

INTRODUCTION TO REFORMED THEOLOGY

1) INTRODUCTION

- a) This study is based on a book by Shirley Guthrie, Professor Emeritus at Columbia Seminary in Georgia.
- b) This is a very practical book aimed at helping Lay Persons as well as Clergy get a basic grasp of Christian Theology done from a Reformed Perspective.
- c) Guthrie wants all Christians to look at themselves and their lives through the lenses of their faith.

2) WHY STUDY THEOLOGY

- a) Calvin insisted that theology should not be esoteric and occupied with such questions as "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin". Rather it should help people understand and live their lives in the light thrown by the revelation of God made through Jesus Christ.
- b) The theological study we are undertaking hopes to help us understand something about who God is, who we are as His creatures, and our relationship to God and to God's world.
- c) It should help us understand our life and help us make sense of the world and why things are as they are. It should also help us make decisions in this world.
- d) Anselm said "Faith seeks understanding" He meant by that an active love for God seeks a better understanding of God.

3) WHO WE ARE SHAPES HOW WE "DO THEOLOGY"

- a) There is truth: about God, about human nature and destiny, about the world in which we live, and about our relationships with God and the World.
- b) However, we know that truth through the lenses of who we are, from our particular point of view. Various things shape our perception of what is true and what is false
 - i) Our age
 - ii) Our gender

- iii) The culture in which we live
 - (1) The family we grew up in
 - (2) Whether we are Americans or from some other country
 - (3) What part of the U.S. in which we live
 - (4) Our socio-economic status
- c) Qualities necessary for engaging in theology
 - i) Honesty
 - ii) Humility
- 4) Engaging in Christian Theology involves the following:
 - a) Jesus Christ
 - i) Jesus is the unique and supreme revelation of who God is and who we are as creatures made in his image and likeness.
 - ii) Jesus is the standard against which we measure our thoughts and actions about God and what it means to be truly human.
 - iii) We should listen to other points of view but they must be heard in the light thrown on life by Jesus Christ.
 - b) The Bible
 - i) This is the source of our understanding about Jesus
 - (1) Who he is
 - (2) What he accomplished on earth
 - (3) Our personal experience must be judged by the standard of Scripture. It is the unique authority in matters of faith and practice.
 - ii) One must guard against reading our beliefs and attitudes into the Scripture. We have guides to interpretation
 - (1) It must be read in the light of its purpose
 - (2) We use Scripture to help us interpret Scripture
 - (3) Jesus is the clearest revelation of God and God's purposes
 - (4) We listen to the church of all ages and places

- (5) The rule of love
 - (6) We study Scripture in its historical and literary context.
- c) The Church
- i) We are Christians in community not in isolation. Christian theology is done in the Church. It is done in conversation with others in the church
- d) The Reformed Tradition
- i) It is a theology of the universal church from a particular point of view
 - ii) We embrace the ancient creeds with Christians of all stripes (Apostles and Nicene)
 - iii) We are in a tradition of belief that views these beliefs through lenses which originated with John Calvin
 - iv) We are always reforming, rethinking as our understanding changes and time changes.
- 5) We are Christians among fellow Christians
- a) We are part of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church
 - i) We share with many other Christians the beliefs that are expressed in both the Nicene and the Apostles' Creeds.
 - ii) Presbyterians are but one part of the Reformed family which has over 200 denominations world-wide. Some are connectional in polity while others are congregational.
 - iii) Our slogan is "Reformed and always reforming"
 - (1) We don't believe the truth can be captured once for all. We grow in our understanding of the truth about God, human beings, the world, the relationships therein.
 - (2) Theology and creeds are fallible and subject to revision in the light of the revelation in Scripture and the movement of the Holy Spirit.

- (3) We are always asking what the Living God whom we know through Jesus Christ revealed in scripture is doing now.