Understanding Theology in Biblical Interpretation

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Subtitle:
How man-made systems shape the way we read Scripture — and why we must let God's Word define the framework

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Introduction

In every generation, Christians seek to understand and rightly handle the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15). This pursuit requires more than casual reading—it demands careful interpretation, guided by sound hermeneutics and shaped by a desire to let Scripture interpret Scripture. Among the influences on how believers read the Bible, **theology** plays a central role.

In this study, "theology" refers not simply to the general study of God, but to organized systems of belief that function as frameworks for interpreting Scripture. These systems are the result of human effort to arrange and explain the Bible according to certain presuppositions and methods. While they

aim for order and consistency, these frameworks may not always reflect the true intent of Scripture—especially in areas such as **eschatology** (the study of last things), where different theological systems can produce drastically different conclusions.

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1. The Meaning of "Theology" in Frameworks

The word *theology* comes from the Greek *theos* (God) and *logos* (word, reason, study), meaning "the study or reasoned discourse about God." In practice, theology encompasses entire systems of thought—structured interpretations of the whole of Scripture.

Such systems can be useful in helping believers understand how individual passages fit into the Bible's overall message. However, they are also **man-made constructs**, shaped by the presuppositions and interpretive methods of those who developed them. Because of this, they are fallible, and their conclusions are only as reliable as the biblical accuracy of their underlying assumptions. This is especially true with prophecy, where the theological framework often determines how a text is read and applied.

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2. Major Theologies as Interpretive Frameworks

While all faithful interpretation should aim to be biblical and God-centered, different systems of theology approach the Bible in distinctive ways. Some of the main ones include:

- **Covenant Theology** – Sees God's redemptive plan as one unified covenant, fulfilled in Christ, with the Church as the continuation of Israel's covenant people.
- **Dispensationalism** – Divides history into distinct dispensations, maintaining a separation between Israel and the Church, often interpreting prophecy with strict literalism.
- **New Covenant Theology** – Emphasizes the New Covenant as the fulfillment of all previous covenants, focusing on the law of Christ.
- **Progressive Covenantalism** – Blends elements of covenant and new covenant theology, emphasizing progressive revelation and fulfillment in Christ.

Each of these can be paired with historical prophecy approaches such as preterism, futurism, historicism, or idealism. For example, dispensationalism typically pairs with futurism, while covenant theology often pairs with partial preterism or idealism.

It is important to remember that these systems of theology are human interpretations of Scripture. While some align more closely with the biblical text, others may impose an artificial structure that obscures or distorts the intended meaning.

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3. A Biblical and Balanced Approach

When Scripture is allowed to interpret Scripture and the whole counsel of God is taken into account (Acts 20:27), one approach stands out as both Christ-centered and consistent:

- **Theological Base:** A covenantal view that sees all of God's promises fulfilled in Christ, uniting Jew and

Gentile into one people of God.
- **Prophecy Perspective:** A partial preterist reading that recognizes many prophecies were fulfilled in the first century (especially in AD 70), combined with idealist insights that view Revelation's visions as timeless truths about Christ's reign and the church's mission.

Why this approach is biblically sound:

1. **Christ remains the center** – All of God's promises are fulfilled in Him (2 Corinthians 1:20).
2. **History confirms prophecy** – Jesus' predictions in passages like Matthew 24 and Luke 21 align with first-century events.
3. **Future hope is preserved** – The return of Christ, final judgment, and resurrection remain certain (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; Revelation 20:11–15).
4. **God's people are united** – No separate plans for Israel and the Church; all are one in Christ (Ephesians 2:14–16; Galatians 3:28–29).
5. **Speculation is avoided** – Focus stays on Christ's kingdom and mission, not on sensational date-setting.

This reflects the Bible's unified story—a redemptive plan already accomplished in Christ's first coming and awaiting its consummation at His return.

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4. Why This Matters

Theology is not merely an academic discipline—it shapes how believers read, apply, and live out the truths of Scripture. A flawed theological system can lead to misinterpretation, misplaced hope, or even a focus on the framework itself rather than on the Word of God. This is why it is vital to evaluate

every theology in the light of Scripture, “proving all things” and “holding fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Conclusion

When we speak of theology in the context of biblical interpretation, we are speaking of **systematized human attempts** to understand God’s Word. These theological systems can help us see the unity of Scripture, but they can also obscure it if they are built on faulty assumptions. Our loyalty must be to God’s Word itself—not to any theological system—allowing Scripture to shape our theology rather than forcing Scripture to conform to it.

Especially in eschatology, where competing theologies often produce conflicting visions of the future, we must pursue a biblically grounded, Christ-centered theology that honors both the fulfilled prophecies of the past and the promises yet to come.

Footnote: *Theology* — from Greek *theos* (God) and *logos* (word, reason, study), meaning “the study or reasoned discourse about God.” In this context, it refers to organized systems of doctrine that function as interpretive frameworks for understanding Scripture.
