

PART I: Focused Reading

What is Theology?

► Pre-Reading

Chapter 1, p. 27, paragraph 26 introduces the term *theology*. Read that information again and then in your own words write a brief definition of theology.

► Reading

Read the following article:

- You may refer to the definitions on the right, but do not use a dictionary.
- Underline the main ideas and most important words or terms.
- You may write comments and questions in the margin.

❶ Turning from the *poignant*¹ scene described in the Introduction to this chapter, we might want to ask what Paul meant by “the whole *will*² of God.” The Ephesian letter gives us *hints*³ of what he must have *covered*.⁴ He refers to God’s *determination*⁵ and choice “before the creation of the world” (1:4). All human beings are “dead in transgressions and sins” (2:1), but God’s grace and salvation through faith were revealed and made available through Jesus Christ. Our salvation, which comes through faith, is to result in “good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (2:8–10). Paul then insists that Jesus Christ “*has destroyed the barrier*”⁶ between Jews and Gentiles (2:11–3:13). He calls his readers to know and love Christ and “to live a life worthy” of their calling from God (4:1), no longer living as the *heathen*⁷ do (4:17). He gives both general and specific instructions for this task and for maintaining right relationships within the Christian community. He speaks of the church as both the body and bride of Christ, his people who must live in unity and as children of light. He calls for Christians of all social, economic, and other levels to “*submit*”⁸ to one another out of *reverence*⁹ for Christ” (4:1–6:9). All believers must be watchful and prepared because they live in a *hostile*¹⁰ environment and are engaged in a spiritual battle (6:10–18). He also speaks of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit and the future, promised inheritance (1:13–14; 2:18, 22; 4:30). In this one epistle, then, “the whole will of God” covers the person and work of God from before creation to beyond the end of life, the world, and history as we now experience it. In short, it appears to contain an overview of the main content and topics of information about God, his work, and his will, especially in and through Jesus Christ.

¹ emotionally moving, impressive

² plan, purpose, counsel

³ clues, indications

⁴ discussed, talked about

⁵ unchangeable decision, decree

⁶ has broken down the wall

⁷ Gentiles, ungodly

⁸ put first

⁹ respect, honor

¹⁰ warlike, extremely unfriendly

❷ How, you may ask, is the content of “the whole will of God” related to the question, “What is Theology?” Looking at the question from this *angle*,¹¹ we might suggest that theology is an attempt to *articulate*¹² the whole will of God in an organized, *coherent*¹³ way.

¹¹ viewpoint

❸ You will not find the word *theology* in the Bible. It comes from two Greek words, *theos* (which means “God”) and *logos* (which means “word,” “reason,” or “speech”). So theology, in the most basic sense, is a *rational*¹⁴ discussion about God. To broaden the definition a step further, we might say that Christian theology is an organized study of God, human beings, and their relationship—about the nature and activity of God, about us who are his creatures, and about his work to bring us into a reconciled relationship with himself.

¹² describe,
communicate

¹³ logical,
consistent

¹⁴ logical,
reasonable

❹ It is useful to note that all religious systems have their theologies. Christian theology, especially evangelical theology, is based primarily upon the Scriptures, but such areas as the historical study of theology and philosophy may be included in the study.

❺ When we move from these rather elementary descriptions of theology to theology as an academic discipline, we will see that the field, or study, of theology becomes more complex. As in all other areas of study, academic theology has its own technical vocabulary, methods, ways of approach, and areas of controversy. There are various types of theology. There are also *underlying presuppositions*¹⁵ of which we need to be aware, because they will affect our approach to theology. It is *imperative*¹⁶ to grasp the underlying assumptions of theological work because they can have either a positive or a negative effect upon the pastoral and teaching activity within the local church.

¹⁵ basic
assumptions,
fundamental
beliefs

¹⁶ absolutely
essential,
highly
important

► Understanding the Reading

1. Go back and read your definition of theology on p. 50 of this chapter. How has this reading expanded your understanding of the question, *What is Theology?* Rewrite your definition.

2. Discuss your revised definition with your classmates.