

Reformed Theology Basic Terms & Definitions

Prolegomena (*Principia*/Fundamental Principles, Bibliology, Terms; Sola Scriptura) – definitions of “Theology”

- Theology is the study, teaching, or *doctrine* of living to God the Father through God the Son by God the Spirit according to God’s Word in the context of God’s society, kingdom, or church (see William Perkins, Petrus Van Mastricht, Ryan McGraw, Mark Jones, etc.).
- Theology is the *science*, or theoretical knowledge, of an infinite subject, with a necessary correlation to heavenly kingdom living (see James Henley Thornwell, John Lafayette Girardeau, both building on John Calvin).

Theology Proper (God [being, Persons, attributes] and His decrees; Unconditional Election) – **Soli Deo Gloria!**

Creation, Man, & Sin (execution of God’s decrees) – e.g., Days of Creation, Creation Ordinances, Works of Providence, Imago Dei, Fall, Total Depravity, Fourfold State of Man, Covenant Theology

Christ & Salvation (Christology, Soteriology) – e.g., Deity/Humanity of Christ in Hypostatic Union, Incarnation, Offices (Prophet, Priest, King as Redeemer), Limited/Definitive Atonement, Irresistible Grace (Holy Spirit, Effectual Calling), Perseverance of the Saints, Assurance, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus, Cross & Glory, Savior & Lord, Repentance & Faith

Ecclesiology (Study of the Church) – Church (Polity; *esse & bene esse*) & State & Society & Education & Benevolence/Distribution

Eschatology (Study of Last Things) – Death, Resurrection, Intermediate/Final State, New Heavens & New Earth, Christ’s Return/Parousia, Judgment, Rapture, Millennium, **Soli Deo Gloria!**

Excerpts from *The Elder & His Work* by David Dickson (1821-85)

pp. 15f

Not that we must be theologians, able to grapple learnedly with all heresies or controversies; but we should be well read in our Bibles, and able to do what Aquila and Priscilla did to Apollos. [Church officers] should be men to a certain extent “established, strengthened, settled,” not “novices,” whom the elevation to office in the church is likely to make heady, forward, crotchety, conceited... If an elder is to discharge the duty laid upon him in scripture – to “reprove, rebuke and exhort,” to “be able by sound doctrine to exhort and convince gainsayers” – the word of God must be the man of his counsel, his daily companion.

Let me not be thought to discourage elders [and deacons] from the study of theology as a systematic science. Any one who has studied the Confession of Faith, as all elders should do, is no mean (*or, insignificant*) theologian. And it is a great strength to the church of Christ that many of her [elders and deacons] should be well up in doctrinal controversy. Elders [and deacons] who have time and ability for this should give themselves to it. No heresy ever becomes extinct, as some volcanoes are said to do, for they all come out of the old human heart, which is as full of evil as ever. But the old heresies assume new forms well worthy of study and detection; and the world listens to an exposure of them more readily from [non-ministers] than from ministers, even though not half so able or conclusive.

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The usefulness of an elder [or deacon] will depend in the long run more on his character than on his gifts and knowledge. Quiet Christian consistency will give weight to his words of advice and be a daily lesson to all around. His walk and conversation, his style of living, his companions and friends, his geniality, his amusements, will all have an important influence, not only on his own family, but on the people of his district and congregation. Young people especially notice, and get good or evil from, much that they do not speak about to others. They should learn from us what a Christian is like, not by the frequent use of certain pious expressions, but by the clear, transparent outflow of a life “hid with Christ in God.” Brethren, “what manner of persons ought we [church officers] to be in all holy conversation and godliness?”