



*Having Fun with Theological Words*

## **Why is a well-developed vocabulary important?**

As you can see the answer is rather *prima facie* or evident merely on the face of things. One word may carry with it a series of complexities, from the subtle to the obvious. Thus, through a robust vocabulary we can more effectively construct our thinking and subsequent communication.

This is no less true with God's Word. Sometimes concepts are contained in the Scripture where the Scriptures, though possessing the idea, do not provide a vocabulary word for us. Thus, we, with our various native languages, either find a word or create a word or term which functions as the representative of the concept we may discover in the Bible.

The word, "Trinity" is the most common example used to illustrate this point. The word, itself, is not found in the Bible but its concept is all throughout the Bible.

Today, we will look at a series of words which are related to the Scriptures, either those found in Scripture, those representing a concept in the Scriptures or those related to interpreting and understanding the Scriptures. In other words, *let's have fun with theological words.*

**Theology** –theos (Θεός), meaning "God," and logia (λογία), meaning *sayings or a series of constructed thoughts which have been communicated*. The root word is logos [λόγος], which refers to reasoning from which we get the English word, *logic*.

For the Christian theology can basically can be viewed as - *the consideration of the entirety of Scripture from which the believer's understanding of God and his revelation to man is founded and developed*.

## **Types of Theology**

*Natural* – the least dogmatic of the kinds of theology, natural theology is developed by observing nature and forming postulates and principles about God. For the believer, he or she must always remember that natural revelation cannot ever contradict, countermand or supersede written revelation.

*Biblical* – this theology approaches the Bible progressively. It looks at the work of God and revelation of God from the fall to Christ's anticipated return with an emphasis on the harmony of the Scriptures, the fulfillment of prophecies and the first advent, again also anticipating Christ's return. This theology is developed as one studies, beginning to end, the Word of God. God and his work is revealed, more and more, as the theologically invested person moves through the Bible

*Historical* – this refers to the church, itself, and what has been received and rejected by “the church” throughout history. This informs the Christian with regard to what has been vetted and to what degree. Many complex and difficult topics have been dealt with by the church through the ages and it is essential to the Christian who desires to develop his or her theology, that they be exposed to this material which will help them in learning what has been covered in the past; the excellent processes involved in affirming or rejecting ideas and taking such realities, both the ideas and vetting mechanisms, with them into their own studies.

*Systematic* – (sometimes referred to as *dogmatic theology*, though some also view *dogmatic theology* as a *subsidiary of systematic theology*) it is the study of the Scriptures in which major subjects to lesser subjects in the Bible are studied with respect to all of their Scriptural references, starting with the most affinitive and then to the least (*though some systematic theological efforts only cover major doctrines*). This includes not only the systematic review of all pertinent parts of Scripture for a subject matter, but as well, the utilization of historical and Biblical theologies to aid in the process.

Ultimately, from systematic theology, whether formerly published as such (ex: *Loci Theologici* of Melanchthon published in 1521) or more informally such as Luther's works which do, systematically, cover the doctrines, the most definitive and dogmatic theological propositions are derived from this method. Some common topics or doctrine dealt with in a systematic work would be, Bibliology, Theology Proper, (*the doctrine of God*), Christology (*the divine person of Christ*) Pneumatology, (*the divine person of the Holy Spirit*), Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology, Anthropology and Angelology.

*Personal or Practical* – ultimately, whether you know it or not, every Christian has a personal or practical theology. That is, how Christians live their lives will demonstrate what they believe. A good Pastor/Teacher will help his congregation develop a strong practical theology through practical teaching, or how to apply, by faith, what has been taught.

**Divine Sovereignty** – this refers to *God's divine rule* of the universe. It is not without controversy, however. The Reformed church influenced by John Calvin, i.e. *Calvinism*, defines *divine sovereignty* differently than Lutherans and many Protestant and Evangelicals.

Calvinism typically prefers to speak of divine sovereignty as “absolute sovereignty” in which God is in control of everything.

**Ex:** Pastor John MacArthur, a Calvinist in his doctrine, states about God's absolute sovereignty, “God orders everything, **controls everything**, rules over everything.” (Grace to You. GTY.org) (Bold mine)

**The problem with that?**

Let's look at **Job1:6-12:**

<sup>6</sup> Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. <sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." <sup>8</sup> The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."

<sup>9</sup> Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? <sup>10</sup> Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. <sup>11</sup> But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face." <sup>12</sup> Then the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.

As many of us know Satan followed up this permitted exercise by attacking Job in various ways in destroying his children, health and wealth (*“do not put forth your hand on him”*, is understood to refer to not taking Job’s life). Who was in control when Satan attacked? Not God, rather, Satan. Yes, Satan had limits but the things he did within his limits were things he did or as God says, “your power”.

But even though Satan did have great power, there was a power greater than Satan’s at work, namely *divine sovereignty*. Not that this power was making Satan do anything, rather this power not only could and did permit the Satanic evil but it was able to incorporate that evil into the greater divine plan of God and use it for good.

Thus, a proper and more biblical definition would be that ***divine sovereignty*** is the rule of God in all universal matters which he ultimately uses to bring about his will.

Here are portions of Scripture which reflect the concept of divine *rule* in all things as opposed to *control*.

**Genesis 50:20:** (Joseph speaking to his brothers about their selling him as a slave) <sup>20</sup> “As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”

**Romans 8:28:** <sup>28</sup> “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.” *Work together* comes from the Greek word, συνεργεῖ (synergei) and from which English gets “synergy” that means to take two or more things and make them cooperate or function together.

**Omnipotence and Omniscience** – both words share the prefix *omni*. *Omni* is Latin in its origin and means, *all or all of something*. When it is combined with other words it means all of that particular thing. Thus, omnipotence and omniscience.

**Omnipotence** – this refers to the potency or power of God and with the prefix, *omni*, it means *all powerful*. The Bible refers to God's power as supreme. **Matthew 19:26**: "But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.""

Even though God is all-powerful he does not always exercise his power.

**Omniscience** – this has in view knowledge (science) which comes from the second part of this compound word. Thus, God is described as all-knowing or possessing all knowledge. **Psalm 147:5 Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.**

Even though God is all-knowing he does not always act on his knowledge nor reveal that knowledge to others.

**Synecdoche** – this is a figure of speech which helps us interpret the Bible without a wooden literalism which can cause us to misunderstand a passage. God accommodates human literary devices in his inspired Word. Thus, we must be aware of them so that we do not trap ourselves, theologically, into a corner out of which we cannot be rescued.

Specifically, a *synecdoche* is a figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole or the whole for a part. It is the kind of figure of speech used where a small or singular thing represents a larger number of the same kind or a larger number refers to a smaller group.

**Matthew 3:5** Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him [John the Baptist]...

“All”, here, does not mean every single person in Judea and the region about the Jordan were going out. Rather, many or quite a number were going out to him but the use of *all* helps give a picture of its significant number.

**We often say something like this when we exclaim, “Everybody was there!”**

**James 2:15** If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

Here, the word, “naked”, is the most extreme condition of poverty and is a great example of synecdoche in use where the larger represents the smaller. Most people read the passage and understand it does not mean complete nakedness only but as well it includes lacking sufficient clothing . However, the use of the synecdoche helps us understand, more starkly, how we are to view our brothers and sisters.

Before moving on let’s look at one more passage.

**Romans 3:7-18**

<sup>7</sup> But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?

<sup>8</sup> And why not *say* (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”? Their condemnation is just.

<sup>9</sup> What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; <sup>10</sup> as it is written,

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;  
11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,  
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;  
12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME  
USELESS;  
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,  
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

13 “THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,  
WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,”  
“THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”;  
14 “WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”;  
15 “THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,  
16 DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,  
17 AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.”  
18 “THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”

With this in mind, do you believe this is a ***synecdoche***? The reason I ask this is because some theologians used this to define the depravity of man and have formed a theology behind it in stating that God, in using this language, means to describe all men, everywhere, as this depraved thus, he must regenerate them before they can ever believe the gospel. And we will look at regeneration lastly, today.

Does this describe all men, everywhere, or is this a synecdoche?

**Metonymy** – this figure of speech is also critical to understanding the Word of God. One can understand it as referring to one thing but having something else, though related, in mind. It replaces the name of whatever really is in mind with a representative, so to speak, of that thing.

The most common example is the reference to one's automobile as a person's *set of wheels*. They really are referring to the car, as a whole, though it possesses wheels.

One of my favorite examples of a metonymy in the Bible is God and the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

**Exodus 7:1-3** 7 Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. 2 You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. 3 But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 14:4 as well).

God, here, represents his actions. He isn't arresting control of Pharaoh's heart and will, rather he is provoking Pharaoh with what God knows are actions that will result in Pharaoh's hardened heart.

**A few common examples among humans are:**

*You're upsetting your brother.*

*Don't anger her.*

*You made him mad.*

**Dichotomous and Trichotomous** – these two words refer to the way man is viewed by various theologians as described or presented in the Scriptures.

***Dichotomous*** – (also called bipartite) this refers to man being divided into two parts, *material* and *immaterial* and more specifically, *body* and *soul*.

**Trichotomous** – (also called tripartite) this construct has man divided into three parts, *body, soul* and *spirit* or if you use the preceding value system, *one part material* and *two parts immaterial*.

However, with regard to the spirit of man, he is congenitally dead until he is born again (regenerated) thus, bringing back to live the spiritual man which died in Adam and this dead spiritual part of man consequently was passed on to us all.

I am not going to develop this portion of the class other than to make you aware of this and two major issues.

- The Old Testament uses soul and spirit somewhat interchangeably at times.
- The New Testament exceptionally distinguishes between the soulish and spiritual properties of man.

**Regeneration** – the Greek word from which we get regeneration is used only two times (*though the concept is contained elsewhere*) in the Bible. The word is παλιγγενεσίας (palingenesias). It comes from two words, *palin*, which means again and *genesis*, which means birth or beginning, thus “new beginning” or “new birth”.

The two passages are:

**Titus 3:5** He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

**John 3:3** Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

This being “born again” or regenerated refers to our being alive in Christ, our spiritual resurrection at the new birth from which we become a spiritually alive person who possesses eternal life and the capacity for fellowship with God.

Some people, as I mentioned earlier, believe that man is so depraved, per the Romans 3 passage, that man must be regenerated in order to believe the gospel. Even on its face this seems like bad doctrine but it is becoming more and more prevalent with the rise of neo-Calvinism which teaches that regeneration comes before one believes the gospel.

Well known Calvinist Bible Teacher and Pastor, R.C. Sproul, is a good sample of neo-Calvinism. He states, emphatically, that regeneration must come before one can believe the gospel. While he is correct in stating that no one can regenerate themselves, that it is the work of God, he mistakenly reduces its meaning to only being made alive, spiritually.

This alone is sufficiently in error seeing that being made alive, spiritually, or resurrected is a property which only comes when one is made alive in Christ which must come through receiving the gospel. However, laying just this element aside let's look at **Titus 3:5**. Here we will discover that regeneration is not just being made spiritually alive again. It is also the cleansing from sin.

**Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,**

The Greek word for washing, λουτροῦ (loutrou), refers to a cleansing wash. It is a ritualistic reference to the ritualistic baptisms or washings that the saints practiced during the Theocracy of Israel. This washing our sanctification which can only come after we are justified which can only come when we receive the gospel whether in Word or Sacrament!

Regeneration therefore, is not merely the being made spiritually alive again but the cleansing by God the Holy Spirit of the individual, from sin, in other words, his/her sanctification.

**End Class**