

Preface

Exploring Theological English is an ESL/EFL textbook designed to help you become more proficient at reading theological publications written in English. Our primary focus is on helping you acquire the key reading skills that good readers use every day. These include strategies (i.e., procedures, techniques) for comprehending the type of language used in the classroom and in scholarly writing, developing a broad general vocabulary, expanding your academic vocabulary, and figuring out complex grammatical structures used in academic writing. Our secondary emphasis is on introducing you to important concepts and terminology used in theological writing.

What audiences are addressed?

This book is designed especially for high-intermediate to advanced learners of English. You may be a student in an academic institution, or you may be studying on your own without the benefit of a class. If you are in an academic setting, you may be enrolled in a Christian college or university, a seminary, or a Bible school. You may be in an English-speaking environment, such as Great Britain or the United States, where English is the medium of instruction, or you may be studying in a country where English is used less frequently or even where it is seldom used. If you are engaged in self-study, you may be preparing to study theology in an institution of higher learning. Or you may be motivated for other reasons to improve your ability to read theological publications written in English.

Why is theology difficult to read?

What hinders or slows down your understanding when you read theological publications? If you are like many learners of English, you face several challenges. You may find that theological writing deals with concepts that are only somewhat familiar, and it may also include ideas that you have not previously thought about. Furthermore, when theologians discuss these **theological concepts**, they use many new **theological terms** (e.g., soteriology, eschatology) and they often assign specialized meanings to common everyday vocabulary (e.g., saved). This means that you not only need to become familiar with many new words and phrases but you also must learn the

Theological concepts are broad biblical and theological ideas. These concepts are formed by combining specific characteristics of a biblical truth into a larger, more general idea. For example, when referring to God, the concept of glory includes his majesty, his holiness, and the greatness of his entire nature.

Theological terms (or **theological vocabulary**, **theological terminology**) are words or phrases that have distinct, or special, theological meanings. The words *soteriology* and *eschatology* are theological terms.

General vocabulary with theological meaning are common everyday words or phrases that have a special meaning when used in theological writings. For example, the common, everyday word *saved* ("he saved his money") also has a theological meaning ("saved by grace").

General vocabulary are words that you can find in common everyday language (e.g., book, house, computer). Sometimes we use another term for the less common words or phrases from textbooks and scholarly publications. We may call them **academic vocabulary** (or **academic terms**, **academic terminology**). For example, words like *proficient*, *literal*, and *equivalent* may be called general vocabulary or academic vocabulary.

theological meanings of some common vocabulary which you already use in everyday contexts (**general vocabulary with theological meaning**).

Your challenge in reading theological publications may also come from not understanding the variety or type of English used in academic writing. When theologians write in English, they assume that their readers will be native English speakers or that they will have a high level of proficiency in the language. Therefore, they tend to use an advanced **general vocabulary** or **academic vocabulary**. They may also use complex sentence structures—that is, sentences that are very long and often contain several clauses. They may use less common grammatical constructions and a large number of passive verbs (e.g., “The decree *was issued* by Cyrus, king of Persia.”).

If you have studied theology in your native language, you may be acquainted with many of the concepts that appear in theological publications written in English. However, you may still find it difficult to understand a text because you do not know the English equivalents of the specialized terms. In addition, you may not be familiar with the wide range of general vocabulary, highly complex sentence structures, and new grammar constructions.

As you begin this study, you should keep in mind that many native-English speakers have difficulty understanding some theological arguments. They, too, must work diligently to comprehend new concepts and new vocabulary.

Is a particular theological viewpoint taught in this textbook?

The readings found in this textbook reflect a traditional orthodox view of Christianity. This viewpoint is called by a number of different names, conservative or evangelical being among the most common.

This view, to which the writers of this book are committed, assumes that we have in the Bible God’s accurate and trustworthy presentation of himself and his will. It assumes the existence of God (Heb 11:6) and that all things have come into being as a result of his will and actions. Furthermore, those with this view believe that he remains active in the universe, even to the point of intervening directly when he so chooses (i.e., he works miracles). Human beings were created in the image of God, fell into sin by the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, and so have sinful natures, commit sin, and are guilty and helpless before God. God offers restoration of the broken fellowship between himself and people (salvation) as a gift (grace). This reached a climax in Jesus Christ his Son who through his incarnation, life, teachings, works, and ascension brought the kingdom of God into the world in a unique sense. By his death he paid the penalty for human sin and made possible reconciliation with God. By his resurrection he defeated the power of sin and death. Through the divine Holy Spirit God continues his work on earth by drawing people to faith in himself and uniting them into his body, the church. Jesus Christ will come again to judge and to restore the creation to God’s original plan. Human beings are called upon to accept God’s grace by faith in Jesus Christ and to live in a manner pleasing to God under his sovereign control.

Through the ages differing interpretations have developed as to how the details of Christianity are to be understood. As writers of this curriculum we have attempted, as much as possible, to avoid any one particular theological bias other than that stated above. When this cannot be avoided, we have made an effort to explain the major alternatives in a fair manner.

This textbook generally uses the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible. If a different translation is quoted, it will be noted after the reference or at the beginning of the reading excerpt.

What will you learn from this textbook?

As you work through the chapters of this book, you will be introduced to how theologians think and how they express their thoughts in writing. You will deal with each of the areas,

noted below, that are most challenging for theology students who are high–intermediate to advanced learners of English: theological concepts and vocabulary, reading strategies, vocabulary strategies, academic vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure. As you develop competence in each of these areas, you will be better equipped to read theological publications as well as other academic writing.

Theological concepts and vocabulary. Research shows that the most successful readers draw upon previously acquired information to help them understand new material and fit that material into their existing framework of knowledge. Therefore, one of your first tasks is to develop a structure of basic theological concepts and vocabulary. Chapter 1, *Starting with the Bible*, will help you begin to build this framework. As you progress through each chapter, you will continue to build this structure. When you have completed this textbook, you should be able to more easily understand theological writings.

The selection of theological topics in this text is similar to that found in traditional books on Christian doctrine. For each topic, the most common discipline–specific terms are introduced and defined, followed by practice exercises.

Reading strategies. In addition to drawing upon their background knowledge of the subject matter, successful readers employ a number of highly useful strategies (procedures, techniques) that help them read effectively. Some procedures, for example, help them read at a speed that is appropriate for the content, comprehend a high percentage of what they are reading, and remember the key points. By using the strategies employed by good readers, you, too, can become a more proficient reader. In this book you will learn a number of helpful reading strategies. The specific procedures and exercise types vary from chapter to chapter, each occurring multiple times in the textbook.

Vocabulary strategies. When reading an academic text, many learners of English believe that they must use a dictionary to look up every word they do not know. This is one way to learn new vocabulary, but it is not the most productive way to comprehend an entire reading passage. Good readers use many different skills in order to understand academic reading passages. Therefore, we include a variety of vocabulary–learning strategies and practice exercises throughout this text to help you retain and use unfamiliar vocabulary.

Grammar and sentence structure. We assume that you already have a foundation in English grammar from your past study of the language. This book cannot be a substitute for a basic grammar course, and it does not deal with all of the major points of grammar and sentence structure in English. Beginning with Chapter 3, it focuses on two of the most troublesome areas found in academic writing: complex sentences made up of different types of clauses and organizational markers that lead the reader through the text, making it easier to understand the meaning and predict the development of ideas. We have included practice exercises for each of these.

How is this textbook organized?

This book has been designed so that you can use each chapter in the sequence provided. However, you may choose to skip some chapters and do others. Each chapter has five or six major sections, each presenting new information and/or practice exercises. Chapters generally begin with a section on vocabulary and reading skills (generally academic vocabulary, theological vocabulary, and reading for meaning). The second section includes one or more readings similar to the content found in introductory theology textbooks. The readings introduce the theological content of the chapter and give you opportunities to apply various reading strategies. You are encouraged to improve your reading comprehension with only minimal use of a dictionary. Short definitions, called *glosses*, are provided for the less common general vocabulary words. The third section of each chapter helps you develop the language skills you need in order to become a more proficient reader. It focuses on areas such as reading

strategies, reviewing grammar constructions that might be particularly troublesome when reading theological publications, and increasing your general academic vocabulary. This section will help you learn to read more quickly without having to look up so many words in a dictionary. The fourth major section varies from chapter to chapter. It may define the theological terms related to the topic for that chapter or it may contain a second major reading that completes the presentation of theological content. In the latter case, a fifth section focuses on key theological vocabulary. Finally, each chapter concludes with a variety of review exercises.

To get the greatest benefit from this textbook, most students should complete all sections of each chapter. However, the chapters are organized so that you can choose to do some parts and skip others. For example, if you have little difficulty with grammar and general vocabulary, you may wish to skip those sections and focus only on the readings and the theological vocabulary.

What language skills are addressed in addition to reading?

As noted earlier, this text focuses primarily on reading skills including vocabulary development. However, there are many opportunities for you to practice your writing skills. For example, to complete the exercises, you are asked to write your answers in English. If you find this exceptionally difficult, try to write as much as you can in English and the remainder in your native language.

In addition to practicing your reading and writing skills, you may also practice listening and speaking English if your instructor conducts all or some of each class in English. Some exercises ask you to discuss certain issues with your classmates or a friend.

What other books and supplies do you need?

The following items will be very useful as you study this textbook:

1. Bibles
 - a. Your native-language Bible.
 - b. Two or more different English translations shown on the chart in Chapter 1, p. 43. We suggest you use one of the literal (formal equivalent) translations in the left-hand column and also one or more of those listed as functional (dynamic) equivalent. Note that complete copies of most of these translations are on the Bible Gateway site (<http://www.biblegateway.com>).
2. Dictionaries
 - a. A theological dictionary.
 - b. An English-only dictionary.
 - c. A bilingual dictionary.
3. Miscellaneous
 - a. A notebook which allows you to add or remove pages.
 - b. A highlighter, or pens of two or more colors.

What personal benefits can you gain from studying this textbook?

Our desire is that through using this book you will be better equipped to do biblical and theological studies and that you will demonstrate improved ability in English as well as confidence that you can read and learn from academic publications. Our prayer is that through studying this text you will also be more eager to learn the great truths of our Christian faith, become more intimately acquainted with the Master, and allow your life to be changed by him.

A word about the authors

The original idea for the textbook came from Cheri Pierson and her personal experience as a missionary instructor at the Nordic Bible Institute in Sweden. Challenged with teaching students who needed to read theological publications written in English, she saw the necessity of this book and was motivated to do her doctoral research in the field of English for Bible and Theology. In addition to the overall design of the book, she contributed the sections related to English vocabulary, numerous exercises throughout the text, and portions of the *Teacher's Guide*. Lonna Dickerson wrote the sections on organizational markers and grammar, as well as portions of the *Teacher's Guide*. The chapter readings that are not from theology textbooks, the sections on theological vocabulary, and a number of exercises related to these, come from Florence Scott's study of theological writings and her own reflections on biblical material relevant to the topics and issues. While each of us came to the project with a unique contribution, we all shared in giving shape to the final product. Now, after more than a decade of work, we are pleased to make this textbook available to students, teachers, pastors, and lay persons.

Companion Website for students and teachers: <http://www.ExploringTheologicalEnglish.com>