

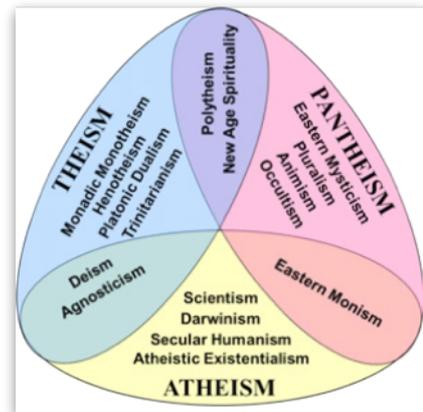
PRESUPPOSITIONS IN THEOLOGY

1. Review.

- a. The definition of theology is “the ancient and ongoing discipline within the Christian faith that seeks to understand, organize, and articulate truth about the Triune God and His works of Creation and Redemption in light of His special revelation in Scripture, His personal revelation in Christ, and His general revelation in creation.”¹
- b. We are all theologians, whether we like it or not. Our goal is to be a good theologian.
- c. The functions of Christian theology are to:
 - (1) Define the Christian faith.
 - (2) Preserve the church from error.
 - (3) Guide our priorities, actions, and responses to events.
 - (4) Express Christian doctrine clearly.
- d. Varieties of theology are biblical theology, systematic theology, and historical theology.
- e. The dangers of theology are neglect, sloppiness, compromise, novelty, speculation, pride, divisions and quarrelling, and a disconnect between faith and practice.

2. Presuppositions.

- a. Foundational presuppositions.
 - (1) There is a God, and he can communicate to us.
 - (a) **Ge 1:1** 1 In the beginning, God....
 - (b) **Ge 1:28** 28 And God said to them, Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.
 - (c) “He Is There, and He Is Not Silent.”²
 - (d) “The theist believes there is a God. He mounts confirmatory evidence to support that belief, but basically he believes.”³
 - (2) God has communicated to us in the Bible. The Bible is trustworthy.
 - (a) **2 Ti 3:16** 16 All Scripture is God-breathed (θεόπνευστος)....
 - (b) **Jn 17:17** 17 Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth.
 - (c) “We learn nothing about the Trinity or Christ from nature or from the human mind. And we cannot be certain that what we learn from the Bible about the Triune God is accurate unless we believe that our source itself is accurate. Thus the belief in the truthfulness of the Bible is the basic presupposition.”⁴
- b. Interpretive presuppositions.
 - (1) We are to interpret the Bible in a normal, plain, literal manner.



¹ Dr. Michael Svigel, Dallas Theological Seminary.

² Title of a book by Francis A. Schaeffer.

³ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 16.

⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 16.

- (a) “In giving us the revelation of Himself, God desired to communicate, not obscure, the truth. So we approach the interpretation of the Bible presupposing the use of normal canons of interpretation. Remember that when symbols, parables, types, etc. are used they depend on an underlying literal sense for their very existence, and their interpretation must always be controlled by the concept that God communicates in a normal, plain, or literal manner.”⁵
- (2) The New Testament takes priority over the Old Testament.
 - (a) This is not because the New Testament is truer than the Old Testament or that there are mistakes in the Old Testament. It is because the New Testament came after the Old Testament and offers more detailed information about God’s plan. God’s revelation is progressive. The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed. The New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. The New Testament must be interpreted in light of the Old Testament.
 - (b) **Jn 16:12-13** 12 I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.
 - (c) “All Scripture is inspired and profitable, but the New Testament has greater priority as the source of doctrine. Old Testament revelation was preparatory and partial, but New Testament revelation is climactic and complete.”⁶
 - 1) This is particular true for the church in the Church age.
- c. Systematising presuppositions.
 - (1) Biblical truth is logical and internally consistent such that it may be organised and systematised. God is rational and orderly, and so is his revelation.
 - (a) “The exegete strives to present the meaning of truth; the theologian, the system of truth. Theology’s goal, whether biblical or systematic theology, is the systematization of the teachings under consideration.”⁷
 - (2) Systematic theology is limited by our finite minds and what the Bible reveals. Not all our questions will be answered. We are dependent on what God chooses to reveal.
 - (a) **Dt 29:29** 29 The secret things belong to Yahweh our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.
 - (b) **Eph 3:4-5** 4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Messiah, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 16-17.

⁶ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 17.

⁷ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 18.

d. Personal presuppositions.

(1) Faith.

- (a) “[The nature and task of theology is] faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*).”⁸
- (b) **He 4:2** 2 For good news came to us just as to [the Israelites of the Exodus generation], but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not *mixed* (συγκεράννυμι, perf. pass.) *with faith* (τῇ πίστει) by those who listened.
- 1) συγκεράννυμι: “to bring about a blend by mixing various items, *blend, unite*, lit., pass., of colors...to effect a harmonious unit, *compose*” (BDAG, 952).

(2) Thinking.

- (a) **Mt 22:37** 37 And [Jesus] said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your *mind* (τῇ ᾠδιανοίᾳ).
- 1) διάνοια: “the faculty of thinking, comprehending, and reasoning, *understanding, intelligence, mind* as the organ of νοεῖν” (BDAG, 234).
- (b) “Ultimately the believer must try to think theologically. This involves thinking exegetically (to understand the precise meaning), thinking systematically (in order to correlate facts thoroughly), thinking critically (to evaluate the priority of the related evidence), and thinking synthetically (to combine and present the teaching as a whole).”⁹

(3) Illumination of the Holy Spirit.

- (a) **Jn 16:13** 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth....
- (b) **1 Co 2:6-14** 6 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom [Christian theology], although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. 7 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But, as it is written, What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him— 10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ...12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. 14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.
- (c) The Spirit supernaturally preserves Orthodox Christian doctrine in every generation.¹⁰

(4) Worship.

⁸ This is the classic definition of theology associated with Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and others.

⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 19.

¹⁰ Dr. Michael Svigel, Dallas Theological Seminary.

- (a) **Ro 11:33-36** 33 Oh, the depth of the riches, wisdom, and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? 35 Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.
- (b) “Worship means to recognize the worth of the object worshiped. How can any mortal put his mind to the study of God and fail to increase his recognition of His worth?”¹¹

3. Priorities.

- a. Paul insists in *1 Corinthians* Jesus is the centre and foundation of Christian theology.
- (1) **1 Co 1:18-24** 18 For the message of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ...22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Messiah crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Messiah the power of God and the wisdom of God.
- (2) **1 Co 3:10-11** 10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I [Paul] laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. 11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Messiah.
- (3) **1 Co 15:3-5** 3 For I [Paul] delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Messiah died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.
- b. What are the basics of Christian theology, the subjects every Christian must know and understand? *1 Thessalonians* provides the answer. In one month, Paul taught the new believers at Thessalonica about:
- (1) The Trinity (1 Th 1:1-6).
- (2) The Holy Spirit (1 Th 1:5-6, 4:8, 5:19).
- (3) Salvation (1 Th 1:9).
- (4) Discipleship (1 Th 4:3, 5:23, 1 Th 2:12, 4:1).
- (5) Resurrection (1 Th 4:14-18).
- (6) The tribulation (1 Th 5:1-3).
- (7) Jesus’ second coming (1 Th 1:10, 2:19, 3:13, 4:14-7, 5:23).

¹¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 19.