

Prolegomena

Before we begin the doctrinal statement, it is important to understand *prolegomena*. The word is fairly simple. It is Greek in origin and from two different words: *pro*, meaning “before,” and *legomena*, meaning to “speak or say.” Prior to beginning theology¹, one must first take into account certain foundational considerations before saying anything further. In essence, *prolegomena* describes the rules of engagement for learning the truth communicated about God in Scripture. *Prolegomena* is where one must begin in the study of theology.

Knowing God is the crucial endeavor for people. Therefore, it is essential to understand how one arrives at truths about him. Yet how does one faithfully begin to gain a more accurate understanding of God and his Word? This task is accomplished in five main ways. We must understand the:

1. Source we use to study theology.
2. Method we use to understand theology.
3. Philosophy we use to obtain theology.
4. Theological systems and traditions we have to learn theology.
5. Outcomes we should see practiced from theology.

Our Source

We believe that the Bible is God’s complete and trustworthy revelation, and that it is adequate and sufficient to form doctrine. While God has shown his “eternal power and divine nature” in creation (Rom 1:20), this *general revelation* is glorious but insufficient for salvation. Rather, it renders sinful humans without excuse for their rejection of and rebellion against God (Rom 1:18-21; Ps 19:1-6; Acts 14:15-17). The Bible, however, is God’s *special revelation* of his character, purposes, actions, and especially of his Son Jesus Christ, and he has given it to us so that we might know him and be reconciled to him (Heb 1:1-3; John 20:30-31). There is no need for further special revelation because an omniscient and omnipotent God has chosen not to do so. We hold a presupposition that the Bible is the sufficient and only source for accurate truth about God by which we may determine doctrinal positions (Ps 19:7-11; 2 Tim 3:16-17).

Our Methodology

We believe that the Bible has one ultimate Author who wrote this comprehensive narrative of himself and his creation.² When a specific area of doctrine is being studied, all parts of the Bible that deal with that subject must be considered properly in their context to form a reliable doctrine. If “All Scripture is breathed out by God” (2 Tim 3:16), God’s narrative as found in Scripture must be approached comprehensively and holistically. Understanding must rely upon the whole, not merely the parts.

Our Philosophy

¹Theology likewise comes from two Greek words: *theos*(God) and *logos* (word), referring to “a word or discussion about God. Theology is normally taken in a broad sense to signify the entire scope of Christian doctrines.” Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 648.

²For more on the divine and human authorship of the Bible, see *Doctrine of Scripture*, 3.

We believe that there are two major concepts to be kept in mind when attempting to understand God and his Word so as to separate truth from opinion. First, God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Isa 55:8-9), so we cannot comprehend them without illumination by his Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:9-16; John 14:25-26; 16:12-15). Second, when God revealed his Word, he did so with the intent to communicate in a way that people, created in his image,³ might understand (Deut 29:29; 30:11-14; John 20:29). Therefore, dependence on the Holy Spirit and careful exegesis⁴ of the Bible allow us to construct doctrine to better understand God and his purposes.

Our Theological System and Tradition

We believe the Bible, as the Word of God, is the only authoritative source to answer theological questions. While we recognize that we can and should learn from Christians of various times and places, their writings and ideas can be humbly and thoughtfully accepted or rejected in as much as they adhere to or depart from the teachings of the Bible.

We believe that among all the truths that God has revealed to us in Scripture some doctrines are *primary*, meaning that they are recognized as essential beliefs or practices within orthodox Christianity and are applicable to all churches that proclaim Christ (e.g., the Trinity, the deity and humanity of Jesus, etc.). Other doctrines are *secondary*, meaning that they are understood and accepted differently within orthodox Christianity (e.g., the relationship between Israel and the Church, those who should be baptized, etc.). On secondary matters, this statement will identify the doctrinal position that shapes and defines Cornerstone's belief and practice, while acknowledging that other believers and churches hold different biblically based convictions. Still other doctrines may be described as *tertiary*, because they more loosely shape the life and practice of a local church (e.g., modes of baptism, views on the millennium, etc.). On tertiary matters, a breadth of opinion and practice may be maintained within a local church without compromising primary biblical doctrines. The majority of this doctrinal statement is devoted to articulating primary and secondary doctrines. Where there are tertiary aspects within these doctrines, they will be indicated.⁵

Our Outcomes

We believe that the doctrinal statements below should be regularly, cautiously, and deliberately examined over time. To treat this document as complete and unalterable would convey two dangerous realities: first, that we think we have arrived at a full understanding of God and his Word; second, that we are not seeking to grow in our understanding of God and his Word. Both are grave errors. The pursuit of knowing God and his purposes is a lifelong venture (John 17:3; Philip 3:8-15; Col 1:9-10). Further, the purpose of this statement is to communicate the unchanging truths of Scripture in our current time. Therefore, this statement will need to be

³For more on the Image of God, see *Doctrine of Humanity, sections 1-2*.

⁴*Exegesis* is a Greek word meaning "to draw out." When used in reference to studying the Bible, *exegesis* is "the determination of the meaning of the biblical text in its historical and literary contexts," as opposed to imposing upon the biblical text what a reader may want it to mean. Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 1991), 19-20. For more, see *Doctrine of Scripture*.

⁵ For a list of the doctrinal matters which we identify as secondary or tertiary, see Appendix A. For more on why and how to distinguish between different levels of doctrinal matters, see Gavin Ortlund, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

adjusted or amended to reflect our growing theological understanding, address future cultural developments, and reflect changes in word usage or connotation.

We believe that each of these five means of understanding theology is essential to a healthy relationship with God both personally and corporately. They help us to develop a growing understanding about God (*orthodoxy*, “right belief/knowledge”), to live in a manner worthy of God (*orthopraxy*, “right action/habit”), and to fuel our passion and love for God (*orthopathy*, “right desire/delight”). Each of these three outcomes should be evident and growing in the life of a follower of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:9-11; Col 1:9-10; Titus 1:11-14).