

# Theology is for Everyone

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Preacher: Canon Dr. J.I. Packer

[ 0 : 0 0 ] This church is extraordinarily fortunate in having amongst its parishioners Dr. Jim Packer. There are very few churches, I'm sure, where we have been members, where one can call upon so many talented and helpful members of the congregation.

But of course, at the top of the pile is Dr. Packer. Nobody else has written 45 books. No one else initiated this event, the Lenders' Exchange, in 1988 or thereabouts. He saw the need for a niche of this kind and increasingly it seemed to be a need for all of us to exchange perspectives and experiences of the faith.

So we are honored, Dr. Packer, to have you address the group and look forward to your statement that theology is for everyone.

I trust that we all agree with you at the end of your presentation. Thank you, Olaf, for your introduction.

[ 1 : 2 7 ] I enjoyed it. And now, friends, serious business. So, before anything else, let us pray.

Almighty Father, we thank you that all light, truth, and wisdom comes from you. And we pray that we, who are new creatures in Christ, may enjoy the ministry of the Holy Spirit in all its fullness, bringing us truth and wisdom as we think together and talk together right now.

Granted, we pray for our good and for your glory. Amen. Theology is for everyone.

And I'm preaching to the choir. You all believe it. At least, Olaf encouraged me to think that you must all believe it.

He clearly believes that you all believe it. And so, perhaps, I should not bother to give the talk, after all, and simply encourage everyone to go out in the sun, which might well have the effect on our spirits of confirming our faith in God and his goodness.

[ 3 : 0 4 ] And, in the truth, that theology is for everyone as part of that good heritage that our God gives us.

But, no, I'm going to give my talk, and I am going to make the case as I would seek to make it to people who were less convinced that theology is for everyone than, I suspect, you are.

If one polled lay people generally through the Christian Church, particularly Anglicans and Roman Catholics, I think that the general consensus would be, no, theology is not our business.

Theology ought to be left to the professors and the clergy. We, lay folk, are expected to believe what they tell us, and as good Anglicans and Roman Catholics, we shall try to do just that.

We can safely leave it to the clergy and the professors to decide what we should believe. They, after all, are educated up to doing that, and we lay folk, well, here I speak now particularly in the voice that I think, or in the words that I think that Anglican lay people would use, we, once we've been put through confirmation, we are assured that we know everything that we need to know to get us to heaven, so why should we bother with theology?

[ 5 : 0 4 ] Why should we learn anything more in the course of our earthly pilgrimage? We don't need it. Well, that, I think, is poppycock.

But nonetheless, it's a common view, and it's the view that I have in my mind, that I'm arguing against, as I present to you the line of thought that I now offer.

I think that the Bible shows very clearly that the answer to the question, should lay people bother with theology, is yes, most certainly yes.

And to ground what I say further on Scripture, I'm going to read and comment on a couple of passages. First, Gospel of Mark, chapter 12, verses 28 through 34.

It's a fuller account of an event which is reported more briefly in Matthew's Gospel, that I expect we are used to the briefer report.

[ 6 : 23 ] But this is how the story is told in Mark. One of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that Jesus answered them well, asked him, which commandment is the most important of all?

Jesus answered, the most important is, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

And the second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said to him, you are right, teacher.

You have truly felt that he is one and there is no other beside him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, you are not far from the kingdom of God. But after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

[ 8 : 02 ] Got that? The scribe had spoken wisely and Jesus acknowledged that. And what did the scribe said?

To love God with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength and to love one's neighbors, oneself is much more than whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Mark, writing in Greek, though of course this conversation would have taken place in Aramaic, but Mark, writing in Greek, and whenever you narrate what was done in one language, now yourself using another, well, it's an interpretation.

It cannot be anything else. Translation is always interpretation. And it's interesting when you read through the original to see that Mark uses two words.

One put in Jesus' mouth for the mind and the other put in the scribe's mouth for the mind. It may have been the same word in Aramaic.

[ 9 : 24 ] We don't know. But the text that we're given to work with is the Greek text. And in the Greek text, Jesus says, love God to love the Lord your God with all your mind.

And the Greek word is *dionioia*. And it means all your reasoning power, all your resources of logic and imaginative thinking along with your logical analysis.

That's what *dionioia* means. And when the scribe responds to Jesus, he is given the word *cynesis*, which is translated understanding.

And *cynesis* means insight into values, into relative importance, into wisdom, into the wise way to live one's life.

Jesus saw that he answered wisely. Well, put those two words together and what you've got is pretty much a map of the human intellect in action.

[ 10 : 42 ] And what the passage is telling us is that it's a matter of life's priority to obey the most important commandment of all, which has, as part of its substance, loving the Lord your God with all the mental powers that God gave you.

That's what we're learning here. So, the mind is not permitted to lie fallow in the Christian life.

On the other hand, the mind is to be working at full stretch or we are not fulfilling the most important commandment of all.

The late, great Martin Lloyd-Jones, whose name some of you, older folk here like me, will know well.

Younger folk may not know of Martin Lloyd-Jones, so I'll tell you, he was Britain's number one evangelical preacher for a quarter of a century in the days of my youth.

[ 11 : 52 ] Martin Lloyd-Jones used to say over and over, the Christian is, this was the way he put it, the greatest thinker in the world.

He didn't mean by that that the Christian had greater technical resources for intellectual life than anyone else in the world. What he meant was that the Christian has a bigger intellectual task to tackle than anyone else in the world.

The Christian has to rethink everything that the world has taught, everything that is, which has come to him in a world-centered and self-centered way.

And we have to go over it and re-angle it all in terms of God, the God from whom truth and wisdom come, and in terms of the glory of God, how we are to use this truth in order to bring honor to God's name.

And it's a task which is as large as life. Literally. There is nothing about which we think which doesn't need to be re-thought in God-centered, Christian, Bible-based terms.

[13:20] So the Christian has a lot of thinking to do. It's part of our calling. To confirm this now, let me refer you to a couple of passages in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians where he saw himself as dealing with all-round immaturity linked with all-round conceit and arrogance and quarrelsomeness and general disorder in the congregation.

He saw a connection between those two things. When people are immature, well, it's like the behavior of children who are three or four or five or six years old.

they don't always realize what a mess they're making, what a disruptive force they can be. They just live according to the little that they see and, oh my goodness, you just have to follow them around and clear up after them and it's pretty near a full-time job.

Well, Paul saw the Corinthian church very much in those terms. And so, his sense of what was going on breaks surface in verse 20 of 1 Corinthians 14 where he begs them to get beyond this immaturity and his plea is expressed in the following words.

Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil that's a different thing altogether. But in your thinking be mature.

[15:14] Paul knew that that was at the heart of the difficulties in Corinth. They simply hadn't attained a mature thinking. And he writes the letter as much to encourage them and lead them into mature thinking as anything else.

He strikes the note again right at the end of the letter when in verse 13 of chapter 16 he says, Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men.

He doesn't mean men as opposed to women of course. He means act like grown-ups. Be strong. You won't be strong unless you are acting like grown-ups and you won't be acting like grown-ups, Christian grown-ups, I mean, unless you're thinking like Christian grown-ups.

Well, link those words of Paul, deploring immaturity that's centered in the mind, with what Jesus said commanding the scribe who discerned that love of God with all the mental powers God has given us is truly life's, part of life's priority and more important than offering sacrifices or going through any other religious routine.

Link the passages together in that way and I think you see clearly enough scripture is encouraging us very strongly to believe that theology is for everybody.

[17:03] What is theology? Well, our image of theology I suppose even those of us who believe in a broad sense that theology is for everybody but I suppose our image of theology is of a technical study and certainly amongst scholars it's as technical as any other branch of learning a technical study then out of the reach of ordinary lay folks a speculative study which sustains itself with all sorts of guesses and fancies and fantasies about God which these clever scholars think up and third quality of it following from the first two it is irrelevant to ordinary life that I believe is what most people deep down do think is the truth about theology that's their image of theology but stand back and think for a moment of what the word means in terms of its etymology etymology doesn't always tell you the meaning of words you have to look at the way they're used in order to be sure of their meaning but in this case etymology presses the button theology theology is theos the Greek word for

God and logos which means the account of something theology then is quite simply an account of God an account of God in relation to everything that is not God an account of God which is drawn from the scriptures which are the word of God and an account of God which can be prayed and made matter for praise so that your thinking ends in giving glory to God in doxology and petition and theology in pastoral ministry is of use because it tunes people into God whereas their problems problems which create their need for pastoral treatment is that they're not properly tuned into God when they start well just by saying it that way I hope I make the point that theology is an exceedingly practical study yes properly done it is indeed and it's theology properly done that I'm seeking to commend to you this morning I might add that if we labor as we should labor to witness to unbelievers outsiders about our faith well we need theology for that because they being initially skeptical about Christianity they will spot it straight away if they're made to feel well here's this person trying to share his or her faith with me and they don't really know their stuff they're stumbling and fumbling and saying things in a very crude and oversimplified fashion as an outsider I can see that so it's due I can respect their goodwill then but I can't respect their competence because they aren't competent outsiders who start without initial sympathy on what you're trying to

present to them are very quick to pick up incompetence on the part of those who are trying to teach them trying to share well that's another reason why we need to know some theology just for a moment think of the Jehovah's witnesses who come to your door you may think that the stuff they try to peddle about Armageddon and the new world and all that is pretty crude and unconvincing stuff but they do know their stuff and if only you keep your mouth shut they will rattle it off for oh a quarter of an hour together non-stop well why aren't

Christians who have truth to share as competent in knowledge of their stuff as are folk like the Jehovah's witnesses or the Mormons if you get the Mormons I only get the Jehovah's witnesses and frankly that's quite enough for me well that's the reality of theology and it's theology thus understood that I'm commending to you this morning question what are the marks of good theology theology as it ought to be when I start teaching my theology overview class at Regent College which I do on an annual basis just for the first few minutes I have a bit of fun with my students introducing myself to them and getting on wavelengths with them

[ 23 : 07 ] I tell them I'm a servant of the queen pause the queen of the sciences I mean that's what theology was claimed to be in the middle ages queen of the sciences and I say straight away I want you to think about the queen I have three things to tell you about the queen one is that she's short sighted and she can't see anything clearly unless she sees them through the spectacles of scripture and the second thing is that she's shapely when she maintains her god centered poise she is beautiful to look at anyone of course can get out of shape I tell them even the queen can get out of shape but when she's properly in shape god centered that is in her focus and approach to everything well she is very shapely and beautiful indeed and a third thing to remember

I tell them she's distinctly sassy theology the queen doesn't keep her mouth shut when confronted with error theology speaks up speaks up in the name of god and won't let her get away with error well that's the queen she's someone to be reckoned with she isn't a quiet little mouse well you can see what I mean when I say I have some fun with them saying things like that and I'm saying these same things now to you because it's just as true for you and me as it is for my students at Regent College I believe that theology is the queen of the sciences in the fundamental sense that it establishes a point of view from which all the facts of all the sciences ought to be studied and for us as for my students at

Regent it's important to grasp that theology must build on scripture and that it's only in good shape when it's God centered in its style of thought and it's distinctly vocal sassy speaks up contradicts error and folly wherever error and folly are found and you don't have to look far to find them these days answering my question what constitutes good theology in a more formal way well I never honestly folk

I didn't touch anything it just happened all right now back to where I was I was going to tell you that a pecker alliteration popped into my mind to guide me in giving a more formal answer to the question what are the marks in good theology the matter must be right the method must be right the memory must be right and the mindset must be right let me explain the matter must be right to start with what do I mean by that I mean that theology concerns itself with truths about God which we call doctrines doctrine you know is the Latin doctrina which means teaching and doctrines are truths for teaching when we talk about church doctrine what we mean is the truth of which the church is trustee set in shape for teaching here reference to the classic creeds is important because those creeds set before us the basic doctrines and theology must keep in touch with the creeds if its subject matter is going to be as it should be and then secondly the matter of theology is morals ethics ideals of goodness and righteousness ideals of godly christ-like living answers across the board to the question how should we behave whereas the study of doctrines is an answer to the question what should we believe belief must behave when we've got it and the subject matter of theology includes christian behavior so its doctrines and its morals and its spiritual life what I mean by spiritual life is communion with god and growth in fellowship with god and I'm remembering now that back in England forty years ago

I was friends with an elderly pastor who used to express the subject matter of theology by using the magic set of initials DEP doctrine experience which was his way of expressing the thought of doctrine put into practice and behavior doctrine experience and practice viewed now as a set of standards and I think it was from him that I got the illustration which I would be using now I never thought to make a slide of it I might have done if I had a chalk board I could draw it up on the board think of a stick person drawn by a child there will be a round circle for the head and there will be a

larger area with boundaries for the body and there will be stick legs can you imagine that well the point was that if any of these concerns these matters of theological study are disproportionately done well you get a disproportionate human growth from God's point of view if people are only interested that is in getting truths clear and in theological arguments and disputes and debates the circle marking the head gets bigger and bigger and bigger and it is disproportionate with the body and the legs and if all you're interested in is religious feelings and shivers down the spine and gooey moments exalted moments you know you feel specially good and you believe that this is the breath of

[ 31 : 50 ] God upon you well that corresponds in my picture to a head that's small but a body that is huge because of course it's in the centre of the body especially below the belt that these feelings are generated and sustained and so once again you have a distorted body tiny head huge huge corpus thorax whatever no not thorax the whole body and stick legs and then if your only interest is in doing things I mean if you're an activist for whom life is a matter of running around doing this doing that doing the other and you neglect doctrine and you neglect the quest for real communion with God well you draw the tiny then you draw the tiny head and the tiny body stick body with huge legs you see again disproportionate and the point of the illustration is that spiritually in the judgment of God we want to be well proportioned just as physically we try to be as well proportioned as we can in our growth and our daily existence well that's enough

I think about the matter of theology keep the doctrines keep the ethics and keep the experience in proper place proper proportion to each other theology concerns them all and the method of theology theological thought must be right you never lose touch with the Bible on which you're drawing from material you never lose touch with the situation into which you hope to feed the material you don't study God's truth in a vacuum you study God's truth in order that human lives and human communities may be put into shape whereas at the moment they're out of shape intellectually morally attitudinally yes out of shape so you try to get you study with a purpose of getting all these things right so that you may help people to put their own lives right in these departments and so your study will be situational you'll never forget that you're studying theology in order to put it to use in your own life and in the life of others and your method will be also traditional in the sense that you will gratefully receive the wisdom of yesterday for the understanding of God's truth and the living of godly life today

Christians who never bother about the wisdom of yesterday they're like a cork tossed on the water no stability they just go where the water goes and there's always a thing or two going in Christian circles I mean the latest fad really some fancy doctrine or fancy pattern of life or whatever it is and people concentrate exclusively on that and if you ask well now what's the story of Christianity during the nearly 2000 years before this particular fad broke surface they really have no idea and alas very little interest and that I'm afraid is a failure in theology because all down the centuries the Holy Spirit of God has been teaching God's people from the scriptures there have been mistakes made granted but there's also been an enormous amount of wisdom distilled and if you're going to do theology to any purpose think theologically to any purpose you need to be in touch with that heritage it isn't the final authority scripture is the final authority but it's a tremendous resource so the method must be right for good theology and the memory must be right well now that's the last point I made actually when theology is in touch with its own past again and again it's able to say of the notions that are being passed around in the present hey we've been here before we've seen this before it's a mistake and this is how you detect and defuse and correct and get beyond it well as I said if you if you haven't got a memory of these things I haven't said it yet I'm about to say if you haven't got a memory of these things you are rather like a person who is having difficulty in living in the present just because their memory is gone memory loss in the church is as unhelpful as memory loss in the individual and in the individual of course it can be tragic just think of Alzheimer's short sight is another way of picturing the state of affairs if you don't know where the church has been before you are like a short sighted person

I told you the queen is short sighted without the bible I'm now saying that the queen is short sighted without some knowledge of how the holy spirit has taught folk from the bible during the centuries that are past and for your memory must be right and your mindset must be right here I refer to a book that was published nearly half a century ago by Harry Blummeyers do you know how to spell that name B-L-A-M-I-R-E-S the book was called The Christian Mind The Lily Testament Meeting has anybody read it yes just a few of you but not very many it's a very impressive book in its

substance it's a brief book but it makes very weighty points Blummeyers argues that back in the 1960s when his book was published one had to say of the western world the [ 39 : 34 ] Christian mind no longer exists it's extinct and having caught his readers attention by saying that Blummeyers went on to confirm the marks of the Christian mind are these it is supernatural that is to say it reckons all the time with God and his presence in his world the natural order is supernaturalized constantly by divine action it is personal it's relational and the Christian mind sees relationships and ultimately relationship with God as the supremely important realities naturalism as a view of life and impersonalism as a way of looking at life around you and dealing with other people that doesn't lead you to wisdom

Christian life is sorry the Christian mind is oriented to truth always seeking truth the Christian mind takes evil seriously doesn't eliminate evil by any mode of thought if you think of the world today you will know that lots of the current modes of thought which we are invited to identify with do actually eliminate evil nothing is really bad everything is on its way to goodness in some fashion or other no simple mind the Christian mind takes evil seriously and the Christian mind takes authority seriously the authority of God in his word and finally says Blumeyers the Christian mind is sacramental in the broad sense this is not sacramental this is sacramentalism by the way such as is maintained by the church in Rome this is sacramental mindset as a way of looking at the world And what Blamire's means is simply that the Christian mind sees the features of the world around us, the order of creation, as so many pointers to the greatness, beauty, grandeur, wisdom, etc. of the creator.

The world, in other words, leads the mind up to God. The Vancouver mountains, the Vancouver sea, the spring greens on the trees, and so on and so on and so on. Everything leads the mind up to God. And that is the habit of the Christian mind, namely to be led to God by the prompting and the pointing of things around us.

[ 42 : 50 ] That's what he means by the sacramental mindset. He's right. And theology shapes the mind in terms of those six qualities.

Now, let us set against that the answer to another question. What then are the marks of bad theology? And I offer you three.

First, it is rationalistic. Rationalism is what you get when the human mind, with all its powers, appeals to the personal self as its final standard of truth and wisdom.

And we've had a great deal of that in the last 300 years, and we've got a great deal of it still.

And it's rationalism as the key feature of Western culture has probably come to stay. Subjectivism is a related quality.

[ 44 : 09 ] Subjectivism is an expression of human pride. It is the attitude which says, I affirm my mind, my instincts, my judgments against everything and everybody.

Bad theology.

Bad theology. Bad. Is what I call anti-intellectualism. Here I'm thinking of the way in which conservative Christians of all sorts have pretty much contracted out of the in-movements of thought during the last hundred years.

Because they have been so secular, so rationalistic, so subjectivist, and so far from Christian faith. Liberal theology, of course, has bought into all of that.

But conservative theology has shrunk from the world, the open public square, shall I say, of debate about life in general.

[ 45 : 54 ] And it's reacted into an attitude which says, in effect, give me as little theology as I can get by with.

Keep me as far from theology as is compatible with spiritual well-being. Keep me as little theology as I can get by with.

God is not honored in our lives by faithful service as fully as he should be. We inherit a certain amount of that, friends.

Though I think we can say that at St. John's there's less of it than there is in some other evangelical churches. And the very existence of learners' exchange, as Olaf described it when introducing me, is, I think, a pointer under God to that fact.

But there is a lot of anti-intellectualism around in conservative Christian circles. Whereby we excuse ourselves from serious theology on the ground that theology is constantly being distorted.

[ 47 : 43 ] So if we try to get into theology we're likely to be led astray. And even if we did get into theology and became really competent at stating our faith, no one would listen, no one would listen, so why bother?

Well, that's enough about bad theology. I move now to my final question, my final comment.

And I hope I've stimulated your thinking and this will lead into some solid discussion. Last question. What then is the faithful Christian's agenda in theology? And I want to suggest to you that for each one of us the agenda is threefold.

One, seek God's truth. The question of truth is always the basic question.

[ 48 : 46 ] The question of reality is one aspect of the question of truth. What's real? Well, what's true?

And for the Christian, the next move is to say, let God tell us. And so everything is to be brought into relation to scripture so that God may tell us what is the truth.

It is sometimes said and truly said that Christians who seek experiences sometimes forget that the quest for truth is primary.

I think, I'm sorry to have to say it, but I think that is a truth in its own right. Well, let's see to it that we put first things first. First, seek God's truth.

That's item number one in the Christian's agenda in theology. Second item in the agenda. Know the Christian basics.

[ 49 : 54 ] I've hinted at this already. I said it right at the beginning. If we don't know our stuff and we can't present it to other people with real competence, Well, we shall lack credibility and we shall not be honoring God the way we should.

You say, what is the stuff? Well, let me reel off nine things which it seems to be we, all of us need to know something about, up to the level of simple competence in stating them.

The authority of the Bible. That's number one. The sovereignty of God. God's control over his creation.

The reality of the Trinity. Yes, it's a mystery. But we need to be able to explain as much as the Bible explains about it.

And in the Bible, we're presented with a gospel that cannot be stated. Save in Trinitarian terms.

[ 51 : 16 ] The Father sends the Son. The Father and the Son send the Spirit. You don't even go on, you see what I mean. But if you don't acknowledge the Trinity, well, you're not able to state any of that with biblical clarity.

So, authority of the Bible, sovereignty of God, reality of the Trinity, the tragedy of humanity as a fourth matter on which we need to be competent, how, in conversation, are we going to show people that there's something fundamentally wrong with human nature?

There are ways and means. You see the Bible doing it, actually, in a whole series of different ways. Human dignity is being lost.

Human, the human individual is a kind of noble ruin. How are we to get this across? Well, first of all, understand it in biblical terms.

We are members of a tragically ruined race. And we need to be able to say that low and clear. It's the basis for going on to say that the only hope for lost humanity is new life in Christ, who redeems and restores.

[ 52 : 44 ] But if we can't speak credibly about the problem, we shall be heard as speaking credibly about the solution.

So, we must be able to explain the glory of the incarnation. We must be able to explain the mediation of the Son of God, who became man, in order that we might be renewed in the life of God.

We need to explain the necessity of faith and the centrality of the church in God's plan. And what I call the circuitry of communion with God through the means of grace.

Circuitry, I think, is the right word. I borrow it from the world of electricity, in which, sure, I don't know my way around, but I think that the word circuitry expresses it, doesn't it?

Life and light from God, received, and what has been received, sent back to God, by us who have received it, in the form of praise and service.

[ 54 : 14 ] The circuitry of communion with God, and, final point, the ultimacy of doxology. When you ask, what is human life for?

Well, part of the answer is for a joy beyond anything which people in the world begin to experience, but that isn't the whole answer.

To give glory to God is the final answer. Doxology is the ultimate purpose of our existence. And giving glory to God, so Christians find, is the ultimate joy and fulfillment, even in this world, where everything that we're going to enjoy in the world to come begins, but nothing is complete.

Well, these are standard Christian themes. These are the basic, basics, if I can put it this way, in the Christian message.

And we need to be able to talk about them clearly and forthrightly to people who start from scratch in regard to them. And so, having said that much, I've filled in what has to be said under item three, Christians' agenda and theology.

[ 55 : 41 ] One, seek God's truth. Two, know the Christian basics. And three, maintain your witness. Understand your calling to be a witness for God in a benighted and, in many ways, daft world.

And, understand that witnessing to God and his truth, God and his love, God and his Christ, is a very integral part of the life of doxology, bringing, giving praise to God and leading others to praise God also.

You can see where I've got to. Theology, put to use, is right at the heart of Christian discipleship and Christian service.

So, is theology for everyone? The question now answers itself. We can't be the people that our God is calling us to be. without it. So, let's make sure that in all the other priorities that we set ourselves in our life, getting abreast of theology at this layman's level has its priority claimed.

What am I to say? It's learning time set apart to pursue it because our discipleship demands it.

[ 57 : 28 ] Well, I said some of that provocatively. That was purposeful. I want you to have a conscience about this and I want you to juggle other people's consciences about this.

and now let's have some discussion and debate perhaps. Am I pitching it too strong? I, of course, don't think so.

You may think so. Well, if so, let's talk about it. Over to you. Thoughts, reactions, comments, whatever. Jim, is there any place in the world where theology is actually still formally regarded as the central study?

Is it in Eastern Europe or South America or the Vatican or even all? Only amongst leaders in the older churches can one guarantee that theology is given its proper primacy.

Leaders in the Vatican and leaders in Orthodoxy would just be nodding their heads to all the things that I've said but I can't think frankly of any part of the world any area of Christian culture still existing where this attitude is part of the cultural heritage and maintained by the community.

[ 59 : 02 ] No, I can't. We've all gone secular. Bad news? Yes. There's a famous scene on Judgment Day where Jesus says to a group or rather the group says to Jesus you've done all these things in your name and he replies but I do not know you.

So there's some bad theology around somewhere in this situation and do you know of any accounting is the final responsibility with the individual or is there added to that any accountability for the laziness of some Christians to be inquiring of each other where they stand in faith and so forth.

Is there any accountability there or is it still left with the individual not to have found the truth or had the right theology in that sense?

I think there is accountability in the fellowship at this point. I remember that I think it's in the 13th chapter of Hebrews that we are told to watch over each other.

It isn't just that clergy and pastors are told to watch over the flock. it's that we are told to watch over each other.

[ 61 : 00 ] And in the nature of the case that would be the only or at least that would be a primary way sorry only was wrong a primary way of expressing neighbor love in the church.

We don't I'm afraid do it as we might and I think we all of us suffer as a result. we do tend to leave personal faith as a private matter for other people.

Our own faith is a private matter. We don't like people inquiring too directly into that and we think that Christian courtesy requires us not to inquire too pushy into the personal faith of anybody else. And that is more wrong than right I think. Though granted in this field it is very easy to be downright offensive talking to another person and trying to push on them convictions which go beyond where they actually are at the moment and where they can follow us.

I don't think I need to dwell on that. But the fact that there is a wrong way of doing something doesn't mean that there isn't a right way also. And what your question I think alerts us to is the fact that there is a right way which we need to discover and follow.

[ 62 : 44 ] Yes, we are to a significant extent our brother's keepers and we mustn't try and evade that in the way that Cain tried to evade it when he was asked the question about where is Ava.

I'm glad you brought that up Bill. It's awkward to discuss it but it's necessary to discuss it. Well, over to you and Betty.

I was just thinking about the work of the Holy Spirit. And even are we not honouring God even if we fail incompetent in our witness.

Because I think back to when I was witness to it. I don't think everybody had it exactly when they shared faith with me. Some of them were babes in Christ but I saw the love of Christ in them that attracted them.

and I think that's for me I think the Holy Spirit fills in where we fail. I don't know if you would concur with that.

[ 63 : 55 ] Well, I would concur with it but you know how it is when you're talking you can only say one thing at one time and I was spending all my strength this morning trying to say look we need to have a conscience about being competent to state our faith.

And however strong our trust in the Holy Spirit to fill the gaps may be I think that my point still stands. We're called to do the best we can as spokesmen for the faith of Christ.

And then what you say about love of course will come in all the more strongly. People will see the love and the concern the good attitudes backing up the good words.

It's better however you will agree that the good attitude should back up good words than that the good attitude should have to back up not such good words.

If we put it that way. this all we two have tried to do and not left the other one down. I just think we might get hung up on that having everything right and it may cause us to take backwards death in our witness to others.

[ 65 : 27 ] I mean I think my own family I don't know at all but I share with them what I know and hopefully it has some effect on them.

I'm so glad you're saying all this Betty and I respond now by saying for goodness sake folks don't hear anything that I've said this morning legalistically as if this is an academic requirement well a learning requirement without which you dare not open your mouth as if in other words this is a task which we have to accept as a burden strapped on our back.

I don't mean it that way I'm trying to present an ideal an ideal which we pursue in the freedom of the spirit and the joy of the Lord not however allowing ourselves to think that being free in the spirit joyful in the Lord and loving towards folks excuses us from trying to do the best we can with the minds that God gave us.

That's the whole of what I've been trying to communicate. Please hear it that way and not as if well not as if I'm a kind of intellectual what shall call it jailer let's say it that way who will not let you out of jail until you can pass exams in a whole series of theological pursuits.

yeah that's it I think that the superficiality in today's society and everything like that I think that rubs off everywhere in congregations and I think people it's based on knowledge you can't just look to someone I'd be offended if someone came up to me and said I'm a Buddhist why don't you become a Buddhist it has to be in detail it has to be based on that person and our knowledge of that person's life and background it can't be just something superficial and if you don't feel you're confident enough with people they don't know enough of their own faith so refer them to something else like the alpha course is excellent a 13 week course that goes into great detail and then you're not just building all these people who may be just nominal in their faith or attending services and they don't have the holy spirit they're not really born again you know because they've just been told a superficial system it's not something in detail of what's involved which the alpha course goes into that detail and explains in detail it's not just a near-to-day gone-to-morrow thing it's simple

[ 68 : 39 ] I'm very underweagled that you've mentioned that the alpha course which is very widely used in the Christian world and the Christianity explored course which is widely used and is used here this is why we don't have the alpha course it's because we do have the Christianity explored course they both of them represent something which I myself am thrilled to see and I hope will increasingly be appreciated as the years go by this is a rediscovery of the adult catechumenate you know what that is in the second third centuries fourth century too if an adult expressed interest in

Christianity well in local congregations there was always a catechumen class and one or more of the ministers would be concerned with instructing the catechumens catechumen it's a word that comes from a

Greek term meaning to instruct and it was understood that folk who wanted to become Christians must be properly grounded in the faith the syllabus for the catechism classes adult catechism classes now was in substance the Apostles Creed and well it was just part of the set up in the church that there would be classes going on all the time to teach adults the faith of the Apostles Creed well we got a long way away from that we inherited a culture in which it was assumed that everybody would be taught the basics of the faith as children you get it in Sunday school and you get it through learning a children's catechism but we got our head in the clouds if we suppose that that state of affairs pertains today because it vanished in my judgment and

I go back a bit to observe a certain amount it vanished about half a century ago everywhere the idea that Christianity didn't need to be learned in the old old fashioned manner just got into the minds of Christian leaders and parochial clergy and pastors and whatever else they did they let the basic instruction of younger people in the faith of the apostles creed they let it go and so now in evangelical churches you may still find lots of people who know their bible tolerably well but they don't know the faith because they never been taught the faith taught it I mean in the classic Christian wisdom classic Christian manner marked by classic Christian wisdom that's been honed over 2000 years of teaching it well I think that's where we are and you're calling attention to that fact you're so right when it comes to getting clear on the faith people are superficial and the whole idea that we need to learn the faith as I said right at the beginning of my talk that has simply gone people don't believe it and you have to reason with them to try and show them that well both according to the bible and according to common sense according in line with your attitude to anything else that you want to get on top of you have to do some learning if you want to appreciate music you've got to do some learning if you want to appreciate literature you've got to do some learning and so on and so on well you're tuning us into that awareness and thank you for doing it you're absolutely on target

I think in what you just said yeah I'm wondering if you cared to comment on what methods are being used Marcus used a point about alpha and you added Christianity Explorer my experience is that oftentimes that's an unloading of responsibility you go to a course here it is pre-packaged and sometimes those courses are run by the in people or the volunteer people and responsibility then just vanishes further than else and there is a certain marketing spin to it so I just I just wonder if you have any thoughts on that please well I think that you're putting your finger on something that is sadly true and it is all too easy for folk who take courses to shift responsibility onto the shoulders of the people leading the courses and limit themselves to how can I say it absorbing whatever in the course comes easy to them and leaving the other stuff for other people and so really feather bedding themselves in this whole exercise of learning what we've been given to learn

I think that in human pastoral terms that's the way it works out what can one do well one can at the very least warn people against handling the course in that way warnings in any department of life where something can be mishandled or can go wrong warnings can be given and they may not be heeded but if the warnings aren't given well certain responsibility has been neglected people ought at least to be warned you have been warned don't get this wrong don't handle it wrong be open to learn properly and fully and one hopes that people who take courses will informally be discussing and churning over what's been presented to them one on one with other people and you do want when you run these courses some friendly

[ 76 : 08 ] Christian people in the course who will be ready to talk one on one with people who are trying to assimilate what they've heard and if the course doesn't have people like that as part of the human what do I call it the human establishment and basis for managing the course well yes the kind of thing that you're talking about will happen and it needn't happen and it will be very sad if it does happen so again you raise a good solid point thank you very much for it Bill you do look like a man with something to say thank you Dr.

Packer this morning and you're going to do likewise is that it thank you so much good thank you