

THEOLOGIES THAT WOUND: An Introduction

Part I

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This is Part I of an introduction to the series, “Theologies That Wound,” which will highlight some mainstream theological thoughts and beliefs incongruent with Scripture, and that can harm Christian’s relationships with God and others.

The first article in the series, “Theologies That Wound: A Study of Biblical Forgiveness,” can be found on our site under Library/Therapeutic Articles. New articles will be posted roughly every six weeks. The following is a sample list of areas that will be addressed:

- Anger, Hatred and Vengeance–What’s Wrong, What’s Right?
- Marriage and Divorce–Design and Permissibility.
- God’s Will–Treasure Hunting or Creating?
- God’s Sovereignty–Who’s in Charge?
- Christian Identity–Am I Good or Bad?
- Leadership and Submission–What’s His, What’s Hers?
- Faith–Optimal, Functional and Dysfunctional.
- Salvation–Eternal Security and Perseverance of Saints.
- The Church–A Change Agent or an Agent that Needs to Change?
- Unconditional Love–Wound, but do no Harm!
- Revisiting the Rapture–Ready or Not, Here I Come!
- Sexual Self–Sexual Freedom through Love’s Intoxication.

WORDS, BELIEFS AND SORROW

The lack of developing and exercising discernment accounts for a considerable amount of human sorrow and torment.

The Bible is God’s revealed word, and is given to all humanity for knowledge and wisdom, forgiveness and reconciliation, correction and conviction, comfort and affliction, and faith and fear. Words have the capacity to heal and wound. Paul says in II Corinthians 7:8-10 that words and their accompanying beliefs can wound in two ways. One is a worldly sorrow that produces a kind of death; the other is a godly sorrow that leads to repentance through confrontation. The latter sorrow is good. It wounds us at first, but is the forerunner of potential growth and healing. Discernment (the ability to judge) is required to determine what kind of sorrow we experience, which in turn will influence our acceptance or rejection of it.

LACK OF DISCERNMENT BEGINS OUR TORMENT

A considerable amount of human sorrow and torment results from not developing or exercising discernment. When we fail to discern, false information can be deposited in our faith or theology banks that greatly influences our everyday decisions. For example, many Christians believe they should always love others unconditionally. Their definition of

unconditional love leads them to:

- never say anything to hurt another,
- avoid all immature arguing and
- cover all the sins of offenders.

They may conclude it is right to avoid problems and confrontations, especially if the other is easily hurt. However, thoughtful Christians won't allow themselves to exclude other Bible passages on the same topic, such as Matthew 18:15 (the responsibility of talking to an offender) and Proverbs 27:6a ("Faithful are the wounds of a friend.") Reconciling seemingly contradictory thoughts and verses requires the skills of discernment.

Without careful thought and judgment, people suffer consequences of their wrong beliefs. In the example above, the likely result would be an inability to work through relational problems and denying or repressing anger, hurt, guilt and/or shame. According to recent research, these unresolved feelings lead to coronary heart disease, depression and anxiety. Other significant effects of false beliefs and accompanying unresolved emotions could include:

- Shortened lifespan.
- Premature decline in physical health.
- The inability to find peace.
- The illusiveness of a sense of God's presence.
- A slow disconnect from one's faith.
- A shift in priorities from spiritual thoughts to the external world.
- An unmet desire for spiritual renewal.
- Spiritual doubt and disappointment.

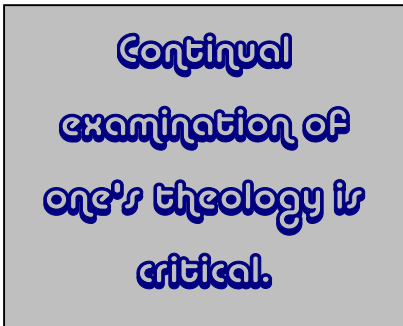
These largely unnecessary sorrows and torments can result from the failure to develop and exercise discernment, which allows false beliefs to be deposited in one's theological bank. In turn, these beliefs exercise considerable influence over future decision-making.

Some people's discernment skills are highly developed. We can think of our beliefs like a bank account. Those who are less discerning, or sloppy in what they accept, can put worthless and even harmful "counterfeit" currency into their faith account. Over time, the counterfeit will harm the value of the account—the validity and strength of the person's beliefs. Maintaining a healthy faith "balance" requires repeated and regular examination of the deposits we've made in our bank of beliefs, and a willingness to weed out those without merit or that can cause harm. A mark of maturity is to revisit, test and rework our theology as our understanding increases and our discernment recognizes and rejects "bad currency."

MOTIVATING THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION

Continual examination of one's theology is critical. By so doing we remove falsehood and purify truth. We also contribute to our sanctification (change), perfect our image of God and grow our faith—all of which will protect us in times of temptations and trials.

Love of truth can be a powerful motivator for theological examination. A person who desires truth more than retaining and validating current beliefs has the chance to discover deeper truths that can resonate "in the



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innermost being and in the hidden part” of our soul (Psalm 51:6).

Our love for God should compel us to be the best person we can be for Him. He calls us to examine our minds and hearts. In the parable of two debtors (Luke 7), the one who was forgiven much, loved much because of it. Our desire to be our best can be enhanced by dwelling on what God has forgiven us for, what He has done and will do for us, and His impartial love for us.

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Our image of God is incomplete and faulty; we can honor God by being thoughtful in developing an exacting theology regarding His characteristics and how He intervenes in our world. God deeply desires to be known as He is, not for what we want Him to be.

The desire to find relief from pain and resolve problems can drive us to analyze potential false beliefs that contribute to our suffering, as well as encourage continual evaluation of new information.

UNDERSTANDING THEOLOGY AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

The literal Greek meaning of the word *theology* is “the words or sayings of God.” Our study of those words (plus historical evidence, etc.) leads us to ponder and form conclusions. The conclusions we reach become the foundational beliefs, faith, or theology that greatly influence our perceptions, experiences and feelings for the remainder of our lives. No one gets it right the first time; our beliefs grow and develop as we do. Therefore, it is essential to periodically reevaluate our faith, and especially the thoughts, verses, or ideas we do not entirely understand or which appear contrary to our beliefs.

Theology is not the Word of God and theological beliefs are not sacred cows. It is a personal and fallible collection of thoughts that aim to understand God and His creation. As Christians, our primary information is gathered through His revelation—Scripture. Human beings use logic and spiritual reason to consider Scripture and form conclusions, which becomes our theology. An image of God is developed from these thoughts.

Yet an image is a representation, not the real thing, like a painting, which is only a likeness of something. No words or forms could completely describe God; He is beyond human expression. Man’s best theology is composed of limited and imperfect mental constructs to make up an image of God and His creation. Because of this, our image of Him must not be static, but continually reworked throughout our lives.

Each of us creates his or her own unique image of God. It is often our best representation of Him, sometimes formed not from objective study, but from our need and personal woundedness. For example, one who has been sorely and repeatedly rejected may desire to be soothed by an image of God that focuses on His unconditional acceptance. This accounts for some of the reason we have different views and emphases of God. One person may relate more to the idea of a policeman ready to pounce and give a ticket when we violate the law (producing a guilt-ridden person). For another person, a protective and nurturing mother who loves unconditionally is more appealing (producing the belief God will forgive everyone and all are heaven-bound). We all skew the truth about who God is; focusing too much on one of His traits is one way to do so.

Theology is a manmade discipline. It has many similarities with the development of

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human science disciplines, like psychology. Theological development begins with God's revelation, however, not from scratch as other disciplines. Fallible humans use an estimated five percent of their brain, live only seventy-five years or so, forget about ninety

Fallible humans who use an estimated five percent of their brain, live only a brief live only seventy-five years or so, forget about ninety percent of what they learn and possess a dual, contradictory and partly unconscious nature. Yet, these are the very people God entrusts with the awesome task of piecing together the unfathomable, unending character of a Spirit not of our world.

percent of what they learn and possess a dual, contradictory and partly unconscious nature. Yet, these are the very people God entrusts with the awesome task of piecing together the unfathomable, unending character of a Spirit not of our world.

This is a completely humbling and gargantuan task. Knowing this should keep us from becoming dogmatic and rigid about our theology, and open to modifying or giving up an incomplete or poor representation of God for a better image of Him when new truths are discovered.

Some interpretations of Scripture can be held as secure, unchanging truths. For example, Christians believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of those who put their trust in Him. Those beliefs are foundational, and are not going to change. What does change over time is the

meaning, purpose and impact of bedrock truths. We clarify what essential faith doctrines mean in our lives by asking questions. For instance:

- How can I better understand the intended role of Savior and Son of God?
- What things are true of Him in these roles?
- What are the ramifications of Jesus calling me His brother in light of other verses describing Him as Son of God and describing me as a son of God?
- What does it mean to be a son of God or a god, as we are called in the Bible?
- How does that influence my self-esteem and my self-image?

Unfortunately, many people cease refining and expanding beliefs once they have thoroughly developed them. Often, they are enshrined and protected from change. However, the tragic result is suspending growth in becoming like Jesus. Unchanging beliefs may provide a sense of stability, security and peace, but at what price?

In Part II of this introduction, we'll look at some reasons why discernment is so hard to practice, and how to develop the skill needed to use it effectively.