



July 2010—*Why Every Believer Needs Theology*

It is very common among American Evangelicals to dismiss theology as a hindrance rather than a help to faith, but C.S. Lewis did not think this way.

“In a way I quite understand why some people are put off by Theology. I remember once when I had been giving a talk to the R.A.F., an old, hard-bitten officer got up and said, “I’ve no use for all that stuff. But, mind you, I’m a religious man too. I know there’s a God. I’ve felt Him: out alone in the desert at night: the tremendous mystery. And that’s just why I don’t believe all your neat little dogmas and formulas about Him. To anyone who’s met the real thing they all seem so petty and pedantic and unreal!”

Theology is like a map. Merely learning and thinking about the Christian doctrines, if you stop there, is less real and less exciting than the sort of thing my friend got in the desert. Doctrines are not God: they are only a kind of map. But that map is based on the experience of hundreds of people who really were in touch with God—experiences compared with which any thrills or pious feelings you and I are likely to get on our own are very elementary and very confused. And secondly, if you want to get any further, you must use the map. You see, what happened to that man in the desert may have been real, and was certainly exciting but nothing comes of it. It leads nowhere. There is nothing to do about it. In fact, that is just why a vague religion—all about feeling God in nature, and so on—is so attractive. It is all thrills and no work; like watching the waves from the beach. But you will not get to Newfoundland by studying the Atlantic that way, and you will not get eternal life by simply feeling the presence of God in flowers or music. Neither will you get anywhere by looking at maps without going to sea. Nor will you be very safe if you go to sea without a map.

In other words, Theology is practical: especially now. In the old days, when there was less education and discussion, perhaps it was possible to get on with a very few simple ideas about God. But it is not so now. Everyone reads, everyone hears things discussed. Consequently, if you do not listen to Theology, that will not mean that you have no ideas about God. It will mean that you have a lot of wrong ones—bad, muddled, out-of-date ideas. For a great many of the ideas about God which are trotted out as novelties today are simply the ones which real Theologians tried centuries ago and rejected.”

For some good basic theology, consider reading *Systematic Theology*, by Wayne Grudem.

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C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: Touchstone), pp.135-137.