

The Cover Page

Prepared Especially For Students Beginning The Study Of Theology

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DEDICATED TO

The Many Earnest-hearted Students Who Have Sat in Our Classes Through the Years Whose Questions Have Been a Distinct Contribution To the Mental and Spiritual Development of the Author

CHAPTER I SECTION V

Qualifications For The Study Of Theology

A true study of theology should never be a narrowing experience, for man is exploring infinity in the process. The whole man is employed, and the greatest powers of mind and soul will never reach the limits of its horizon.

1. Though it would be a mistake to suppose that one could be a successful theologian with only the intellectual approach, yet certain intellectual qualifications are essential, and these determine the measure of comprehension. Some of these intellectual qualifications are innate and others are acquired.

a. One qualification largely innate is the ability for calm, unprejudiced judgment coupled with the equally valuable ability to suspend judgment where the facts of the case are not sufficient to warrant a final conclusion. This implies a strong reasoning capacity, with a deep and sincere desire for truth, and a fearlessness of conviction in following it wherever it might lead in reference to personal prejudice or in reference to man-made systems of doctrine and philosophy. So few people are disposed to estimate their prejudices in the face of truth, and to take refuge in ready made systems rather than to appropriate the truth from all. "All things are yours: whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas..." (I Cor. 3:21-22). The above qualities are more or less innate, though they may be developed and increased by exercise.

b. The acquired mental assets for the theologian are the achievements of a disciplined thought life which has the patience to apply itself to delving into the rich mines of eternal truth and to reflection upon its riches.

(1) No one can hope to be an adequate student of theology who has not familiarized himself with the

pages of his Bible from cover to cover. "Exegesis precedes theology, and the work of systematic theology should be preceded by work in the Bible." (Clarke, *Outlines Chr. Theol.*, pp. 5-6) Whatever other knowledge he may acquire, this is paramount. There is too much study about the Bible even in our theological schools of today, and too little of the Bible itself. Devotion to the Scriptures as the Word of God will yield a rich reward in spiritual and intellectual poise, while there would be fewer Christians led astray by false doctrines were they more familiar with what their own faith contains. We believe that theological knowledge should not exclusively belong to the clergy and the scholar; but the layman could know far more than he does, and thereby be gratified to find himself growing in Christian poise and stature.

(2) Next to the knowledge of the Bible itself the student of theology will discover the advantage of gathering for himself as much of a background of general knowledge as possible, especially in history, religion, psychology, and moral science. The average man would make a mistake if he endeavored to become a specialist in any of these lines on top of being a specialist in theology. But every Bible student could, and ought, to be as familiar with history as he has time and capacity, for history is one mode by which God reveals himself in the affairs of nations. This would include not only the history of the chosen people, Israel, but all nations. For it is a striking fact that even in the Old Testament God represents his active direction and providence among the nations of the world. There is, moreover, much in history which attests to the soundness of the Christian conception of God. Religion, which is as old as mankind, is another phase of history that should greatly interest the theological student. It becomes a light thrown upon the Christian faith, or perhaps the dark background which causes the Christian faith to shine all the more brightly against its dark failure and hopelessness. We can understand and appreciate Christianity more if we know something about the religions of the world. Further, a successful presentation of the true faith is more likely to ensue when one understands the viewpoint of another. The theologian should keep in touch with the thought currents of his own day, for history and religion represent life, and life is constantly changing, never stationary. A working knowledge of the mental sciences should be another aim. While the Scriptures reveal the true solution of the problems of personality, it often gives a keener insight into the lives of men to know what it is being discovered about the human mind, and to check and verify these discoveries, and the conclusions drawn from them, with God's revelation of man's soul as found in the Bible. A comparative study of the human systems of philosophy will serve to make our student of Christ, "the Way, the Truth and the Life," more certain and more intelligent in his convictions, and more effective in their statement. There is evidence that Paul read the philosophies of his day, while he had the independence of his spiritual illumination to show him where they failed to reach the ultimate truth. To be able to study and then to wisely weigh systems of thought, this truly is the scientific attitude.

2. We have stated above that the intellectual equipment, important as it is, would be inadequate alone. The Bible has already flung out that challenge. "The world by wisdom knew not God." (I Cor. 1:21) Therefore, the moral nature of man must be engaged in the seeking of truth, not merely to know but to do. Familiarity with truth does not develop character unless that truth is appropriated into life and made the standard of action. Knowledge of God and his will is not the same as knowledge of electricity, for instance. In the former, there is a moral imperative accompanying the knowledge. One may know much about a physical science

without feeling any need of changing his mode of life; but if he attempts to treat truth concerning God with the same detached attitude, a moral stultification results; and a warped judgment makes a proper perspective impossible. This explains the rejection by man of the clearly valid conclusions relating to Christian evidences and the process of rationalization set up as a counter defense. Not the hearers of the word, but the doers are to be justified. It is a dangerous moral policy to attempt to be a specialist in Christian theology unless one is committed to live the truth as it is presented. To all the above we solemnly add that no one can be a Christian theologian who has not yet had his own renewal from spiritual death to spiritual life. The Bible is very frank in declaring that the natural man cannot comprehend the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness to him. Communication by radio would seem foolish to the one who knew nothing about the facts of sound waves and their utilization in this wonderful way, but the facts would not be destroyed by his unbelief. Christian theology deals with the realm of the spiritual, and he who has not known a renewed spiritual consciousness and experience cannot hope to be a home there. The church has suffered much from the misleading dictums of men of great minds who thought themselves qualified to speak with authority, and to assume the role of teachers, when they had never matriculated in the undergraduate school of the things of the Spirit.