

13. The Purpose of Christian Theology for Man

The purpose which theology is to accomplish in man after the Fall is **to save men from eternal damnation, incurred by every member of the human race, or, to state it positively, to lead men to eternal salvation (σωτηρία, *salus aeterna*)**. This purpose is stated by St. Paul when he says (1 Tim. 4:16): “In doing this [taking heed unto the doctrine, performing the office of a Christian teacher] thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.” So also Jesus: “Every scribe ... is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 13:52). Because of this high purpose of theology the ministry of the Christian teacher is the most important office on earth, the “good work” (καλὸν ἔργον) *par excellence* (1 Tim. 3:1).

The theologian must continually be on his guard lest he entertain **false notions as to the purpose of his theological activity**. The purpose of theology **is not** the spread of culture or the establishment of civil righteousness—though Christianity is the one thing that really makes good citizens and promotes true culture. Nor is it the purpose of theology to “satisfy the intellectual craving of the human mind” or to enrich human knowledge in general—though theology does answer from Scripture many questions which baffle all human wisdom and research¹....

In the church only God’s Word (λόγια θεοῦ) should be heard, and that **for the purpose of saving men** (1 Pet. 4:11; 1 Tim. 1:4; 6:3). From Meisner’s *Philosophia Sobria* Walther quotes the pointed statement: “The theologian who does not continually pursue this purpose and does not make the salvation of men the objective of all his study and teaching, does not deserve to be called a true theologian.”

The old theologians define the purpose of theology quite well when they say: “**The subject of the operation of theology is *homo peccator* in so far as he is to be led to eternal salvation**” (Baier I, 40).

Also society or **the State** concerns itself with the *homo peccator*, not for the purpose of saving souls, but only for the purpose of protecting by means of temporal punishment the bodily life and temporal goods of its members against the outbursts of the wickedness inherent in human nature. Theology, however, is not concerned with the civil punishment to be meted out to the evildoer. Rather it is the business of the theologian and of the Christian Church, through the preaching of the Law, **to convince the *homo peccator* of his guilt before God and of the certainty of the eternal punishment to be meted out to the transgressor and, through the preaching of the Gospel, to bring him the remission of sins and eternal salvation**.

And this ultimate purpose of theology [*finis ultimus*], the *salus aeterna*, can be achieved in only one way. Eternal salvation is obtained only through faith in Christ, through faith in the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ, as we read in John 3:36: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but

The Purpose of Theology

To lead men to eternal salvation is “The good work” (1 Tim 3:1).

NOT spread of culture

NOT make good citizens (civil righteousness)

NOT intellectual knowledge in general

Upon the Subject, Sinful Man, is applied the law bringing guilt and the gospel bringing forgiveness and eternal salvation

The Ultimate Purpose of Theology, **Salvation**, is only achieved through **the intermediate purpose** of creating and strengthening faith in Christ.

¹ Thus Scripture gives us reliable information on the metaphysical problems concerning the nature and the origin of things (Col. 1:16–17; Gen. 1:11–12), for which the philosophers have not yet found a satisfactory answer.

the wrath of God abideth on him.” Hence **the intermediate purpose of theology** (*finis intermedius*) is, primarily, the creation and preservation of faith in Christ. Rom. 1:5 names this as a *finis theologiae*. Paul received his apostleship “for obedience to the faith.”

Sanctification and good works, of course, is **another objective of theology**. Theology teaches the believers to “be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8)—not as though good works were the cause or prerequisite or means of obtaining the forgiveness of sins and salvation (those who teach such a thing are cursed by the Apostle, Gal. 1:8), but because **good works are a result and effect of the faith which has obtained the forgiveness of sins and salvation without works**. In this way the theologian achieves both the right quality and a gratifying quantity of good works. (Christian Dogmatics, Vol 1, p.104-105)

Sanctification is another objective, because good works are **the result and effect of faith**.

14. The Means by Which Theology Accomplishes Its Purpose

Ever mindful of the purpose of theology, which is to bring men to faith and thus lead them to heaven, the theologian must concern himself with **the means by which this purpose is accomplished**. **He must not be beguiled into employing the means suggested by carnal wisdom, such as worldly might, external compulsion, state support, “social affairs,” and the like. Men are strongly tempted to employ these unchurchly means.** But the only thing that achieves the purpose of theology and builds the Church is **the Gospel**, and only he is fitted for the ministry (ικανότης ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ—“our sufficiency is of God,” 2 Cor. 3:5) of the Church who firmly relies, for his success, on the divinely ordained means and knows that the “Gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24), though mean and contemptible in the eyes of the world and his flesh, is **the power of God unto salvation**. That is what Christ has commanded His Church to teach and to preach. That is how Paul achieved his success. (Christian Dogmatics, Vol 1, p.105)

The Means of Theology

The gospel, “the power of God unto salvation”

NOT carnal wisdom

NOT worldly might

NOT external compulsion

NOT state support

NOT “social affairs,” and the like

V. THE PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE

1. Threefold purpose. — God gave His Word to man for a very definite purpose, namely:

- a) to save man from sin and damnation through faith in Christ,
- b) to educate and train His children in holiness of life,
- c) to magnify His glory.

(a) Man had been created for a life of joy and bliss in communion with his God. By sin he lost all this, and became subject to eternal death. Moved by His infinite compassion, **God determined to save guilty man from the dire consequences of his transgression, and to restore him to blissful communion with Himself**. To accomplish this, He not only redeemed us through the death of His Son (Rom. 5:8, 9), but also gave us the Scripture, which “is able to make us wise unto salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). For this reason Christ says: “Search the Scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39). Again we read: “These are written, that ye might

The Purpose of The Bible

1. Justification
2. Sanctification
3. God’s Glory

believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His name” (John 20:31).

(b) The second purpose of the Bible is **to teach and train all believers in Christ to serve God in righteousness and true holiness**. Jesus prayed for His disciples that God would “sanctify them through Thy truth” (John 17:17). To this end **the Word of God** is “a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path” (Ps. 119:105). Paul informs us that: “all Scripture is profitable ... for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

(c) Both of these objectives culminate in **the ultimate purpose, the glory of God**. “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: **that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ**, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet. 4:11).

2. No other book can accomplish this purpose, because no other book in the world can give us reliable information concerning these matters. Only God can tell us how we can be reconciled to Him, and how we are to worship and serve Him. It is utterly futile and presumptuous for any man to devise a plan according to which God is to give eternal life to sinners, and to determine what manner of conduct and works will please God (Matt. 15:9). **The plan of salvation, as revealed in the Bible**, sets this Book apart from all other so-called sacred books in the world. These other books all teach that man must, in some way or other, save himself. **The Bible teaches that God saves man by grace for Christ’s sake through faith**. (A Summary of Christian Doctrine)

CHAPTER XVII: ON THE END AND EFFECT OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

The end of Scripture: First, with respect to God.

§ 362. Up to this point we have discussed the efficient, material, and formal causes of Holy Scripture. It remains for us to discuss briefly its end [*finis*]. **The end of Scripture is considered both with respect to God and with respect to us. With respect to God, the end of**

Scripture is the salutary knowledge and glorification of God. It is for this purpose that God revealed Himself in His Word that was first spoken orally and later was committed to writing: so that He, having been known correctly by human beings according to His essence and will, might be praised in this life and in eternal life. When we recognize from the Word of God His goodness, power, and wisdom and when we meditate devoutly on the mystery of our salvation that has been planned from eternity and revealed in time, then we cannot help but be stirred by that knowledge to love Him who is the supreme good. From this love there immediately arises in our hearts a celebration and glorification of that supreme good.

Second, with respect to us.

§ 363. **With respect to us, the end is either intermediate or ultimate. The apostle sets forth the intermediate ends in Rom. 15:4 and 2 Tim. 3:16, which are teaching, reproof, correction, instruction, and encouraging**. You see, Holy Scripture has been

given to the human race to provide a remedy against the ailment introduced through the fall of our first parents and to make a man complete and equipped for every good work.

The End of Scripture

1. With Respect to God

- A. Salutary Knowledge of God
- B. The Glorification of God

2. With Respect to Us

- A. Intermediate: Teaching of Human Beings
- B. Ultimate: Salvation and Eternal Life

But now, the human race is subject to a **threefold malady and evil** through and because of original sin. In true knowledge, we are blind and ignorant; in good action, remiss and lacking; in tolerance of evil, weak and impatient. Scripture remedies the first malady with teaching; the second, with instruction; the third, with encouragement. Not only are we blind and ignorant in the matter of true knowledge, but we also are prone and rash to think up or embrace errors. This malady Scripture remedies with reproof. Not only are we remiss and sluggish in doing good, but we are also eager and prone to do evil. This malady Scripture cures with correction.

Three-fold Malady

1. Knowledge: blind
2. Action: lacking
3. Tolerance of Evil: weak and impatient

On the other hand, there are **three responsibilities** for the truly devout Christian: to know the truth, to do good, to endure evils. Consequently, we also count **three chief and alive virtues** of a Christian: “faith, love, and hope.” To faith belongs a knowledge of the truth; to love, the doing of good; to hope, the endurance of evil. However, because a knowledge of the truth does not exist without the removal of all that which is false, because doing good has no place unless there be a departure from evil or sin, consequently there are **five responsibilities altogether that are required in the perfection of Christian piety**: teaching and reproof have respect to the knowledge of the truth, instruction and correction have respect to doing good, and encouragement has respect to the patient endurance of evil. For all these, Scripture is not only useful but is also sufficient, so it is right to say that it makes a man perfect. (Cf. our *Method. studii theol.*, part 2, sect. 4, c. 2.)

Three Responsibilities

1. To know truth
2. To do good
3. To endure evil

Three Virtues

1. Faith
2. Hope
3. Love

Five Responsibilities

1. Teaching
2. Reproof
3. Instruction
4. Correction
5. Encouragement

§ 364. Without doubt, **Holy Scripture is: (1) God’s throne**, from which He speaks to us. Heb. 1:1–2: “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us in the Son” and by the Son whose speech has been recorded in the writings of the evangelists. **(2) God’s school**, in which He teaches and shapes us. Ps. 94:12: “Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O Lord, and whom You teach out of Your Law.” **(3) God’s clinic and spiritual office of medical matters**. Wisdom 16:12: “For it was no plant or plaster that cured them, but Your Word, O Lord, that heals all things.” **(4) God’s armor and arsenal**, in which He fortifies and arms us against enemies of every kind. Eph. 6:17: “Take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” **(5) God’s hand**, by which He leads us through the paths of faith and righteousness to eternal life. Ps. 48:14: “He will lead us like children.” In the Hebrew this reads: “until death.” **You see, the last and greatest end of Scripture with respect to us is our salvation and eternal life**. John 5:39: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.” John 20:31: “These are written that you may believe and that through faith you may have life in the name of Christ.” 2 Tim. 3:15: “The Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise unto salvation.” God has revealed Himself in His Word, instructs people in the truth through this Word of His, drives them to do good, and encourages them to endure adversities **all for this purpose: that they may finally share in eternal salvation**.

§ 365. To this point all the statements of Scripture are to be referred that bear witness to the divine efficacy of the Word **in converting, illuminating, regenerating, and saving human beings**. Ps. 19:[8–]9; John 5:39; Rom. 1:16; 1 Tim. 4:16; 1 Pet. 1:23, etc.
(On the Nature of Theology and On Scripture, Gerhard)