

Clear and Critical Thinking  
Distinguish Between  
Theological Research and Biblical Research

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## **Theological Research**

In order to get a sense of what we are talking about when it comes to the differences and or similarities of theological and biblical research we must have an idea of how it is defined.

Theology – is the field of study and analysis that treats of God and God’s attributes and relations to the universe; study of divine thing or religious truth; divinity.

Theological – of, relating to, or involved with theology; based upon the nature and will of God as revealed to humans.

Biblical – is in accordance with the Bible.

According to one source, “conducting research is integral to reflecting on and learning about God and God’s world. Thorough research of any subject requires attention to the various sources of knowledge that God has instituted, including Scripture, experience, reason, and tradition. While it is impossible to engage any of these sources in isolation from the others, it is helpful to consider how each individually contributes to guiding the research process.”<sup>1</sup>

However when we take a look at how theological research has maintained its momentum in the past, we find that it had a movement of its own until the Protestant Reformation came along. Many preachers, teachers and theologians simply take Biblical texts and go in as many directions with it as could possibly be comfortably allowed, only taking time to see if any verses they used supported where they were taking their audience.

The reformation then caused the religious community of scholars to test all things and hold fast to what could be proven instead of relying on their own theological principles. It was important now to start with the foundation of Scripture and begin there to build on it. This Biblical research would cause them to test and improve their theology instead of working within

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1. “Westminster Theological Seminary,” Sources that Guide Theological Research – WestminsterTheological...,[https://students.wts.edu/...center...research/sources that guide theological.html](https://students.wts.edu/...center...research/sources%20that%20guide%20theological.html) (accessed November 13, 2017).

the framework of their personal theology. This gave way to Biblical research as opposed to the growing practice of Systematic Theology.

### **Biblical Research**

This Biblical research actually sought to bring out in truth, what the Scripture was actually teaching. Biblical studies must begin with the Biblical text. What does the Scripture teach and not what revelations we want to interpret for the good of the audience. Before we can jump to what one might consider as a valid conclusion, we actually need to see if there is a valid question or problem that actually needs to be solved. Is there an argument that has substance? Is there a question that needed to be asked of the text that may not have been thought of. Scholars wanted to keep their faith, while being clear that it was not dictating what they really found the text was actually saying. What they knew from church History was that the Bible has been the truth of the church's teaching and its practices.

### **Purpose of Scripture**

Therefore it was important to keep what was known as truth and leave it to be foundational. Scripture gave its purpose as 'making one wise unto salvation.' Clear purpose and a scripture that was written by men but God inspired. The Bible says that 'All Scripture is God breathed, so we must hold on to that as foundational. Paul's writings were foundational. The Scripture was also clear in its purpose as stated in 2 Tim. 3 saying, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:15-17). KJV

Our experience helps us to filter our way through what we have considered to be foundational truths and since we own our experience it requires us to use clear and critical thinking. Otherwise when we have searched through what the Scriptures have actually said, we may have to back away from what we felt it was saying. We then will ask the questions of the text that may not have been asked before. Everything must be tested and the weight of the Biblical text should be absolute. Again this being so because they are God breathed and there can be no confusion as to what has been said. There only comes some confusion when we try to interpret the text to fit into our realm of thinking. There was a time where preachers could become 'creative' with the Biblical text and still today some may extend their limits.

Scholars who have been 'enlightened' know well that there are boundaries and testing that are considered before theological reasoning is set before their audiences. With clear and critical thinking you will have to lay aside your preconceived notions previously held ideas that will hinder you from considering what may be found that is oppositional to your beliefs, your own personal theology. As we view the Gospels, each of those write even as some are synoptic, had their own personal focus and highlighted events from their vantage points, yet they are still considered to be 'God inspired.' It is in these differences and making use of clear and critical thinking, we can see how these God breathed Scriptures speak to us today, however different but with clarity.

There will be times when we search the Scriptures for answers and revelatory experiences but understand that an answer to our personal questions was not the direction God was heading. So what are we looking for in the Scriptures? Clear and critical thinking may allow us to know that we must put our agenda aside and just consider what God is teaching about Himself, His Son and the Holy Spirit that He wants us to absorb. How do we live our life

according to His purpose? Did God leave a clear message or did He expect us to dig through the Biblical text to figure out what was being taught?

In critical thinking, the issue of faith stands out to me because that stands up to what I believe to be true, and that belief is my faith in the Word of God. The Word to me is absolutely true and at the end of the day it will be my assessment of that truth that I will be able to take a stance. If we encounter what we think is a problem with the Scripture, we must admit that it will not be our problem because it is God's Word. With the claim of this truth, I would have to take a position and would not be flawed in making a reasonable judgment as it relates to defending what is my inherited opinion, based on insight, understanding, research and investigation. This Word is God's Word and so far it has stood the test of time. So when we study the Biblical text, we must study with the expectation that God has a plan for what that Scripture is to accomplish, yesterday, today and for the times to come. Whatever God is saying in the Biblical text, it is up to us to draw it out, receive it and believe and apply it to the life we live. We will have built upon the foundational truths of the Scripture in order for us to live and worship God according to what He wants and share His infallible Word with the audience of our day. His inspired Word should inspire us and transform us into His image.

### **Drawing Conclusions**

It is my belief that the Biblical research and Theological research can work together even if they have not started out on the same playing field. As scholars we should recognize what comes first and then build upon that to develop with clear and critical thinking, that with which doctrines are formed. On what will we base our theologies, and are they tried and truth? Can our theological research stand firmly on the shoulders of the Biblical text and remain? We can

ask questions like does the Scriptural text have more significance than it did to the original audience. What we cannot fail to acknowledge is that there was an 'original audience'

What we cannot fail to acknowledge is that there was an 'original audience' and the text was spoken to them.. What we must consider is what we can glean from this particular message that will help us live the life God has called us to. It can be done because in God there is no confusion. He says what He means and still means what He said. That will be key in all of this circular motion, if we remember as theologians, as scholars, as Christians that God is a God that is immutable and He cannot lie. He is the same yesterday today and forever. His Word is simple, His yolk is easy, He will not tempt us nor is He trying to confuse or trick us with His Word.