, at the time that was written, the early church met early Sunday morning or around midnight on Saturday for the breaking of bread, the apostle’s teaching, and prayer. With this context, we know we should prioritize spiritual growth in Christian

community, but we do not have specific instructions on how often that has to happen.

This is one example of how an improper or unbiblical theology can lead to guilt, shame, or even sin. We must check our beliefs against Scripture, and the proper context of that Scripture. That is how we know our theology is true, good, and leading us to holiness and freedom. If we do not check what we believe, we will remain in a static, unhealthy place. From there, we can easily slide into legalism (idolatry to a personal version of God, enforcing our convictions as if they were God's law, trying to be "good" for fear of other's opinions, and the pride or bitterness that comes of those things) or licentiousness (abusing our freedoms, living for our own desires and pleasures, exchanging core truths for personally appealing doctrine, addictions, and illicit sex). Studying our theology helps us better understand God's heart and better balance holiness and freedom.