

## CLEAN THEOLOGY

Theology is a science. It treats of the existence, character and attributes of God; of his laws and government, the doctrines we are to believe, and the duties we are to practice.

Theory is an *exposition* of the general principles of any science, or the science as distinguished from the art. Theology is the substance of truth, and theory is an arrangement of the truth for expression. Theology, rightly understood, is *always* clean, but because men have not understood it, and, therefore, taught error for truth, it has given reason for the common use of the terms „false” or „true,” „clean” or „foul,” theology. In fact there has been so much error mixed with truth in the popular teachings, that to many who are aroused to the knowledge of this, „theology” has become the synonym of error, and „theologian” a brand almost akin to infamy.

Some of our readers have received the idea that we belittle the importance of a clean theology; that we have become disgusted with all theory, and have spoken contemptuously of the great things which our Father has revealed concerning his plan as „theory, theory.”

How any one gained such impression we know not. Certainly

not from anything, properly understood, which we have ever spoken or written. We have always regarded with favor any effort to ascertain what God’s plan is, both of revelation and salvation; and men are not liable to *speak* of anything with *contempt* which we regard with favor. If colored glasses affect the *appearance* of objects viewed through them, something analogous to this may affect the hearing. We do not look favorably upon *every* theory about God’s plan, but we are not conscious of treating any one, or his theory, with contempt. In the investigation of so great a science as theology, there is room for many honest differences of opinion, and while we *can not help* believing right what we are convinced is true, we think it is becoming in a *fallible* man to be humble and civil at least, and to remember that we *may* be mistaken. We are conscious of being misunderstood sometimes, and it may be we are too apt to wonder why it is so, when it may arise from our inability to express our own ideas properly. We feel almost certain that much of the difference among people arises from the use of the same words to express a different thought, or different words to express the same thought. We are reminded that as others have misunderstood us, it is quite likely that in some things we have misunderstood others. We need not be surprised at this, for even the Lord himself has not yet made himself understood. If he bears „so patiently”

being misunderstood and misrepresented, we might be encouraged to bear a little, and in the spirit of love, „try, try again.”

In common talk, what a man believes about God and His plans is called the man’s theology, or his theory, and while such use of the terms may not be exactly right, it should not be considered disrespectful to use them so.

In all that we have said or written on the subject of holiness or righteousness as the „Wedding Garment,” it has not been our object to set aside the necessity of truth, or the importance of *knowing* the truth, but we wish to be understood positively as teaching that knowledge, without *obedience*, is not only not enough, but that it is a curse, and will prove „the savor of death unto death.” Jesus said: „If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them,” and „He that knows His Master’s will and did it not shall be beaten with many stripes.” These, certainly, imply that knowledge does not *necessarily* produce right practice, and Paul tells us of a class who „hold the truth in unrighteousness,” (Rom. 1:18), and „when they *knew God*, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but *became* vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was *darkened*.” A clean theology includes the „*duties we are to practice*” as well as the „*doctrines we are to believe*,” but we maintain that a man may have a very correct idea about the doctrines of the bible and of the duties inculcated, too, and yet not practice them. *Science* is one thing; *art* is quite a different thing. The difference is just as great between theology and righteousness, for He that *doeth right* is righteous.

We plead for the necessity of *obedience*; not *mere* outward acts, that would be formalism, but *loyal* obedience—obedience *from the heart*. (Rom. 6:17). „He that hath clean hands and a pure heart” shall ascend into the hill of the Lord (the Kingdom). Ps. 24:3,4.

*Loving* obedience must be more pleasing to the Lord than anything short of it, and doing is the best evidence of love. Jesus said: „If ye love me, keep my commands.” Jno. 14:15, and „Ye are my *friends* if ye *do whatsoever I command you*.” Jno. 15:14. To such as *obey* him he says, „I call you not servants,” and reveals to them his will and plans. (ver. 15.) So we see that obedience is important if we want the Lord’s help to understand the plan. „If any man will *do His will* he shall know of the doctrine.” Jno. 7:17.

There are several things which we would be glad to say and be understood.

1. We believe it is our duty as Christians to gain all possible knowledge of God’s plans, remembering that „Things that are revealed are for us,” and therefore proper subjects for thought and search. „Hidden things belong to the Lord,” and no man by searching can find *them* out. We

are to get our theology as clean as possible. We are to „grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. We believe that the object of knowledge is to promote love and obedience, and to assist us in the formation of God-like characters, thus enabling us to „apprehend that for which Christ apprehended us.” (Phil. 3:12), „for God hath called us, not to uncleanness, but unto holiness.” (1 Thess. 4:7.)

3. We believe it is possible for men to gather a large store of knowledge of prophecy and the mysteries of God, and not have love, and in such a case all is vain. 1 Cor. 13:2. Knowledge is power for good or evil, and if a man does not „obey the truth,” the more knowledge he has the worse man he is.

4. When teaching that a clean theology is not all that is required, let no one suppose that we under-value the knowledge of truth as a *means*, when it is obeyed, to the attainment of holiness.

5. While opposing other men’s *ideas*, we have nothing to say against *men*. For years we have stood in defense of a large liberty of opinion within the limits of the „One Faith” and Christian fellowship, and never before as much as now have we realized the necessity for such freedom. We ask for ourselves only what we freely grant to others—the

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right to do our own thinking—calling no man Father, Master, or Lord in matters of faith or opinion.

We hope to be willing in the future as in the past to learn from any one, however humble in station or ability, and to receive nothing without evidence, however exalted they may be, even though it were „an angel from heaven.” Gal. 1:8.

We disfellowship no man for opinion’s sake, believing that many, who know but little, are dear unto the Lord, and will be heirs of the Kingdom among the sanctified. We have sometimes been cast off by others, but we have never been conscious of casting off others, and we hope and pray that we may never be guilty of such a thing.

J. H. P.

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