

1. Introduction to Theology¹

Theology comes naturally

Many people believe that theology is too deep and unreachable for the average person. They believe it should be reserved for dusty, bespeckled semi-geniuses who lurk in the dark corners of libraries of great universities. Let me assure you that that is not the case.

True theology is rugged and “grunt proof”. Allow me to explain that term. The military has to make sure that their equipment can take a lot of rough use. It will be dragged through swamps and deserts, dropped out of airplanes and stuffed into back packs along with other hard objects. The people using them will not necessarily be geniuses. How smart could they be? They volunteered! Seriously, the average infantryman (usually referred to as a grunt) just got out of high school. Thus the term “grunt proof.” When the military considers purchasing a new piece of field-worthy equipment, they think anyone should be able to figure it out, and no one should be able to easily kill it.

True theology is grunt proof. It was designed to be understood by everyone from people like C.S. Lewis, who was an Oxford professor, to a shepherd in the Sinai Peninsula. It was written in such a manner that over a span of millennia, in varying cultures, climates, and technological advancements, all people could grasp its essentials and move toward a better understanding of their relationship with God. How hard could it be?

That is not to say that it is not profound. That is not to say that there is not a deep and scary end of the theological pool. What I’m saying is that there are so many truths to be found in the shallow end that you will have years of fun simply splashing around there. The next thing you know, you’ll be eyeballing the deeper portions and going “hmmm...” to yourself.

Let’s consider the biblical view of this matter.

- **Deuteronomy 30:11-14.** Theology is not too difficult for us. Though we should respect the teachings of our elders we do not need a guru or some “great teacher” in order to be able to grasp it. **Hashem** has always tried to make things clear or to simplify matters for us.
- **Isaiah 48:16.** God is not trying to keep secrets. Secret handshakes and “decoder rings” are not necessary.
- **Psalms 119:104-105.** His goals are simple, He wants our study of theology to lead to hating every false way. Theology is light. It enlightens us. It is not meant to be confusing and abstruse.
- **Deuteronomy 10:12-13.** All He asks is that we fear Him, love Him, worship Him passionately, and keep His commands.
- **Deuteronomy 29:29.** Granted, there are some things about infinite God that are too much for us now. However, everything we NEED to know in order to OBEY Him has been revealed to us.
- **Isaiah 8:20.** We should make “*To the Law and the Testimony*” our motto. The Scriptures should be our primary source of theology - not commentaries or popular authors. There is no hope of understanding the Lord outside of His Word. This principle is illustrated in the Master’s recounting of the rich man’s experience in **Gehenna**.² Abraham said that if the rich man’s brothers would not listen to the Word of God, they would not listen even if a dead man were raised. Sure enough, as we saw in the Master’s own life, the Pharisees who failed to heed the Scriptures did not believe even after Jesus was raised from the dead!

¹ Before class begins distribute both the study sheet and the handout “How to demonstrate passion for the Lord”

² Luke 16:31

- **Proverbs 6:23.** Each commandment we learn and obey enlightens us further and brings a course correction, keeping us on the right path.
- **Proverbs 8:8-9.** Good theology is meant to inculcate righteous living; therefore it will not be deceptive or perverse. However, one must be perceptive in order to gain clarity and one must be obedient in order to gain knowledge. Truth will not reside in an untruthful vessel.
- **Hebrews 5:12-14.** After all this, we do have a caveat. Just because all the truth is available to us in the Scriptures doesn't mean that everyone has an equal grasp of the truth. There is definitely a progression in our grasp and we all need to strive to go beyond the basics of salvation to the meatier portions of how to live a life that pleases our Lord.
- **Deuteronomy 17:8-9.** If a passage or a situation is too difficult for us at our present state of maturity we can freely approach those who are more advanced for help.
- **Isaiah 30:20-21.** If there remains any confusion about the nature of God we can always look to our Teacher, Jesus the Messiah. His life and example will show us the way forward. He actually IS the WAY and the TRUTH.

Theology is to d'vekut as botany is to plants

Theology is a way of systematically and carefully describing the human experience of God. **D'vekut** literally means a "cleaving" to God, an intensity of devotion. D'vekut is a Hebrew word identifying the deep, passionate, mystical relationship (or communion) that can exist between the Spirit of God and the spirit of a human.

Theology is to d'vekut as the scientific classification of botany is to plants. Plants are real. They are tangible. They exist apart from the study of botany. A plant that grows deep in the forest, far from human society, exists regardless of somebody's examination. However, by studying the plant, we may come to a better understanding of how to cultivate it. If the plant begins to ail, botany may inform us as to how to improve its condition. Careful study of the plant will help us distinguish it from its weedy imitators.

Similarly, consider a native deep in the jungles of post-modern **relativism**. His faith in the Messiah may be primitive and unschooled but it may be effective for salvation nevertheless. Thus d'vekut is the reality, and theology is the study of that reality. The study of theology, while unnecessary for salvation, is vital to sanctification or constant improvement of your spiritual walk.

Five advantages of studying theology:

1. It helps us cultivate a better relationship with God.
2. It helps us both better understand and better express our relationship with God.
3. It helps us identify when we are off track and get back to where we should be.
4. It helps us resist the devil and the temptations that often come our way. In Matthew 4:4-10 cp Luke 4:4-12 we see that the Devil tempted the Messiah three ways:
 - a. Place your physical needs and desires above obeying God.
 - b. Make a big show of your faith. Test God to see how far He'll go.
 - c. Seek earthly power and wealth regardless of the spiritual cost.

Notice the basic element that was common to each of the Lord's responses? Jesus used the Scriptures every time. Even though He is God, He still kept to what the Scriptures stated, showing the incredible importance of biblical memorization and correct application.

5. It helps us identify false teachers and false doctrines that could do us harm.

The Master once gave us a parable that went like this: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while people were sleeping, his

enemy came, sowed weeds among the wheat, and left. When the plants sprouted and produced grain, then the weeds also appeared.³

Not everyone who claims to be a believer is one in truth. Not everyone who claims to have a firm grasp of theology does. Often the enemy will deliberately plant “weeds” among us - people who appear to be disciples of the Master but are in fact sons of Satan. These people are planted in our midst in order to steal away our spiritual power, our victory over sin or our understanding of our true victorious nature as sons and daughters of God. Their leafy works crowd us out and steal the sunlight of the Spirit’s influence away from us. Their roots creep deep beneath us and steal important truths away before they even reach us!

Paul warned: “*Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elemental forces of the world, and not based on Christ.*”⁴

False teachers will come; it is inevitable. The question is whether or not you will recognize them for what they truly are. The Messiah described them as ravaging wolves wearing sheep’s clothing.⁵ The way you will recognize these fakes is by being so familiar with the truth that you will be proof against their wiles. That will come from the systematic and disciplined study of theology.

Jesus said that not only is it absolutely certain that we will come across deceivers,⁶ but at some point, there will come an ultimate deceiver. He will be very, very good at his craft.

Paul and John gave us three ways to identify the false Christ, this “anti-Christ”.⁷

- a. His signs will all be external and flashy.
- b. They will not be backed by sound biblical teaching.
- c. The antichrist will be in a given room or place and we will hear of him. In contrast, when the **Mashiach**’ returns, EVERYONE will know because His coming will be like lightning across the sky.

Moses warned us about false prophets like the Antichrist who can do great wonders. He said⁸ that it doesn’t matter how flashy the tricks are; if he is telling us to go against the Scriptures, don’t follow him!

Paul told Timothy that the reason that people would fall for false teachers was that they actually want to be fooled!⁹ They want to give in to their **yetzer hara** and the false teacher is giving them an excuse. They don’t want to study the Scriptures for themselves and be personally responsible for their walk. They would rather have someone think for them.

With that in mind, the elders’ key tasks within the congregation are to proclaim the message, to persist in teaching it whether convenient or not, to rebuke and correct, and to encourage with great patience and teaching.¹⁰

You and I will carefully go over what most believers refer to as the “articles of faith”, those points of theology that are considered so fundamental, so foundational that they form the basis of our belief. It is at these points that the enemy has consistently attacked God’s people for the last 6,000 years of recorded human history. His very first attack (against which our ancestors failed abysmally) was “Did God really say...?”¹¹ The key to victory is to be able to firmly reply, “Yes, God did indeed say...”.

³ Matthew 13:24-26

⁴ Colossians 2:8

⁵ Matthew 7:15

⁶ Mark 13:22; Matthew 24:4-5, verse 24

⁷ 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 and Revelation 13:13-14

⁸ Deuteronomy 13:1-3

⁹ 2 Timothy 4:3-4

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 4:1-2

¹¹ Genesis 3:1

To love Him is to want to know Him

You may be familiar with the old song that goes “To know, know, know him is to love, love, love him and I do, yes I do.” As saccharine as the song may be, it does state the two sides of a very deep truth.

- a. That which you love you long to know.
- b. That which you know deeply you tend to love better.

That which you love you long to know. For example, you may love baseball. If you do, the odds are great that you know the names of many baseball players and you may have even memorized many of their stats! Some fans go so far as to go on a quasi-religious hajj to visit each major baseball arena!

That which you love, you long to know more about. Perhaps that reveals more truth than we care to hear! If you’ll allow me to ask, “How is your marriage?” If you state that you love your spouse but you are deeply separated from them on an intellectual and emotional level; if you have no interest in knowing what they do or in understanding them better, then your love for them is undoubtedly lacking. Many of our marriages are failing because we show no interest in truly knowing who our spouses are, what makes them tick and what drives them.

To love God is to want to know more about Him. The study of theology (particularly theology proper, which is the study of the Godhead) is thus as much an experience of the heart as it is an abstraction of the mind. It is the heart reaching out to the object of its affection. Poring over the Scriptures is like reading a love letter. Our spirits should successively rise and fall depending on what the letters tell us about our Lover’s feelings for us.

To say “I have no interest in studying theology” is thus to say “I have no interest in **Yahweh Yeshua**, God my Savior.” Theology studied in this manner is no abstract, “ivory tower” endeavor. Instead it becomes passionately practical. It is passionate because it is motivated by the spirit’s longing for its Creator. It is practical because it helps you know how to better get along with your Divine Spouse.

That which you know deeply you tend to love better. You tend to feel more empathy and compassion for that which you know well. For instance you may initially regard a street thug with his tattoos, chains and knife solely as a threat. However, once you get to know the fear that dominates his life, once you see the deep sadness he may feel at never having known a father’s love, once you understand how short and brutal his life may be, it becomes a little easier to overcome your fear and to instead sympathize with his plight.

Most humans unfortunately fall for one of two extremes. Either they so emphasize the love of God that they fail to understand the fact that He is holy and thus should be an object of fear or they so emphasize the holiness and wrath of God that they fail to understand His mercy and patience.

Bad parenting is usually at the root of these two errors. Parents are a child’s first authority and as such they come to form the core opinions of a person’s view of God. Everyone gains a theological tendency from the way we were raised. Consider the following conditions and the potential view of God that could be the result:

Absent father - An unknown god cannot be served, trusted, or loved.¹²

Abusive father - A parent who is cruel or inconsistent may cause a child to have such a fear of God that he will be unable to believe that God will forgive his sins. If we have been treated poorly by our earthly father, we can sometimes believe that God is a distant dictator or is only there to discipline us. We can sometimes believe that God is just waiting for us to fail so He can remind us that we are a bad person. None of this thinking is an accurate

¹² Acts 17:23-24 cp 32

picture of the God of the Bible, which says that even if our parents abandon us, the Lord still cares.¹³

Authoritarian father – There is a difference between an authoritative parent and an authoritarian parent. Having an authoritarian parent may lead us to believe that d'vekut is impossible - that religion is about power. It could either lead a person to not think and not question authority or to BECOME the authority.

Distant/Uninvolved/Addicted father - A distant or apathetic parent will lead a child to simply consider God to be uninterested or irrelevant to his life. The child may possess a vague notion that God might exist but they will come to believe that that idea is irrelevant to their day-to-day life. Their loyalties will be erratic, whether to church or to family. If they do attend church they are often compelled to seek constant approval.

Inconsistent/Ambivalent father – Because there is no clear sense of right and wrong, a great many use religion to abuse others, or to completely set aside morality.

Overly Indulgent father - People raised under these conditions may possess a strong sense of entitlement. God, if He exists, is to be used as a source of personal empowerment. A parent who is overindulgent may lead the child to believe that God will overlook, excuse and even enable his sins. They will think, “God exists only to please me. I go to church if it pleases me. I seek out churches that serve me. Because God exists to meet my every whim, God is what I define Him to be. God is whatever I need Him to be.” This is by far the most prominent characteristic of American culture, as far as I can tell. Doesn't that say something about our society?

Involved, loving father – Authoritative parents teach their children that God loves His children unconditionally and accepts them for who they are. However, He keeps a close eye on His children, provides them with plenty of support, sets firm boundaries, and grants considerable freedom within those boundaries. Like God the Father, authoritative parents monitor their children and intervene when necessary, but let them get on with things when there is no need to interfere. They mean what they say, and do not shy away from conflict when enforcing the boundaries they have set. Authoritative parents (and God) are loving but not over-indulgent, involved but not overly controlling, clear about limits but not excessively risk-averse, and permissive within those limits but not neglectful. Most people would like to be an authoritative parent, whether or not they actually are. As God is holy, so we should be holy. As God is a good parent, so we should be involved, loving, authoritative parents.

To either overcome the tendencies of negative parenting or to reinforce the tendencies of good parenting we need to study theology so that we can gain a balanced view of God.

What does theologically driven d'vekut look like?

Let's examine this in the writings of the “man after God's own heart,”¹⁴ King David.

- **Psalms 42:2 HCSB** I thirst for God, the living God. When can I come and appear before God?

David likely gained a greater appreciation for the outward forms of worship and the discovery of God when he was (due to his exile) banished from the Temple (Hebrew – ***Beit ha Mikdash***). How much better it would be for us to develop and maintain this holy love without having the liberties of worship forcibly removed from us!

He longed for God the way a deer longs for water. He wanted to “drink” God – deep draughts of God. He wasn't sure he could make it to his next session with the Lord. Holy love of God is the very lifeblood of true religion. We should constantly develop a hunger and thirst

¹³ Psalm 27:9-10

¹⁴ Acts 13:22

for God; nothing more than God, nothing else than God, but ever more and more OF God. This is d'vekut.

Like a white-tailed deer in the hot and dry crags of Israel, David recognized his complete dependence upon the Lord. If the deer couldn't make it to that source of water, it would die. Without our Master, we can do nothing. This must be the prevailing attitude of anyone who desires to be a **tzaddik**.

A tzaddik is a righteous and holy person. It is a person whose goal in life (besides worshipping and enjoying God) is the reconciliation of God and man. The opposite of a tzaddik is a **rashah** (a mean, wicked person). The prevailing state of mind of a rasha is "yeshus". A "yesh" is an entity which enjoys a seemingly self-sufficient existence, as if independent of its Creator; a rasha or a **yesh** is an egocentric, narcissistic person. Never think that we can allow this kind of sinful yeast in our lives and have a good relationship with **Adonai Adonaim**, who only gives grace to the humble and resists the proud!

- **Psalms 63:1-2 HCSB** A Davidic psalm. When he was in the Wilderness of Judah. God, You are my God; I eagerly seek You. I thirst for You; my body faints for You in a land that is dry, desolate, and without water. (2) So I gaze on You in the sanctuary to see Your strength and Your glory.

David couldn't get enough of God. He eagerly sought God, thirsted for God and described his longing as a whole body experience. He said that that his spiritual desire was like the thirst experienced in a dry, desolate land with no respite in sight. Traveling through the dry, dusty deserts of the world worked up an appetite for God in David.

Having a correct understanding of the doctrines presented by the prophets and apostles is called being **orthodox**. Obviously we hold to the importance of orthodoxy, for we are commanded to be able to "rightly divide the word of truth".¹⁵ But orthodoxy, is only a small part of d'vekut. **Tzedekah** (right living) cannot exist without orthodoxy but orthodoxy may exist without tzedekah. One may possess a right opinion of God without being possessed by a great love of God. **Lahag** is an obsessive, greedy compulsion to study - study that does not result in a changed heart, study that precludes action. Lucifer and his demons would be a great example of this type of dry, fruitless knowledge.¹⁶

David held not only orthodox views of God, but also a passionate longing for God.

Unfortunately too many elders are like priests who have built altars and laid out the wood but then are perfectly content to keep rearranging the wood and stones in new and imaginative ways, completely unaware or not caring that fire has not come down from heaven. Those who have truly come in contact with the Lord will be set ablaze, for "our God is a consuming fire."¹⁷

To have a right view of God and even to do right things FOR God is not enough. Love must take hold of us.¹⁸

- **Psalms 84:2-4 HCSB** I long and yearn for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh cry out for the living God. (3) Even a sparrow finds a home, and a swallow, a nest for herself where she places her young--near Your altars, LORD of Hosts, my King and my God. (4) How happy are those who reside in Your house, who praise You continually. Selah

¹⁵ 2 Timothy 2:15

¹⁶ James 2:19

¹⁷ Hebrews 12:29

¹⁸ Matthew 7:22; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

David longed and yearned for the courts of the Lord. He experienced this longing as both an emotional and a physical need. He was jealous of the birds that got to nest in the Beit ha Mikdash! He wished he could just live in the Temple.

We elders must be careful to not lose God in the wilderness of ministry. We must not allow the multitude of mitzvot that we both read and attempt to obey to swallow up this central fact: God is neither an idea nor a moral code but a Person. We can never hope to fully know a fellow human being through a single encounter. How could we ever dream of gaining sufficient insight into divine Personality in even one hour a week? It is only after long and loving time spent with the Lover of our Souls that the full ramifications of d'vekut can be realized. We need to develop a strong yearning to be in God's house, to be learning from God's Word, or to be conversing with fellow Believers about God.

- **Psalms 119:130-131 HCSB** The revelation of Your words brings light and gives understanding to the inexperienced. (131) I pant with open mouth because I long for Your commands.

David considered God's Word to be a wonderful, enlightening revelation and "panted" for this experience "with an open mouth".

There is a Hebrew word that describes this kind of mentality: ***kavanah***. Kavanah is the intense mental concentration or emotional devotion in the utterance of a prayer or during the performance of a ***mitzvah***. Kavanah is the state of mind requisite for deep prayer or meditation.

How can we demonstrate this level of passion for the Lord in our lives? I'd like you to consider the handout I gave at the beginning of the class as you answer that question for yourself.

Let me share with you nine ways, nine characteristics in our culture or society that hinder our love for God and our desire to study His ways.

1. Failing to put God first¹⁹
2. Failing to love our neighbor²⁰
3. An unforgiving spirit²¹
4. Poor relationship with spouse²²
5. Doubt²³
6. Disobedience²⁴
7. Tolerating sin²⁵
8. Materialism²⁶
9. Selfishness²⁷

What can we do to overcome these temptations? Allow me to use Psalm 119:9-16 as a basis for nine possible solutions:

1. Keep (and obey) the Scriptures (v.9)
2. Seek after Him passionately and do not wander from Him. (v.10)
3. Treasure what He says and remember it. (v.11)

¹⁹ Luke 14:26

²⁰ (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27); 1 John 4:20-21

²¹ Mark 11:25; Ephesians 4:31-32

²² 1 Peter 3:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:9

²³ (Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:38-40; Luke 8:24-25); James 1:5-7

²⁴ Psalm 66:18; Proverbs 28:9; John 14:15, 21, 23-24

²⁵ Psalm 101:5; 1 Corinthians 5; Hebrews 3:12-13; Revelation 2:2, 20

²⁶ Ezekiel 16:49-50; Matthew 19:24; Luke 16:19-23; 1 John 2:15

²⁷ James 4:3 cp 1 John 5:14-15 "according to His will"

4. Praise Him (v.12)
5. Be teachable. (v.12)
6. Tell others about Him and pass on His teachings. (v.13)
7. Rejoice in His way; consider it a pleasure; consider Him valuable (v.14)
8. Think about Him and His Word; study Him IN His Word. (v.15)
9. Delight in Him; never forget what He's said. (v.16)

Everyone's a theologian

Listen carefully to me. Everyone has a religious opinion. Even ***atheists*** have their opinion of God, the Bible, morality and death. Every culture of all time, regardless of its level of education has had religions. The idea of the existence of God, or gods, is what is referred to as an "absolute" among humans. No culture has been truly atheistic – ever. Even in Communist China, the Christian church is flourishing and a number of other religions are still practiced. The Soviet Union was never able to completely stamp out the "opiate of the people."

That is because God has placed eternity in our hearts.²⁸ The Lord God has planted certain key concepts deep into our psyches. Besides that, He purposefully left His fingerprints everywhere!²⁹

So, the question is not whether or not you have theology. The proper question is "Is your theology well reasoned?" Are you a good theologian, or a bad one? Are a theological Bruce Lee, or are you like the only white guy in a chop-socky movie about whom everyone says "He has no kung fu!"?

The crudest, most elementary and least educated of men can gain some notion of the existence, attributes and authority of God, even if all they have is nature. So how much more responsible for our theology are we who have the Scriptures, study tools, teachers, churches and the internet available to us?

We should take to heart what the Lord Jesus told us about His return! He said, "**And that slave who knew his master's will and didn't prepare himself or do it will be severely beaten. But the one who did not know and did things deserving of blows will be beaten lightly. Much will be required of everyone who has been given much. And even more will be expected of the one who has been entrusted with more.**"³⁰

²⁸ Ecclesiastes 3:11

²⁹ Psalm 19:1-4a; Romans 1:19-20

³⁰ Luke 12:47-48