

Theology 1 - Prolegomena Part 1

Definition

- “Prolegomena” – the things that are spoken before hand – i.e. the introduction to a topic
- in our case, an introduction to theology and an introduction to theological thinking

Introductory Thoughts

- any average Christian should be able to use proper theological terminology
- we shouldn't be scared off from words like “doctrine” (i.e. teaching) or “theology” (the study of God)
- if you get a chance to go to General Motors Institute, great! But if you don't have a degree from GMI you can still learn to drive a car really well! Just because some people get doctorate degrees in theology, don't let it stop you from learning the Bible for yourself! It's your birthright.

Why Study Doctrine?

- “and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching,” (1 Tim 1:9,10) - we will know the antidote to evil by embracing sound doctrine
- “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Tim 4:16) – if Timothy needed to watch his doctrine carefully, what about us?
- “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.” (2 Tim 4:3,4) – people will not endure sound doctrine but they will still go to church... to hear what they want to hear
- “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.” (Titus 1:9) – elders particularly must hold to sound doctrine
- “But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.” (Titus 2:1)

The Christian Life vs. Studying Doctrine?

- when building a home, why would you choose walls vs. a foundation? You shouldn't be required to choose
- it is possible to focus only on living the Christian life. It is possible to focus only on doctrine. But why would you want to choose?
- according to Romans 12 a holy life is an aspect of our worship, but it is not the totality of our worship
- much of our worship is based on what we believe about the Lord Jesus Christ
- we attend the breaking of bread to express our joy and satisfaction in what we know to be true about the Lord Jesus Christ. And how do we know what is true about the Lord Jesus Christ? Because it is written in the Bible.

“Let's Just Love Jesus”

- our Enemy is now saying “Let's not get all caught up with words. Let's just love Christ.”
- do you see the problem with this statement?
- it dismisses the words, it dismisses the Bible, it dismisses the only authoritative source of spiritual truth, it dismisses the only true record of Christ's life and teachings, it dismisses all God wants us to know about what it really means to love Christ! All we are left with is our own ideas of what it means to love Christ
- I love the Christ of the Bible, not the Christ of my own imagination

The Great Questions

- every theology, philosophy or moral system must answer certain questions if it is to have any relevance
- the first question is, **“how can we know?”**. This is the field of epistemology, the branch of philosophy that deals with knowledge. One of the central questions of epistemology is, “how can we know?”
- All men have 3 sources of epistemology, while Christians have a 4th - we have special revelation – we have the
- the second question is, **“what is the basis for moral behaviour?”**. Does morality exist? Is there a moral code?
- we all want our children to grow up to be moral. We all want our children to have good values
- But if you want your children to have good values, what do you mean by good values?
- is tolerance the ultimate virtue?
- G.K. Chesterton said, “Tolerance is the virtue of a man without convictions”, for reasons that are about to become apparent
- tolerance of evil is not a virtue. It is only when we are intolerant of evil, that evil is vanquished
- to be tolerant of good is redundant. Nobody declares themselves to be tolerant of motherhood and apple pie
- the only place where tolerance is a virtue is in toleration of that which is morally neutral

- so for example there are many cultural differences, customs, and languages. These are morally neutral, and so we must be very tolerant of them
 - but that simply brings us back to our question, “what is the basis for moral behaviour?”. Because if you want to be tolerant to that which is morally neutral... how do you know it is morally neutral?
 - Christians know what is good, what is bad and what is neutral because we have a book that tells us!
- the third question is, **“does a human being have value?”**
 - there is a system of thought called naturalism or materialism that tells us that everything is the product of matter
 - this system would tell us that all reality can be described by mathematics and physics. If our equations were sophisticated enough, we could predict any event in the future by knowing the position of atoms at some point in the past and their velocity
 - but the ultimate end of such a philosophy is nihilism, because if the philosophy of materialism is correct, you have no free will
 - if a naturalistic/materialist philosophy is correct, there is no essential difference between life and non-life, between a human being and a rock
 - our theology does have an answer to the question, “does a human being have value?” (Gen 1:27, Psalm 139:13,14)
 - we have a value completely apart from what we accomplish, or what we own, or how we are thought of by others
 - God has invested each person with a human dignity, and there is a great sanctity to life
- the fourth question is, **“how did we get here?”**
 - again, naturalism has an answer - the Big Bang - but philosophically speaking, this answer is not very satisfactory
 - the idea of a "Big Bang" leads to determinism, in other words that you have no free will and that existence is merely a matter of mathematics and physics
 - again, lets state that the natural ultimate outcome of determinism is nihilism. If you have no free will, why bother?
 - not all determinists are nihilists, but all consistent determinists are nihilists
 - Christianity has an answer to this question, “how did we get here?” - Genesis 1:1 tells us, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”. Indeed we see purpose in our creation
- another question a system of thought must answer is, **“what are the moral obligations of the conscience?”**
 - it's clear that we all have a conscience, but the conscience is not a perfect guide to what is right and wrong
 - Christianity is able to explain the value of the conscience, the limitations of the conscience, and how the conscience got the way it is – the Fall of Man
- the sixth question is, **“does objective truth exist?”**
 - creation demonstrates the reality of objective truth. e.g. $1 + 1 = 2$ (ALWAYS)
 - by our actions, we demonstrate that we really do believe in objective truth
 - a man can philosophize all he wants about post-modernism, but in the end he wants to use a bridge that has been approved by a licensed professional engineer
 - as Christians we should not be surprised that real objective truth exists - we have a book which claims to be authoritative - and it could only be authoritative if it is true
 - furthermore we know that truth is not just a concept, but is personified in the One who said of Himself, “I am the way, the truth and the life”
- there is one final and ultimate question to raise - **“Is there a God?”**
 - of course this is the ultimate question, because it defines the nature of reality
 - if there is a God, then matter is not the ultimate reality
 - if there is a God, then learning about that God is the ultimate aim of life - nothing could be more important
 - and yet most of the people in this world live with a pattern of thought that believes that there is a God... and that's it
 - Christianity has an answer to this question
 - God has revealed His person, His attributes, His expectations, and His master plan of reconciliation
 - when you think about it, only Christianity has a really good answer to the question of how a holy God can be reconciled with sinful man
 - Incidentally – before the Judeo-Christian revelation, every other religion concerned itself with fertility. The Old Testament introduces the problem of a Holy God and sinful man

Theology 2 - Prolegomena Part 2

Statistics

- “For the purposes of the research, a biblical worldview was defined as believing that absolute moral truths exist; that such truth is defined by the Bible; and firm belief in six specific religious views. Those views were that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life; God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe and He stills rules it today; salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned; Satan is real; a Christian has a responsibility to share their faith in Christ with other people; and the Bible is accurate in all of its teachings.” (Barna)
- 71% of Southern Baptist pastors held a Biblical worldview
- 51% of non-denominational Protestant Pastors held a Biblical worldview
- 13% of members of non-denominational Protestant churches have a Biblical worldview
- 9% of born again Christians in the United States believe these basics of the faith

Epistemology

- epistemology is the branch of philosophy that deals with knowledge - “how can we know?”
- there are at least 3 sources of knowledge available to all mankind
 1. observation
 2. instruction
 3. reason
- so we see that each of these sources of knowledge is subject to error, intentional or unintentional
- this is not surprising to us, because we live in a fallen world
- questions related to Epistemology for the religious believer
 - would an all-powerful God leave us with only 3 faulty sources of knowledge?
 - would God leave us without an authoritative source of knowledge?
 - would God leave us with the exact same sources of knowledge we would have if that God did not exist?

Deism

- the Deist says there is a God who created the universe, and left it to run according to natural laws, and that God takes no part in the affairs of men (e.g. the watchmaker)
- 3 problems with Deism
 1. what use is such a God, who would create us but then take no further part in the affairs of men
 2. why would a God create us to be so different than himself?
 3. why would God leave us with the exact same sources of knowledge we would have if that God did not exist?
- there is a God, He would provide us with a fourth source of knowledge, and that is revelation

Revelation

- “God unveiling Himself to mankind” (Enns)
- general revelation - builds on the first 3 sources of knowledge – observation, instruction and reason
- special revelation - the authoritative source of knowledge - the Bible
- this special revelation, the Bible, is this 4th source of knowledge

General Revelation

- general revelation is that unveiling of God to all mankind, without the Bible
- nature – Psalm 19:1-3, Romans 1:18-20
- conscience – Romans 2:15
- Divine Providence - Acts 14:17
- one could even say general revelation is demonstrated in history and in the natural consequences of human action
- General Revelation is a clouded witness in that mankind is fallen and sinful. It is not authoritative
- Creations and General Revelation
 - while General Revelation doesn't require a young earth, it does require a created earth
 - every attempt to deny creation is an attempt to close off the revelation present in creation.

Proofs for the Existence of God

- none of these “proofs” are rigorous in a mathematical sense
- as Christians we do not expect proofs to be unassailable, unquestionable and beyond refute
- Hebrews 11:6 tells us, “**And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**”
- as Christians we know we never come up with an irrefutable argument for Christianity, because the Bible tells us
- so why bother with these proofs for the existence of God? They help lead our thoughts in a certain direction
- proofs include:
 - Cosmological Argument – the existence of a creation implies the need of a creator who is apart from the creation
 - Teleological Argument – design implies a designer
 - Ontological Argument – this argument states that if God did not exist He would be lacking one perfection (that is to say, he would be lacking existence). But if He lacks one perfection He would not be perfect. Since God is perfect by definition, He must also have existence
 - Moral Law Argument – based on Romans 2:12-15 and the existence of the conscience. Moral laws imply a moral law giver.
 - Religious Need Argument – humans have a need for God. If we need something, it must exist
 - Argument from Joy – since humans have an innate desire for immortality, there must be life after death.
 - Anthropological Argument - the nature and existence of man is unexplained apart from creation by God
 - C.S. Lewis in his book, “Compelling Reason” argues for the existence of God from the undesirability of nuclear war. Since a planet destroying nuclear war is undesirable, human life must have value beyond the rest of the natural universe
- Argument from History (not really a proof for the existence of God, but for the existence and authenticity of Christ). It is an historical fact that Jesus really lived (Suetonius, Tacitus, Josephus). Jesus Christ’s influence has changed the world. The Lord, Liar or Lunatic choice must be confronted.

Putting it Together

- remember the rules of logic: P implies Q. If P is true, then Q is true
- if there is a God, we would expect Him to provide an authoritative source of truth
- because general revelation tells us there is a God
- therefore we know there must be a special revelation

Thinking Like a Christian

- some of our activities are distinctively Christian
- but if we are thinking about reality in a Christian manner, it will affect every area of our lives
- and a Christian understanding of reality will particularly affect how we think... even about everyday things

- take for example, a blue box, a pair of glasses, and a prescription medication
- if we are really thinking like a Christian, how will we think about these everyday items?

- when we think like a Christian, when we have a Christian view of reality, it must affect every area of our lives
- this is a message we need to teach and model before our young people
- it is also a message Christian adults need to remember
- why is the divorce rate among evangelical Christians actually higher than the divorce rate among non-Christians?
- could it be that a Christian view of reality is not influencing our marriages?

Summary

- how we think, what we believe and the doctrine we hold really does matter in every area of our lives
- and all of this transformation that Romans 12 speaks about... will spill over into our church lives and church commitments
- you can’t have a strong church without strong Christians
- but if you have strong Christians learning and growing in their understanding of Biblical doctrine, you will have strong churches

Theology 3 – Theology of the Bible Part 1

Introduction

- the purpose of this series on theology is that you believe that which is true, understand why you believe, and be able to make a defense of your beliefs
- in a multicultural and sophisticated society, it's not good enough to believe → you must understand why
- previously we saw the existence of God implies a 4th source of knowledge, which is Special Revelation
- but is the Bible the Special Revelation God has given?

Internal Evidence that the Bible is God's Special Revelation

- the Bible claims to be the word of God
 - it is in a very exclusive list of books making such a claim
 - about 415 times in the Old Testament we read the refrain, "Thus saith the LORD"
 - in the New Testament, 48 times we read reference to the Word of God or the Word of the Lord
- the authors of the NT were often aware that their writings were on par with the OT Scripture which they so revered
 - in 2 Peter 3:16 Peter states that Paul's writings were Scripture
 - this is an audacious claim
- the Bible displays an amazing unity
 - perhaps 30 different authors, over a 1500 year period in 3 different languages and half a dozen countries
 - contrast with the Koran → 1 author over a 23 year period in 1 language and 1 country
- fulfilled prophecy
 - e.g. Daniel's predictions about Alexander the Great and his generals
 - e.g. Zechariah 11:12,13 → 30 pieces of silver, the price they placed on God, thrown into the house of the LORD, to the potter
- the Bible presents a message contrary to what people expect or would invent
 - would you tell people... for whom the temple worship was the center of their existence... that the temple worship was no longer needed?
 - would you tell a people who are fiercely monotheistic that the 1 God consists of 3 persons
 - would you tell a people who were expecting a conquering Messiah that the crucified man was still the true Messiah?
 - would you build a case for the risen Lord on the testimony of women?
 - would you tell people they are sinners?

External Evidence that the Bible is God's Special Revelation

- the historical accuracy of the Bible
 - the Hittites really did exist and had an extensive empire
 - Daniel 5 and Belshazzar making Daniel the 3rd highest ruler in the kingdom
- the ability of the Bible to change societies
 - the societies that are characterized by stability, honest government, technological progress, a compassion for the needy and a place of respect for women... are by and large a product of the Bible
- the power of a changed life → nobody can refute this evidence, and it is effective among post-moderns

Inerrancy

- "The teaching that since the Scriptures are given by God, they are free from error in all their contents, including doctrinal, historical, scientific, geographical, and other branches of knowledge."¹
- why would God allow mankind to fumble along with only the 3 sources of knowledge that we would still have if in fact that God didn't exist!
- the existence of God implies the existence of the 4th source of knowledge – Divine revelation – which is true
- could the Bible be true in matters of faith, but inaccurate in other matters?
 - is God incapable of giving us a book that is true? Does God want to confuse us? Think through the implications of this belief
- if we reject inerrancy, we must believe errors can teach truth, we must believe God could or would not give an accurate revelation, we must believe that God breaths out error, and who can say what is true and what is false?

Authority

- Biblical authority is the natural outcome of inerrancy – the Bible has the right to guide your life
- "You must be born again." (John 3:7), "you must love one another." (John 13:34), "you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking." (Ephesians 4:17)

¹ "Moody Handbook of Theology" by Paul Enns. Also see "Major Bible Themes" by Chafer and Walvoord

Theology 4 – Theology of the Bible Part 2

Inspiration

- “Inspiration” is the work of the Holy Spirit in moving the authors of the Bible, using their own personalities and writing styles, to produce God’s word in written form, free from error in the original manuscripts.
 - supernatural
 - uses personalities and writing styles → not a mechanical dictation
 - in written form → the inspired text of the New Testament is in Greek
 - inerrant in the original manuscripts
- “All Scripture is God-breathed [inspired, breathed-out, theopneustos] and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

What is the Canon?

- the measuring rod → how do we know the books in the Bible really are God’s Special Revelation?
- the early church needed to understand the canon because:
 - people in different geographic areas wanted to have all the authoritative and apostolic writings
 - desire to distinguish between the authoritative writings and the other writings
 - you would only give your life for a book you knew to be God’s word
- the church recognized the canonical books – the church did not determine the canonical books

Protestant / Evangelical Position	Roman Catholic Position
Church recognizes the canonical books	Church determines the canonical books
Church is a product of the Bible	The Bible is the product of the Church
Bible is the ultimate guide to doctrine and morals	Church is the ultimate guide to doctrine and morals
The Bible is a collection of authoritative writings	The Bible is an authoritative collection of writings
Authority is the Bible	Authority is in the people making the collection
Scripture is self-authenticating	Scripture is authenticated by the church
Bible is God’s Special Revelation	Bible is respected but subordinate

- how do we know what books belong to the canon?
 - Apostolicity – written by an Apostle or someone associated with an Apostle
 - John 14:26 - the Holy Spirit “will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”
 - Catholicity – recognized by and useful to the whole church
 - Orthodoxy – in keeping with the sound doctrine that had previously been revealed

When did the Canon Develop?

- by about the year 150, Polycarp had quoted from or alluded to 18 out of 27 New Testament books
- by about the year 170, the Muratorian Canon listed 23 out of 27 New Testament books as being authentic Scripture
- Irenaeus by 202 listed 22 books of the 27
- Tertullian by 220 also listed 22 books out of 27

Transmission of the Text

- we do not have the original manuscripts → possibly to keep us from idolatry
- it is more important that an inerrant manuscript once existed, than that it still exist today
 - e.g. if the American Constitution was destroyed, there would still be a basis for Constitutional Law (provided it once existed)
- is the Biblical text inaccurate through being copied and recopied? No.
 - ancient manuscripts exist
 - John Rylands fragment is part of the Gospel of John, has been dated to about the year 125
 - P46 contains some or all of 9 New Testament books has been dated to the 3rd century
 - Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus contain most of the New Testament - about 330 to 350 AD
 - we have about 5000 manuscripts that are at least a thousand years old
- what does the original text say?
 - You have won 10 million dollars
 - You have won 10 million dollar
 - You have won 1 million dollars
 - You have won 10 million euros

Translation

- literal to the original language or to the language being translated into?
- when studying, use formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence translations

Theology 5 –Bible Interpretation Part 1

“But That’s Just Your Interpretation”

- people use this statement in a number of ways for a number of purposes
 - A “red herring”, designed to distract attention away from your argument
 - An attempt to pretend that we can’t ever know whether your argument is true or false
 - Ignores the fact that your argument can be correct, even if interpretation is required

Everyday Interpretation

- We do interpretation every day, when we get an email, when we talk to people, etc.
- “Daddy, what would happen if someone spilled milk on your new computer?”

Allegorical Interpretation

- allegorizing or allegorical interpretation says there is a deeper meaning than what you would understand from literal interpretation
- one of the best (or worst) examples is from St. Augustine’s Quaestiones Evangeliorum 2.19 about the Good Samaritan
- *A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho: Adam himself is meant; Jerusalem is the heavenly city of peace, from whose blessedness Adam fell; Jericho means “the moon,” and signifies our mortality, because it is born, waxes, wanes, and dies. Thieves are the devil and his angels. Who stripped him, namely, of his immortality; and beat him, by persuading him to sin; and left him half dead, because in so far as man can understand and know God, he lives, but in so far as he is wasted and oppressed by sin, he is dead-he is therefore called half dead. The Priest and Levite who saw him and passed by signify the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament, which could profit nothing for salvation, Samaritan means “guardian,” and therefore the Lord Himself is signified by this name. The binding of the wounds is the restraint of sin. Oil is the comfort of good hope; wine the exhortation to work with fervent spirit. The beast is the flesh in which he deigned to come to us. The being set upon the beast is belief in the incarnation of Christ. The inn is the Church, where travellers are refreshed on their return from pilgrimage to their heavenly country. The morrow is after the resurrection of the Lord. The two pence are either the two precepts of love, or the promise of this life and of that which is to come. The innkeeper is the Apostle*
- but this parable is not about salvation!!!
- **DANGER** → allegorical interpretation allows the interpreter to make the Bible say whatever he wants it to say, and allows him to ignore what it really does say!

Why Do Christians Differ in Their Beliefs?

- one knows the Bible better than the other
- one is better predisposed to obey the Bible than the other
- one uses proper rules for Bible interpretation (and applies them more consistently) than the other

The Most Important Rule for Bible Interpretation

- context, context, context!
- a text without a context is a pretext for an error
- types of context
 - immediate context – what does this verse and the verses immediately surrounding it actually say
 - context of the passage – what does this chapter and the surrounding chapters say, and what thought is being developed?
 - context of the book – what does this whole book say, and what was the purpose and theme of the book
 - context of the whole Bible – what does the rest of the Bible say about this matter

Theology 6 –Bible Interpretation Part 2

Rule 1: Context

- the most important rule is... context, context, context!

Rule 2: Interpret the Bible Literally

- literal interpretation is how we relate to the real world every day
- contrast this to the chaos of allegorical interpretation!
- e.g. 1 Corinthians 14:21 – who was the gift of tongues intended for?
- the Bible is good literature and good literature uses figures of speech

Rule 3: Consider the Plain Sense Meaning

- when the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense
- e.g. Romans 13:1-7 and submission to the governing authorities
- e.g. who could read the NT and think the church should be ruled by other than a plurality of elders
- e.g. who could read Romans 14 and think Law keeping has value for the strong Christian?

Rule 4: Start from What You Understand

- when you face some perplexing passage, start from what you understand, not from the verse you understand the least
- e.g. 1 Corinthians 15:29 and those who are baptized for the dead
- e.g. 1 Timothy 2:15 and women being saved through childbearing

Rule 5: Compare Things that are Alike, and Contrast Things that are Different

- we process information by adding it to what we already know, or by contrasting it with what we previously understood
- e.g. what does the whole Bible say about the Gospel and about prayer?
- e.g. comparing and contrasting Romans with James

Rule 6: Remember the Dispensational Background

- in the Old Testament, things were different - the conditions that existed, how faithful believers demonstrated their faith, and what God expected of man was in many ways different
- e.g. we don't sacrifice animals, worship in the temple, keep special dietary laws or have a priestly caste

Rule 7: Pay Attention to Grammar

- the Bible is the written word of God, and the precise words are important
- details like verb tenses and whether a word is in the singular vs. plural... are important
- e.g. Galatians 3:16 – an argument built on the singular vs plural form of a word
- e.g. Ephesians 2:8,9 – “faith” in the feminine, “that” in the neuter. Faith is not the gift spoken of in this passage
- e.g. Exodus 31:16,17 – the Sabbath is specifically for Israel

Rule 8: Prophecy is a Special Case

- the prophetic past tense - Romans 8:30
- immediate partial fulfillment and a later more complete fulfillment – Isaiah 7:14 and Joel 2:28-32

Rule 9: Honour God in your Interpretation

- we must not compromise the character of God
- e.g. Romans 3:23 does not speak of the Lord Jesus
- when we have a choice of interpreting a verse two different ways, it is a general principle that we should interpret it in a way that is honouring to God

Most of this is common sense. This is how we interact with the everyday world, and these are the “rules” which will help us understand the Bible for ourselves.

Theology 7 – Dispensationalism Part 1

Something is Different

- in the Garden of Eden
- after the Fall
- when God started dealing with Abraham
- when God gave the Law
- when Christ came
- when Christ shall rule in the Millennial kingdom
- in each of these interactions between God and man, something is different (though we won't define that something yet)

Common Threads

- for all the differences in these interactions, there are similarities
- it is reasonable to assume God's interactions with man are not separate and random events
- all these interactions form part of the unified purpose of God, and demonstrate a unified view of history
- some common threads include God's mercy and man's failure to obey the revealed will of God

Literal Bible Interpretation

- this is the system of Bible interpretation that makes the best sense because this is how we interact with the real world
- allegorical interpretation allows for fanciful interpretations, and can seem to provide Scriptural authority for our ideas
- literal interpretation requires us to see that when the Bible is speaking about Israel, it's speaking about Israel
- the Church does not replace Israel in God's great plans
- there are still prophecies about Israel that will be literally fulfilled (e.g. the temple in Ezekiel 40-48)

What Happens When We Read "Israel" and Think "Church"?

- Exodus 31:16 – keeping the Sabbath was for "Israel" → we would keep the sabbath
- Unable to support infant baptism from the N.T., we would use circumcision in the O.T. as a parallel to justify infant baptism
- we would minimize or make little distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament
- BUT WE KNOW THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT
- and, 1 Corinthians 10:32 explicitly states **"Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God"**
- the Bible makes an explicit distinction between Israel and the Church, and implicitly we understand there is a difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament

Economy

- the word "economy" means an orderly arrangement, and comes from the Greek word "oikonomia"
- it can be translated "administration" (NIV), "stewardship" (NASB) or "dispensation" (KJV)
- we see this concept of stewardship used in the Bible in Luke 16
- in a stewardship there are two parties, certain responsibilities, accountability and a potential change of stewardships
- Ephesians 3:2 refers to the present stewardship of God's grace
- Ephesians 1:10 refers to a future stewardship of the fullness of time
- Colossians 1:25,26 contrasts the present stewardship with a previous one
- so we see that there are at least 3 great stewardships

Putting it Together

- there are different interactions between God and man, where something is different
- three stewardships parallel three of these interactions
- what if we view each of these interactions as a stewardship/administration/dispensation/economy
- "A Dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God." (Scofield Reference Bible)

Viewed as a Stewardship

- mankind (or individual representatives of mankind) is the steward
- seeking to obey God's will is the test
- man's responsibility is to obey the revealed will of God
- man is accountable for obeying that revealed will of God
- but if man does not obey the will of God, his stewardship is removed

The Dispensations

- Innocence – don't eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – Adam ate
- Conscience – follow your conscience – the heart of man was constantly evil
- Human Government(?) – judicial power given to governments (death penalty) – unrighteous governments
- Patriarchs (or Promise) – obey the promise made to Abraham – Abraham went to Egypt and had Ishmael
- Law – follow the 613 commands – man couldn't keep all the laws
- Grace – exercise faith in Christ – man will not believe
- Millennium – obey Christ's governmental authority – man rebels at the end of the Millennium
- the precise number of dispensations is unimportant – that the Scripture presents different interactions between God and man is important

A Unified View of History

- dispensationalism provides a unified view of history, and it is a view that says God alone gets the glory
- traditionally there are three distinctives of dispensationalism.
 1. a consistently literal Bible interpretation
 2. a distinction between Israel and the Church
 3. God's underlying purpose in His dealings with mankind is that He alone should get the glory
Isaiah 42:8, "**I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another**"
- God's dealings with mankind are not random – there is a unity to God's dealings with mankind based on God's glory

Dispensationalism and Salvation

- dispensations are related to obedience, not to salvation
- some early dispensationalists got confused about this (taught that people could be saved by keeping the Law)
- but for the last 70 years or so, no dispensationalist has taught such a thing
- dispensationalism is about a test of obedience, dispensationalism does not teach different means of salvation
- confusion comes because in this present dispensation the condition of obedience is the same as the means of forgiveness
- in each dispensation, the means of salvation is faith in God made effectual by the perfect work of Christ on the cross

Soli Deo Gloria

- in each test, man fails to obey the revealed will of God
- only God is faithful
- only God gets the glory
- Soli Deo Gloria – to God alone be the glory

Theology 8 – Dispensationalism Part 2

History of Dispensational Theology

- the “Church Fathers” cannot be said to be dispensationalists, but some saw the same distinctions as us
 - Irenaeus (died ~200 AD) said, “The Gospel is quadriform, as is also the course followed by the Lord. For this reason were four principal covenants given to the human race; one, prior to the deluge, under Adam; the second, that after the deluge, under Noah; the third, the giving of the law, under Moses; the fourth, that which renovates man, and sums up all things in itself by means of the Gospel, raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom.”
- dispensationalism was presented as a developed system of theology by the late 1600’s
 - in 1687, Pierre Poiret wrote a book entitled, L’Oeconomie Divine listing 7 dispensations (including Millennium)
 - hymn writer Isaac Watts (died 1748) wrote “The Harmony of all the Religions which God ever Prescribed to Men and all his Dispensations towards them”. Watts presented 6 dispensations, identical to the first 6 dispensations Scofield presented
 - John Nelson Darby wrote in the mid-1800’s and presented a dispensational theology. While influential, Darby cannot be said to be the father of dispensationalism. Darby’s dispensations are different than Scofield’s.
- wider influence in the late 1800’s and 1900’s
 - Niagara Bible Conferences (1883 to 1897) popularized dispensationalism in North America
 - perhaps the biggest factor in spreading dispensational theology has been the Scofield Reference Bible
 - the Scofield Bible was first published in 1909, and revised in 1917
- 1930’s to today
 - Dallas Theological Seminary was established by Lewis Sperry Chafer, a dispensational leader in the 1930’s
 - Charles Ryrie wrote the book, “Dispensationalism Today” in 1965, which was revised in 1995
 - Dallas Theological Seminary now teaches “Progressive Dispensationalism” rather than the dispensationalism of Chafer and Ryrie

Is Dispensationalism Opposed to Biblical Christianity?

- some wild charges have been made against us, but...
- “It is doubtful if there has been any other circle of men who have done more by their influence in preaching, teaching and writing to promote a love for Bible study, a hunger for the deeper Christian life, a passion for evangelism, and zeal for missions in the history of American Christianity.” George Eldon Ladd, an opponent of dispensationalism

Common Objections to Dispensationalism

- “dispensationalism teaches different methods of salvation”
 - some early dispensationalists believed this (like most Christians!) including Chafer
 - nobody has believed this for half a century. Dispensations are about obedience, not about salvation
- “dispensationalism is incompatible with Calvinism”
 - is compatibility with Calvinism the standard by which we judge all doctrine?
 - for historical reasons, Covenant Theology and Calvinism are often found together, but...
 - there is no doctrinal reason why someone cannot be a Calvinist and a Dispensationalist
- “the fruit of dispensationalism is division within the body”
 - division within the Church is very sad
 - Darby was not the father of dispensationalism, and splits within the “Brethren” are not over dispensationalism
 - but we can also ask the question, how many types of Reformed churches are there?!!!
- “dispensationalism is a new doctrine” – if it’s new it isn’t true
 - the standard by which a doctrine is judged is not antiquity, but whether a doctrine is Biblical
 - dispensationalism was a well developed system of theology by 1687
 - Covenant Theology is only about 100 years older
- “Covenant Theology is true because covenants are found in the Bible”
 - the theological system of Covenant Theology is very different from the Biblical covenants
 - Biblical covenants include Noahic, Abrahamic, Palestinian, Mosaic, Davidic and the New Covenant
- “Dispensationalists disagree on the number of dispensations”
 - yes, and Covenant theologians disagree on the number of covenants
 - but there is no real disagreement between dispensationalists on the Law, Grace and Millennium, which are the 3 most important (covering 65 out of 66 books of the Bible)

- “God has shown grace throughout history, so how can you use the expression Dispensation of Grace?”
 - just because you don’t like a title, don’t reject a whole system of theology
 - we could also call the Dispensation of Grace the Dispensation of the preaching of the Gospel by the church
 - God has been gracious throughout history... but is “Grace” the first word that comes to mind when you read the Levitical Law and the Old Testament?

Stronger Objections to Dispensationalism

- did Christ institute the New Covenant at the Last Supper? What about Hebrews 8:6?
 - there can be a gap between when a covenant is instituted and when it is realized
- verses that seem to equate the church with Israel – Romans 9:6, Galatians 6:16 and Phil 3:1-3
 - speaking to Jewish Christians – the physical and spiritual seed of Abraham
- intelligent dispensationalists know about these verses – our system of theology doesn’t fall apart because of them!

Covenant Theology

- the major system of theology which competes with dispensationalism
- their framework is that God has created 2 or 3 major covenants
- “the Covenant of Works may be defined as follows: God entered into a covenant with Adam as the federal head (i.e. representative) of the human race in which God promised to bless Adam with eternal life if he would obey; if he disobeyed God, Adam would be judged with death” (Enns)
- “the covenant of grace is a covenant made by God with the elect in which He offers salvation to the elect sinner in Christ.” (Enns)
- the Eternal Covenant of Redemption is said to have been made between the Father and the Son setting forth the work of redemption
- by themselves there is nothing wrong with these definitions, but how they are applied can cause problems
 - minimizing the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament
 - Israel has been replaced by the Church, so blessings, promises and commands given to Israel now apply to the church → the O.T. says the Sabbath is for Israel, the N.T. doesn’t give the Sabbath to the Church, but if the Church replaces Israel we must keep the Sabbath (although few keep the Fri/Sat Sabbath and it’s restrictions)
 - if you minimize the difference between the O.T. and the N.T., the O.T. provides support for infant baptism (a support that is not found in the N.T.)
- BUT... while we differ, those who hold to Covenant Theology are still our fellow Christians and we must be gracious

Ultra-Dispensationalism

- would divide the church into the early Jewish church, and the later Gentile church
- the only Scripture that was written to the Gentile church is Paul’s prison epistles
- they would reject the Gospels, most or all of Acts, most of Paul’s early epistles, and the writings of Peter and John
- there are very few Ultra-Dispensationalists today

Progressive Dispensationalism

- an attempt to deal with some of the strong objections raised against standard dispensationalism (but standard dispensationalism already has answers to these objections)
- many people feel they have melded dispensationalism with covenant theology
- literal Bible interpretation has been replaced with a “complementary hermeneutic”

Dispensationalism and Society

- our reputation is that we have completely disengaged from the society we live in
 - “God’s going to burn the whole planet so I really don’t care”
 - “I don’t care about the environment, politics, society or anything else”
- there is nothing about dispensational theology that requires a hands off attitude towards our society
- dispensationalists must be open to the possibility of revival in the church or even within the nation

Closing

- dispensationalism provides a proper framework built on a proper foundation
- literal interpretation is important to our understanding of the Bible, our practice, and the way God deals with man

Theology 9 – Practical Christology Part 1

Omnipotence

- Omnipotence = All Powerful
- Matthew 9:1-7 – Jesus healed miraculously as a proof that He could forgive sins
- Colossians 1:16 – All things were created by Jesus and for Jesus
- Colossians 2:9 – all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form in Jesus
- Hebrews 1:3 – Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of God’s nature
- Matthew 28:18 – Jesus has all authority on earth and in heaven
- Jesus is Omnipotent and thus Jesus is God
- Application → there is no problem Jesus can’t handle

Omniscience

- Omniscience = All Knowing
- John 21:7 and John 16:29,30 – Disciples confessed that Jesus knew all things
- John 1:43-49 – Jesus knew something about Nathaniel that instantly changed him from a skeptic to confessing Jesus as the Son of God and the King of Israel
- John 2:24,25 – Jesus knows the thoughts and intents of all men
- Jesus is Omniscient and thus Jesus is God
- Application → you can be totally honest with Jesus about your sin
- Application → Jesus knew your future sins when He saved you
- Application → Jesus knows about our secret pain

Omnipresence

- Omnipresence = Ability to be everywhere at once (note: God is separate from His creation)
- Matthew 18:20 – Jesus is not limited by space. He is always with His people
- Jesus is Omnipresent and thus Jesus is God
- Application → Jesus is always there, wanting to hear from us

Immutability

- Immutability = Unchanging
- Malachi 3:6 – this is one of the attributes of Jehovah God
- Hebrews 13:8 – “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”
- Jesus is Immutable and thus Jesus is God
- Application → In a world of constant change, shifting ethics and sliding morals, Jesus is unchanging

Jesus is Jehovah

- the Old Testament makes statements about Jehovah God which are also said in the New Testament about Jesus
- compare Zechariah 11:12,13 with Matthew 26:14,15 and 27:5-10 – sold for 30 pieces of silver
- compare Jeremiah 23:5-6 with 1 Corinthians 1:30 – Jesus is our Righteousness
- compare Isaiah 40:25 with Acts 3:14 – Jesus is the Holy One
- compare Deuteronomy 10:17 with Revelation 17:14 – Jesus is Lord of Lords
- compare Zechariah 14:4 with Acts 1:11-12 – Jesus will stand on the Mount of Olives
- compare Isaiah 45:21-23 with Philippians 2:9-11 – every knee will bow to Jesus
- compare Isaiah 42:8 with John 17:5 – Jesus has God’s glory
- Jesus is Jehovah God
- Application → in the Old Testament we see a mighty God who intervenes on behalf of His people. This same God loved us enough to die for us

Theology 10 – Practical Christology Part 2

Humanity

- Jesus is fully God and fully human
- He really is human
 - This was his own testimony about Himself - Luke 24:39-43
 - This was the testimony of His closest followers - 1 John 1:1
- But why is it practical?
 - Imputation. Sin was imputed to all men through Adam (Romans 5:12) but righteousness is imputed through the one Man, Jesus (Romans 5:15)
 - Jesus became weary (e.g. John 4:5,6). We can take comfort in the fact that He understands when we are weary
 - Jesus dispels stereotypes about manhood. Real men are zealous (John 2), love children (Matt 19:14), are respectful to women (John 4, Luke 8), value truth (John 14:6), can weep in public (Luke 19:41, John 11:35) and give up their lives for others!

High Priest

- many of the early Christians came from a Jewish background and may have missed the temple worship
- the Jews had a High Priest to comfort and make intercession for them
- but the Christians are assured that they too have a Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16)
- so why is this practical?
 - we have someone who can sympathize
 - we have someone who faced real temptation (and yet was without sin)
 - we have a High Priest who is always available for us to go to

Worthy of Worship

- in Matt 14:33 we see Jesus being worshiped
- Scripture does not record any objections from Jesus. The disciples worshiped Him and He accepted that worship
- why is this practical?
 - it's practical when the cultists tell us we shouldn't worship Jesus
 - everyone has a built in need to worship. We are driven to worship. But only Christians have an object that is worthy of worship. This meets one of the deepest needs of the human heart

Resurrection

- the Old Testament contains a handful of references to resurrection (Job 19:26, Daniel 12:2) but the concept wasn't deeply understood
- Martha knew there would be a resurrection for her brother Lazarus and the expression of faith in the little she knew was rewarded with a fuller revelation of who the Lord Jesus Christ really is (John 11)
- but why is Christ's resurrection practical for us?
 - Romans 1:4 tells us that His resurrection declares Him to be the Son of God. We do not follow a pretender
 - Matt 28:6 tells us that His resurrection is a confirmation that His words are true, and it is only true words that can be trusted
 - Ephesians 1:19-22 tells us that His resurrection is tied to His leadership of the Church. He have a leader!
 - 2 Corinthians 4:14 (and 1 Corinthians 15) tell us that His resurrection is the guarantee of our own resurrection (even when we don't feel very "resurrectable")
 - Acts 17:31 tells us that His resurrection is the guarantee of future judgment for unbelievers

Jesus Forgives Sin

- Luke 7:36-50 – Jesus claimed the ability to forgive sins against God
- He was either a lunatic, a blaspheming liar, or God
- lunatic?
 - a lunatic lives a chaotic life. Jesus was in possession of His faculties.
 - nobody likes listening to the ramblings of a lunatic. People loved to listen to Jesus.
 - Jesus was not a lunatic
- blaspheming liar?
 - Jesus is generally recognized as a great moral teacher
 - could such exalted morality come from a blaspheming liar?
 - Jesus was not a liar
- God?
 - Jesus claimed the right to forgive sins, He wasn't a lunatic and He wasn't a blasphemer
 - so... He must have been God

The Central Reality of the Human Condition

- the Bible tells us in Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"
- the Bible tells us in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death,"
- God is not the kind of person who ignores sin
- He will judge sin... He will punish sin, unless we accept His one provision for the forgiveness of sin
- Jesus claimed the ability to forgive sin, so God's provision for forgiveness is Jesus Christ

Theology 12 – Thinking Theologically Part 1

Seekers vs. Objectors

- there are real seekers of truth, and there are chronic objectors. How do you avoid wasting your time?
- “You’ve raised a lot of objections, and I’ve tried to answer them. But I have a question for you. If I was to spend the whole night and I was to answer all your objections, would you be willing to become a Christian?”
- if the person says “no”, he has bigger problems than his objections to Christianity → namely a refusal to believe

Did God Make Evil?

- this is a good example of a theological question. As such it requires a theological answer.
- the answer is “No, but He did give us free will.” He wants our willing worship, and we are made in His image.

“Can God make a rock so big He can’t lift it?”

- if you take a logical inconsistency and add the words, “Can God?” at the beginning, it’s still a logical inconsistency
- are the rules of logic are binding on God? No, because then there would be something greater than God.
- so are the rules of logic real and valid? Yes, because they come from the character of God.
- God interacts with mankind in logical and reasonable ways.
- Law of Non-Contradiction → something cannot be and not be at the same time and in the same respect
- the definitive revelation of God (Ex 3:14 - And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM") is consistent with the Law of Non-Contradiction

Lord, Liar or Lunatic?

- some people will deny the laws of logic to deny logical presentations of the truth, like Lord, Liar or Lunatic
- a liar?
 - He gave the most exalted moral teaching
 - He accepted execution rather than deny His words
 - even on the cross He spoke the most gracious words
 - it is unthinkable to suggest He was a bold faced liar
- a lunatic?
 - when someone is insane his life spins out of control → Jesus was in possession of His faculties
 - lunatics are jumpy and paranoid → Jesus was unflappable
 - lunatics are loners → Jesus was a people person
 - lunatics are random → Jesus had a constancy of purpose
 - powerful people don’t fear lunatics → powerful people feared Jesus
 - do you love to listen to the ravings of a lunatic → the crowds delighted to hear him
 - was Jesus a nice rational fellow who was honestly mistaken. People can be honestly mistaken, but what do you call a person who thinks he’s God → a lunatic
- Lord?
 - the only remaining possibility

I Challenge You to Strike Me Down!

- how would we answer the person who “proves” God doesn’t exist by giving God 5 minutes to strike him down?
- this challenge is based on assumptions:
 - that we can exhaust the mercy of God in 5 minutes (2 Peter 3:9)
 - that a child should be able to control the actions of a parent
 - that an unbeliever can control the actions of God (John 9:31)
 - that the unbeliever deserves an answer (Romans 6:23 - God gives gifts, not what we deserve)
 - that the unbeliever’s death would accomplish something (even if the unbeliever were to die, most people would explain away his death rather than have faith in God)
 - that the unbeliever will never repent and be converted (2 Peter 3:9)
 - that his further life will not accomplish anything for the benefit of humanity

Two Great Principles to Understand Our Society

1. moral evil disguises itself as moral virtue
 2. whoever frames the terms of an argument, wins an argument
- these principles go right back to the temptation in the Garden of Eden
 - Satan framed his temptation of Eve in terms of virtue, not ruin!
 - and these principles can be applied to real life issues in our society
 - example of abortion
 - how did we get to the point where a pro-life politician cannot get elected?
 - the argument was framed in terms of virtue → an individual's choice, and a women's healthcare issue
 - individual choice is considered a virtue → so who are you to make decisions for me?
 - if it's a woman's healthcare issue → why should a man be allowed to make decisions about women's healthcare?
 - so how can you use this knowledge?
 - refuse to allow the other side to frame the terms of the argument
 - argue for what you know to be moral virtue, as defined by the Bible
 - from the Bible you know life begins at conception
 - but... make your argument from medical science
 - and point out that a baby has an equal contribution of genetic material from a man and a woman, so it is not a women's health care issue
 - and point out that the newly conceived child has all their genetic potential
 - and point out that individuality is determined by our genes, and so if human individuality is important we cannot allow abortion
 - and point out how early after conception the heart begins to beat
 - use your knowledge in debates to deconstruct arguments
 - when a politician says "I'm personally against abortion, but I support a woman's right to choose.", you say "So why are you personally against abortion? What's wrong with it?"
 - when a politician says "Abortion should be safe, legal and rare." you say "Why should abortion be rare? What's wrong with abortion?"
 - if a politician talks about poverty forcing women to have abortions, you say "isn't all poverty bad? Why is poverty that leads to abortion worse? What's wrong with abortion? If it's all about poverty, then should abortion only be allowed to those who are poor? What if alternatives to abortion were available. Would you then outlaw abortion?"
 - example of pornography
 - who in their right mind could argue that pornography is a virtue or a benefit to society?
 - they must re-frame the argument in terms that are virtuous, terms like freedom
 - pornographers make their argument, not based on the merits of pornography itself, but on the issue of censorship
 - so pornography gets elevated from filth to freedom of expression
 - so how do you address this?
 - if you argue in favour of censorship, you'll lose (note: all of us are in favour of some sorts of censorship)
 - you must break out of the way the argument is framed
 - and I suppose the best way is to ask, "what is the purpose of pornography?"
 - now this is a different question than whether people should be free to spread porn
 - and simply stated, the purpose of pornography is to inflame the passions for that which is unattainable
 - all other appetites serve a useful purpose, even if they can be corrupted
 - not so for pornography
 - so if the purpose of pornography is to inflame the passions for that which is unattainable, what will be the fruit of pornography?
 - and the results are frustration, a lack of contentment with what is attainable through a good marriage, and ultimately ruin → see Dobson's interview with Ted Bundy

Conclusion

- as Christians we have a worldview – a comprehensive way of thinking about reality
- it is a rational system. It is reasonable and logical because God himself is reasonable and logical
- and yet human reasoning is not enough, so God has given us Divine Revelation to help us understand reality.
- are you thinking theologically about the issues of life and society?

Theology 13 – Thinking Theologically Part 2

You're Intolerant!

- in our society, tolerance is the ultimate virtue, and so intolerance is the ultimate sin
- what do you say when someone says, "You're being intolerant!"?
- perhaps the best way is to answer then is to ask them, "What do you mean by intolerant?"
- asking this question gives you a chance to understand where they are coming from so you can answer them intelligently
- but there is another benefit - their natural response is to say, "You think you're right and everyone else is wrong."
- ... which gives you the chance to say, "But aren't you doing the same thing?"
- for a long time they've been told Christians are intolerant and all of a sudden you've tossed it back at them

- once you get them to this point, there are at least 3 directions you can take the conversation
- first, you can introduce them to the idea that tolerance is only a virtue concerning that which is morally neutral
 - tolerance of evil is not a virtue
 - tolerance of good is irrelevant
 - but this takes us to the next question. how do we know something is morally neutral?
- second, you can admit that some Christians have not expressed their views in a Christ-like manner
 - there is a wrong way to be right
 - by getting carried away with their own rhetoric, by ignoring the gentleness of character that should define us, these people are hurting the Christian cause
- third, you can admit that there are some ideas about which you are convinced you are right, but there are other ideas you could be wrong about
 - a little humility goes a long way
 - sometimes we are accused of intolerance, but what people are really reacting to is our arrogance

The Secular Basis for Ethics

- what is the secular basis for ethics?
- this is something you can use evangelistically. For example, the woman who wants her children to be truthful.
- ask her why she wants her children to be truthful.

- so what are some candidates for the secular basis for ethics?
- might makes right
 - e.g. Nietzsche's superman, who is above the common morality
 - a philosophy that is less popular since the Nazis tried to put it into practice
- duty
 - duty can be noble, but duty isn't a good standard by which we judge ethical and moral behaviour
 - Hitler's officers tried this defense at Nuremberg and we hanged them, because they should have known better
- whatever is best for me
 - not a sustainable behaviour on which to build a civilization
- make it up as you go
 - but this isn't really a standard for behaviour. What it is... is randomness
 - and ultimately it takes our emotions and makes them a substitute for an ethical system
- whatever brings the most good to the most people
 - more promising than the previous choices, ignores the rights of the minority
 - murder is justified if many people prosper from it!
- obedience to the State and national laws
 - Christians are called upon to be law abiding
 - but Laws change, and some Laws are unrighteous, and the Laws between countries can vary
 - so obeying the law doesn't provide an unchanging foundation for an ethical system
 - in its ultimate expression obeying the State makes a God of the State
- whatever our society currently believes
 - as before, this doesn't provide an unchanging foundation for an ethical system
 - what our society currently believes... changes
 - someone may tout the progress our society is making... but we need to ask, progress towards what?
 - if we're making progress, there must be a standard against which we judge our progress
 - and that standard cannot be our current set of beliefs... unless we have arrived at perfection

- whatever brings the most personal liberty
 - but no man is an island, and my actions have ramifications throughout my society
- whatever brings good to my fellow man
 - this is much closer to the mark
 - and in fact it's close because it is what Jesus taught
 - but in a secular sense there is a problem...
 - ... and that problem is... what do you mean by good?
 - it is a circular argument that says good behaviour is that which brings the most good to my fellow man
 - yes, good behaviour is good... but this doesn't help us define good
 - so the statement that ethical behaviour is whatever brings good to my fellow man... is circular and provides no benefit
- and so we've seen many secular standards for ethical behaviour, but none of them are particularly good standards
- a very controversial statement - **there is no secular basis for ethical behaviour**
- please note what I am not saying
 - I am not saying... that there are no good atheists. There are.
 - I am not saying... a person who approaches life from a secular viewpoint cannot be good and moral and ethical. They can.
 - what I am saying is that they are good, moral and ethical based on my standard... because they themselves do not have a standard
- but we do have a standard. The Bible is an unchanging foundation for ethical, moral and good behaviour

Does the Church Have the Right to Tell People How to Live?

- the real question that must be addressed is whether the Church has the right to address moral questions
- if the Church doesn't have the right to address moral questions, then it doesn't have the right to tell people how to live
- if the Church does have the right to address moral questions, then it has the right to tell people how to live
- what if the Church didn't have the right to address moral questions?
 - then the Church would be an organization that concerns itself solely with irrelevant theological questions
- what if the Church had the right to address moral issues, and didn't exercise it?
 - then the church would be a bunch of hypocrites and cowards

Why Should a Christian Engage Their Society?

- should Christians vote, support a political party, write letters to the editor, protest abortion and be involved in community associations?
- in one sense, we don't want to put our best effort forth just to make the world better
 - ultimately it is coming to an end
 - and ultimately people need to hear the Gospel, rather than just learning how to live morally
 - likewise our ultimate hope is in the power of God, not worldly systems
- on the other hand, God has placed us in a world that runs according to certain rules
 - for example, in a democracy politicians try to represent their constituent's wishes
 - is it more spiritual to just pray, rather than to pray and write a letter?
- 3 reasons why a Christian should engage their society
 - evangelistic
 - it's hard to witness to people when we are not meeting them, or have nothing in common with them
 - in those activities which are morally neutral, there are opportunities to meet people, and get to know them, and hopefully to share the good news with them (1 Corinthians 9:22)
 - merciful
 - our goal is not simply to reform the world and make it better
 - but we're not doing people any favours by letting them sin to their hearts content
 - when we refuse to take a stand for Biblical morality, we are being unmerciful (Matthew 5:7)
 - preservative
 - frankly, we and our children need to live in this society and culture
 - and none of us would desire that our society be as bad as it can possibly be
- now please understand what I am not saying
 - I am not saying that we throw all our efforts into these things
 - I am not saying we put our hope in earthly politicians
 - I am not saying we will create a heaven on earth
 - as dispensationalists, we know which direction the world is heading
 - but that doesn't mean we need to hasten the slide and rejoice when the world grows worse