

The Definition
Or Nature
of Theology

William Ames

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The following theological information is taken from excerpts of
The Marrow of Theology

1. Theology is doctrine or teaching of living to God. John 6:68, "The words of eternal life..."; Acts 5:20, "The words of this life..."; Romans 6:11, "Consider yourselves...alive to God."
2. It is called doctrine, not to separate it from understanding, knowledge, wisdom, art, or prudence--for these go with every exact discipline, and most of all with theology--but to mark it as a discipline, and most of all with theology--but to mark it as a discipline which derives not from nature and human inquiry like others, but from divine revelation and appointment. Isaiah 51:4, "Doctrine shall go forth from Me..."; Galatians 1:11-12, "The Gospel...is not according to man. For neither I received it from man, nor was taught it, but it came through a revelation."
5. Since the highest kind of life for a human being is that which approaches most closely the living and life-giving God, the nature of theological life is living to God.

The division or Parts of Theology

1. The two parts of theology are faith and observance.
4. These two parts are always joined together in use and exercise, but they are distinguished in their nature and in which the rule that govern them.

Faith

1. Faith is the resting of the heart on God, the author of life and eternal salvation, so that we may be saved from all evil through Him and may follow all good. Isaiah 10:20, "Lean upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in faith..." "

21. Trust is rightly said to be the fruit of faith as it looks to God in the future and constitutes a firm hope; but as it looks to God in Christ offering himself in the present, it is faith itself. Hence arise those names which the Scriptures give to saving faith, *pepoiqhsis*, *parthsia*, *persuasion*, *boldness*; 2 Corinthians 3:4 and 5:6-8; Ephesians 3:12; 1 Peter 1:13; 1 John 5:13-14; *plhroforia*, *full conviction*, Romans 4:21; Colossians 2:2; *upostasis*, *substance*, Hebrews 11:1.

God and His Essence

2. God, as He is in Himself, cannot be understood by any save Himself. 1 Timothy 6:16, "Dwelling in that inaccessible light, whom no man has seen or can see."

4. Since the things which pertain to God must be explained in a human way, a manner of speaking called *anqrwpopageia*, *anthropopathy*, is frequently used.

5. And because they are explained in our way for human comprehension, many things are spoken of God according to our own conceiving rather than according to his real nature.

8. What can be known about God are His sufficiency [sufficientia] and efficiency, or working power [efficientia]. Romans 4:21, "Being fully persuaded that He was able to perform that which He had promised."

the law of God, Jas. 1:25; *Newness of life*, Rom. 6:4; *the New creature*, 2 Cor. 5:17 and Gal. 6:15; and *the Divine nature*, 2 Peter 1:4.

15. The end is called a new and divine creature. First, because it is not produced by those principles which are in us by nature, as is characteristic of all the arts pursued with industry and discipline -it comes out of the new principle of life communicated by God to us in our calling. Second, because our natural disposition is of a completely different kind from what it was before. Third, because it takes for its model the highest perfection found in God himself.

16. There are two degrees of sanctification on earth. One occurs in this life which is generally called an *Infancy*, I Cor. 13:11, 12; Eph. 4:14; 1 Peter 2:2. The variety found in this life is so great that some who are sanctified when compared with others and even with themselves at different times, may rightly be called *Infants*, and others *Adults* during their life here, Heb. 5:13, 14.

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9. These are the two pillars of faith, the base of consolation, the increments of piety and the surest marks of true religion.

11. The sufficiency of God is the first reason why we believe in Him: He is able to give us life, Romans 4:20, "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;"

12. The sufficiency of God is in His essence [essential] and subsistence, or manner of being [subsistential].

13. The essence of God is that by which he is absolutely the first being. Isaiah 44:6, "I am the first and the last, besides me there is no god." Revelation 1:8, 21:6, and 22:13, "I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."

31. The attributes of God tell us what He is and who He is.

36. He is said to live in Himself, because He receives neither being nor life from any other source in any way.

37. Hence, the chief title of God, by which he is distinguished from all idols, is that he is the living God, Deut 32:40, "For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever."; Psalm 84:2, "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."; Jeremiah 5:2.

58. The will of God is single and totally one in Him.

59. The will of God is unchangeable because He always wills the same and in the same manner, Psalm 33:11, "The counsel of the Lord remains forever."

60. The will of God is eternal because He does not begin to will what He did not will before, nor cease to

will what He willed before. Malachi 3:6, "I the Lord do not change."

62. The affections attributed to God in Scripture, such as love, hatred, and the like, either designate acts of the will or apply to God only figuratively.

66. The perfection of God whereby He is called blessed results from all His attributes, 1 Timothy 1:11, "According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust."

The Subsistence of God

1. This subsistence, or manner of being of God is his one essence so far as it has personal properties.

2. The essence is common to the three subsistences. As far as essence is concerned, therefore, the single subsistence is are rightly said to exist of themselves.

3. Nothing is attributed to the essence which cannot be attributed to each subsistence in the matter of essence.

4. But was is attributed partly to each subsistence in the matter of subsistence cannot be attributed to the essence

5. The subsistences are distinguished from the essence, because the mode of subsistence, though consolidated with the essence, are distinguished from it considered by itself.

6. They are distinguished from each other as things connected by certain relative properties, so that one cannot be another, although they are the same nature. Neither can one be said to be first or last, except in order of beginning and manner of subsistence.

10. It pertains to the whole man and not to any one part. I Thess. 5:23, *Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* But the whole of the man, or that whole which the man comprises, is not immediately changed.

11. Although the whole man partakes of this grace, it is first and most appropriately in the soul and later progresses to the body, inasmuch as the body of the man, is capable of the same obedience to the will of God as the soul. In the soul this grace is found first and most appropriately in the will whence it passes to other faculties according to the order of nature. Dent. 30:6, *The Lord thy God shall circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and that you may live;* Rom. 2:29, *Circumcision is of the heart.*

12. It is called a change in man from sin to distinguish it from the sanctification which denotes simply the opposite of the negative, such as that which is attributed to the human nature of Christ which is said to be sanctified or made holy (although the nature of Christ was never defiled by unholiness).

13. The starting point of sanctification is the filthiness, corruption, or stain of sin. 2 Cor. 7: 1, *Let us purge ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, being led to holiness in the fear of God.*

14. Its end is the purity of God's image (said to be fashioned or created once more in Knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, Eph. 4:24) or Conformity to

Scripture, sometimes referring to outward and sometimes to inward or effectual separation. If this meaning is taken, sanctification may relate to calling or that first rebirth in which faith is communicated as a principle of new life; a common confusion of regeneration and sanctification hereby arises. The term is rather to be understood as that change in a believer in which he has righteousness and indwelling holiness imparted to him. 2 Thess. 2:13, *Through sanctification of the Spirit.*

7. For God himself witnesses that holiness is a gift of inherent grace. Jer. 31:33, *I will put my law into their mind, and in their heart will I write it; Ezek. 36:26, 27, I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit will I put into the midst of you.*

8. Sanctification is distinguished from that change in a man which is linked to his calling in faith and repentance, for in the latter faith is not properly considered a quality but a relationship to Christ, nor is repentance considered a change of disposition (for then it would be the same as sanctification), but a change of the mind's purpose and intent. Sanctification involves a real change of qualities and disposition.

9. It is called a real change so as to distinguish it not only from justification but also from sanctification by institution, which is the case in the sanctification of the seventh day. It is also distinguished from sanctification by association with symbols, such as the sanctification of the elements in the sacraments. And last, it is distinguished from sanctification by manifestation, as God is said to be sanctified by men, I Peter 3:15.

7. These relative properties are, as it were, individual forces in one essence, spiritually and perfectly alive. Hence the subsistences are rightly called persons.

13. The relative property of the Son is to be begotten, that is, so to proceed from the Father as to be a participant of the same essence and perfectly carry on the Father's nature. Hence is second in order. Hebrews 1:3, the brightness of His glory in the character of His person.

14. The property of the Holy Spirit is to be breathed, to be sent forth and to proceed from the Father and the Son John 15:26, *He whom I will send forth you from the Father, that Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father: Romans 8:9, the Spirit of Christ; Galatians 4:6, the Spirit of the Son.*

The Efficiency of God

1. The efficiency, or working power [efficiential], of God is that by which he works all things in all things. Ephesians 1:11, "He who works all things." Romans 11:36, "From Him, through Him, and in Him are all things."

5. The meaning of that efficiency which pertains to God's essence is his omnipotence.

9. The very will of God, as the effecting principle, is the cause [ratio] of power. Romans 9:19, "Who has resisted His will?"

19. Absolute power is that by which God is able to do all things possible although they may never be done. Matthew 3:9, "God can, of these stones, raise up children of Abraham."

20. The ordaining power of God is that by which he not only can do what he wills but actually does do what he wills. Psalm 115:3, "Our God is in the heavens, He does whatsoever He wills." (cf. Psalm 135:6; Ephesians 3:11)

31. As for the boundary of the action, that aspect in which one person's working or manner of working shines forth most clearly is chiefly attributed to that person. So in the usual appropriation, creation is attributed to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Spirit.

The Decree and Counsel of God

1. In the exercise of God's efficiency, the decree of God comes first. This manner of working is the most perfect of all and notably agrees with the divine nature.
2. The decree of God is his firm decision by which he performs all things through his almighty power according to his counsel. Ephesians 1:11, "He does all things out of the counsel of His own will."
3. God's constancy, truth, and faithfulness appear in His decree.
7. Every decree of God is eternal, 1 Corinthians 2:7, "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory.*"
9. The counsel of God is, as it were, his deliberation over the best manner of accomplishing anything already approved by the understanding and the will.
10. Counsel is attributed to God because of his perfect judgment whereby he does all things advisedly, i.e. willingly and knowingly, not as a result of inquiry as

19. The particular is the proper use which anything serves in its own nature.

Sanctification

1. The real change of state is an alteration of qualities in man himself. 2 Cor. 5:17, *Old things have passed away; all things are new.*
2. The change is not in relation or reason, but in genuine effects seen in degrees of beginning, progress, and completion. 2 Cor. 4:16, *The inner man is renewed day by day.*
3. This alteration of qualities is related to either the just and honorable good of sanctification, or the perfect and exalted good of glorification. Rom. 6:22, *You have your fruit in holiness and your end in everlasting life.*
4. Sanctification is the real change in man from the sordidness of sin to the purity of God's image. Eph. 4:22-24, *Put off that which pertains to the old conversation, that old man, corrupting itself in deceivable lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Put on that new man who according to God is created to righteousness and true holiness.*
5. Just as in justification a believer is properly freed from the guilt of sin and has life given him (the title to which is, as it were, settled in adoption), so in sanctification the same believer is freed from the sordidness and stain of sin, and the purity of God's image is restored to him.
6. Sanctification is not to be understood here as a separation from ordinary use or consecration to some special use, although this meaning is often present in

in that case they might coexist with God from eternity, but also in the order of duration, as we conceive things.

12. Hence that beginning in which God is said to have created the world, was the end of the duration of nothing and the beginning of the world's duration.

13. In creation God wanted to show both his perfection in his not needing any creature or outward thing (for otherwise he would have created the world as soon as he could) and his freedom in producing all things without natural necessity (for had he created out of necessity, he would have done so from eternity, Rev. 4:11; Ps. 115:3).

14. The world has not been in existence from eternity nor could it have been according to the present dispensation and ordering of things.

15. The day of creation would not have come to be if infinite days had had to go before. The days going before would never have ended, so that that day could have arrived.

16. Hence it follows that no creature was or could have been a cause, instrumental or principal, in the act of creation.

17. Everything created was very good, because it was made neither rashly nor in vain but for the end which the maker had before him. Gen. 1: 3 1, *Whatever he made was very good*; I Tim 4:4, *Whatever God made was good*.

18. The goodness of a thing created is the perfection of its fitness for the use which it serves. Now that use is either particular or universal.

men make judgments. For God sees and wills all things and everything at once. Therefore his counsel is said to resemble deliberation in the strict sense.

11. Three things concur in the perfection of this counsel: one, the purpose [scopus] or the end set forth; two, the mental conception of that end; three, the intention and agreement of the will.

12. The purpose or end of the counsel is the glory of God himself, i.e. the goodness or perfection of God which is manifest in his efficiency and shines forth in his works. Ephesians 1:6, "To the praise of his glorious grace."

17. An idea in man is first impressed upon him and afterwards expressed in things, but in God it is only expressed, not impressed, because it does not come from anywhere else.

18. From this one foundation all errors of merit and foreseen faith can be substantially refuted. For if a particular decree of God depended upon any foresight then an idea of God would have to come to him from somewhere else, which hardly agrees with his nature.

31. That conjectural knowledge which some attribute to God about future contingencies is plainly incompatible with the divine nature and perfection.

32. The good pleasure of God is an act of the divine will freely and effectively determining all things.

37. This will is effectual, because whatever he wills he effects in his own time; neither is there anything not done if he wills it to be done. Psalm 115:3; 135:6, "Whatsoever he pleases, the Lord does."

38. The will of God is therefore the first cause of things, Rev. 4:11, "By thy will they are and were created." The will of God as it works outwardly does not presuppose the goodness of the object; but he creates and disposes by willing, James 1:8, "Of his own will he begat us," Romans 9:18, "He has mercy on whom he will."

48. In whatever God wills he is universally effectual; he is not hindered or frustrated in obtaining what he wills. For if he should properly will anything and not attain it he would not be wholly perfect and blessed.

51. In the things which God wills there is a certain order to be conceived. He wills the end before the means to the end because he works according to the most perfect reason. Among means, he wills first those which come nearest to the end; that which is first in order of execution is last in order of intention and vice versa.

52. The will of God is partly hidden and partly revealed, Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

Creation

1. The efficiency of God may be understood as either creation or providence.

2. Creation is the efficiency of God whereby in the beginning out of nothing he made the world to be altogether good.

3. Active creation is conceived as a transitive action in which there is always presupposed an object about which

the agent is concerned; it is virtually but not formally transitive because it makes, not presupposes, an object.

4. Passive creation can be understood in the manner of mutation, although it is improperly called mutation.

5. Creation refers to the whole world, i.e., whatever exists outside of God.

6. Hence all things which exist outside of God are created - fully created, that is, in matter as well as in form. Rev. 4:11, *Because thou hast made all things*; Col. 1: 16, *For by him were made all things which are in heaven and in earth visible and invisible*.

7. Creation produces in the originative sense because it produces not only being as being, but absolutely every part.

8. Therefore before the creation, creatures had no real being either in existence or essence, although they had being known from eternity in the knowledge of God.

9. Creation then produces out of nothing, that is, out of matter that has had no preexistence but which comes into existence with the thing created. Nothing exists from eternity but God, and God is not the matter or a part of any creature, but only the maker.

10. Some things are said to be created whose matter preexisted. But this creation refers not only to the immediate action whereby such things are brought into existence, but also to the mediate action whereby the matter of which they are formed was brought into existence. So it was in the creation of the plants and the animals, Gen. 1:20.

11. That state of nothing or nonbeing of things preceded their being, not only in the order of nature, for