

**SEMINAR**  
**Reading the Bible Theologically: A Brief Introduction to Theology**  
**By Bob Young**

*Note: In many parts of Latin America, access to the large number of books and study tools we have available for Bible study is limited. In English, we have multiple books and study tools available to assist us in our study of Scripture. In many parts of Latin America, the basic tools for Bible study are not available. This seminar was developed with the specific intent of translating it to Spanish as a basic introduction to theological reading as a first step toward the preparation of sermons and classes. The seminar, although elementary, is made available in English as a basic introduction, hoping that some will be motivated to greater use of the many Bible study tools available in English.*

**SESSION #1**

**Introduction**

Concern about how we read, study, and present the Bible

- Illustration: Latin American Bible Institute; after reviewing the lessons, I discovered that there was no lesson about God

The question is not only how to read the Bible, but how to read the Bible theologically

In another seminar, I provide an introduction to the process of studying the Bible

- Develop a basic understanding of the process of reading, understanding, interpreting, and applying
- Reading for understanding
- Establish paragraphs, complete thoughts
- Seek background information and establish the various contexts (historical, cultural, biblical, grammatical, etc.)

This seminar provides a related study and expands concept of context to include the theological context.

**The Christian, Biblical teaching, and Biblical application**

The preacher (or Bible class teacher) who presents the whole counsel of God must learn to be either a practical theologian or a theological practitioner, or both.

- At times the focus of the sermon or class is on the message of Scripture, but the message must never exist for the sake of the message, but must always lead to application. This is the task of the theologian who always asks how the text is to be applied in practice.
- At times the focus of the sermon or class is on practice and action, but such must always be informed by the theology of the text. This is the task of the practitioner who seeks a theological orientation.

We generally understand what is meant by practice or action. What do we mean when we use the concept of theology in these two phrases?

## What is Theology?

Theology is literally “the study of God.” The word also has a wider application.

A basic definition will guide us in this seminar: “the study of religious beliefs and theories, especially when developed systematically.”

Theology classes identify at least the following theological categories

- Systematic theology
- Biblical theology
- Practical theology [focuses on what to do]
- Historical theology

Systematic (topical, thematic) theology suggests general categories for Bible study

- God (theology proper)
- Revelation, Bible, knowledge (epistemology)
- Mankind, human creation (anthropology; also has wider meaning in social studies)
- Christ (Christology)
- Holy Spirit, spiritual realities (pneumatology)
- Sin (hamartiology)
- Salvation (soteriology)
- Church (ecclesiology)
- Last things, end of time (eschatology)

Biblical theology

- Can be divided into Old Testament and New Testament theology
- Often seeks parallels between the Old Testament and the New Testament
- We can speak of the theology of particular authors or particular books
- Within specific books, one can identify theological topics of specific interest to the author

## Two ways of reading and studying the Biblical text

Theological reading and study seeks a way to integrate theology and practice. For some, this is a new way of reading and studying Scripture. This does not change the message of Scripture, but seeks to dig deeper into the question of how one understands the message.

The **traditional way** of studying or reading the Bible

- This approach begins in applications rather than beginning in the text.
- This approach is often centered in topics. What does the Bible say about \_\_\_\_\_?
- Usually, the student uses a concordance to seek and find certain words
- The good student may seek related words or synonyms.
- A problem is that one may overlook relevant words. For example, in studying salvation, may not think to look for redemption or reconciliation.
- Another problem is that one may fail to find passages that deal with the topic but do not use the words one has in mind. An interesting example is the book of Esther and the

study of God. The book of Esther never uses the word God but says much about the relationship of God with his people.

- Another problem is that one may fail to think about important theological categories. Remember my example of the lessons in Guatemala that did not include a study of God.

The **theological way** of studying or reading the Bible

- This approach does not begin with topics but begins in the text.
- What does the Bible say in this specific text?
- What is the message of this text? What are the principal thoughts of this text?
- New Testament theology, doctrine (teachings), thought
- This approach demands that the student read, reread, and read again the text to discover repeated words and concepts.
- This approach suggests that the context of a passage includes other passages with a parallel conceptual basis. Illustration: sin stories of Genesis.

## **SESSION #2**

### **Reading theologically: Luke**

The best way to understand this concept is to give specific examples. The student will find help in this process in a good study Bible edition, but there is no substitute for beginning with the text and reading the text repeatedly. [Ideally, one would read, reread, and read again the text of Luke to discover the answers to these questions. Here, we will simply suggest the results of that process based on the work of the seminar presenter.]

- How should one or can one outline the book of Luke?
- What will be the relationship of the outline of Luke to the general outline of the Synoptic Gospels? [The citations of the Passion Predictions]
- What is the importance of Luke's claim in 1:1-4 for our understanding of Luke?
- What parts of the historical context are especially significant in Luke's Gospel?
  - The context of Luke is the first century Roman Empire
  - A major concern in Luke is how the gospel will go to certain classes of people among the Gentiles, especially those without value in the Roman societal structures
  - This dynamic informs the nativity story (shepherds instead of wise men or kings)
  - This dynamic informs the reversal stories where the wrong person "wins" — publicans instead of Pharisees, Samaritans instead of Jews, the son who leaves home and sins instead of the son who remains home and sees himself as a slave, the astute servant, etc.
- How is Luke different from the other Synoptic Gospels? The dissimilarities reveal the specific emphases of the different writers.
- What are the outstanding or characteristic themes or topics of Luke? How do we identify them, how do we understand them? [The usual process is to identify and understand these by reading the book repeatedly, seeking to understand the overall message of the book.]

- What is the primary message of Luke? How can we describe, or how should we understand, the message that Luke intended for his first century readers? [The nature of Jesus' mission as Messiah? The gospel to the Gentiles?]
- Again, we will be helped in this process by exploring and understanding historical backgrounds. For example, what is the importance of the fact that Luke himself is a Gentile?
- Possible themes or topics (suggested by a careful reading of the text)
  - The gospel for the Gentiles; universalism; recognition of both Jews and Gentiles in God's eternal plan (2:30-32; 3:6; et.al.)
  - The gospel for all; including women, the poor, children, the disenfranchised
  - Special concern for role of women
  - Special interest in the poor
  - Special attention paid to sinners
  - Special attention paid to the concept of repentance
  - Emphasis on the family circle, frequent events in homes
  - Repeated use of Messianic title, Son of Man
  - An emphasis on the Holy Spirit and the spirit world
  - An emphasis on prayer, especially Jesus' prayers before important events
  - Joy as a response to the announcement of the gospel or "good news"
  - The frequent use of reversal stories
  - More parables than in any other gospel (unique parables)
  - Emphasis on praising God as a response (1:64; 24:53; Acts)
  - Journey themes

What does this theological reading of Luke say about the sermons or classes one can develop from the book?

- Who is Jesus?
- A Savior for all [Jesus, Son of Man, identifies with the human predicament]
- The nature of personal faith
- Commitment, discipleship
- Repentance
- The role of women in Luke's Gospel
- The nature of the gospel
- The kingdom of reversals
- The prayers of Jesus
- The rhythms of life
- Understanding life's options (6:17-49)
- Think carefully about how one can preach various parables in a manner consistent with Luke's theology and purpose. For example, how should we preach the parables of the Good Samaritan or Prodigal Son?

## **SESSION #3**

### **The specific process of reading theologically**

Reading the Bible and specific books of the Bible with “new eyes”

Examples using various Bible books or passages selected by participants

- What is the principal message?
- What are the themes, topics, and words used by the author to advance the message?
- How is the message advanced in the outline of the book? (What possibilities exist for identifying the author’s outline, not what is our outline?)
- What other parts of the Bible have a similar message? (This will expand the understanding of the context)

### **Overview of the Bible study process for class and sermon preparation**

*[Note: This is the ideal. It is recognized that the average preacher will have difficulty finding time to accomplish this process each week in the preparation of each sermon or class. However, over a period of time, the process becomes easier because one builds on the reading and study done previously.]*

#### **Theological reading**

- Read, reread, read again the text, making notes of words, phrases, themes, purpose statements, etc.
- Establish the theme or text, limits of text or limits of thematic study
- Identify a tentative “message” for the sermon or class, consistent with the message of the textual basis

#### **Begin the process of exegesis to verify the textual limits and the thematic validity**

- Vocabulary
- Grammar
- Syntax
- Establish text, context, and limits
- Verify the message or principal point, shaping sermons and classes in the shape of Scripture

#### **Interpreting and applying the text**

- Interpretation of the text depends on a good theological reading and exegesis
- What application of the text will be used in this sermon or class?
- The application of the text in the sermon should be consistent with the original intent of the text or author

#### **Writing the sermon or class**

Establish a purpose statement for the sermon

- Why should this sermon be preached?
- Depends on the needs and problems of the congregation
- Inform, convince, inspire, motivate to action

- Illustration of a tree: roots are knowledge, trunk is conviction, branches are inspiration, and the fruit is action. The purpose of the tree always points toward the fruit. The purpose of the sermon (knowledge/information, belief/conviction, emotional acceptance/inspiration) always points toward changed lives and actions

Decide what sermon structure will best allow the communication of the message

- Biblical outlines: text, expository, expository analytical, textual analytical (various aspects or details or text)
- Narrative; example-explanation-application; narration with application; analogy; thematic; biography; logical; problem resolution; sequence; organization by time, space, persons, etc.

Decide how the sermon will “touch” the mind and heart (mental and emotional) of the hearer