

I. **Terminology:**

1. **What is theology?**

*Theology comes from the Greek and means a “study of God”.  
It generally applies to all religious studies not just those about God.*

2. **What is doctrine?**

*Doctrine is defined as beliefs or teachings  
and is often meant to denote the official teachings of a church which members are expected to believe.*

3. **What is the basis for Christian theology and doctrine?**

*The source of doctrine is scripture.  
Unfortunately, it’s all too easy to misinterpret scripture to fit one’s assumptions and religious paradigm.  
For this reason, we find different doctrines even among those using the same book of scripture.  
According to Paul, Jesus Christ established prophets, apostles, pastors, evangelists, and teachers  
to help interpret scripture properly. [Ephesians 4:11–15]*

4. **How does one learn theology?**

*Seminary education, religious studies courses, Bible studies, sermons, books, conversations, revelation, etc.  
Theology is a complex thing, and it grows with us as we grow spiritually.  
As we worship, pray, study God’s Word, engage in conversation, witness, and serve,  
our understanding of God grows both in us as individuals, as a congregation, and as a denomination,  
our understanding grows, and then so does our theology.  
If our theology never changes, it means we are not growing in our relationship to God.*

II. **Quote:**

**“We all make errors in our theology: you and me both.  
So my recommendation is to err on the side of love. Why?  
Because...  
God is not doctrine. God is not denomination. God is not war.  
God is not law. God is not hate. God is not hell.  
God is Love.”**

1. **How many agree with that statement? And why do you agree or disagree?**

*It’s a trick question – because if anyone thinks that their theology or our theology is error free,  
then that person is a heretic – since only God is error free.*

2. **If you agree that we make errors, what errors do you make in your theology?**

*What are some examples of errors that God’s people have made in the past?  
What are some examples of errors that Christians have made in the past?  
What are some examples of errors that Lutherans have made in the past?*

3. **What errors do you see other Christians making today?**

**What errors might we Lutherans be making today?**

4. **Which is more important: holding on to our current theology  
or trusting & loving & listening to God who always desires to lead us to new & deeper understandings?**

5. **How can theology get in the way of love?**

*When we make our theology more important than loving God and loving our neighbor  
(which most certainly includes treating pastors and everyone else with love and respect)  
we have made an idol out of our theology, and are worshipping our theology instead of worshipping God.  
We are quick to condemn conservative churches for their judging attitude.  
But some Lutherans can be just as quick to judge and condemn.*

### **III. What is the basis of Lutheran doctrine?**

#### ***Sola Fide (By Faith Alone):***

*“For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed — a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” (Romans 1:17).*

*Faith is much more than simple intellectual belief. It is trust and love, a relationship with Jesus.*

*Luther’s explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed points out:*

*“I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith...”*

#### ***Sola Gratia (By Grace Alone):***

*“For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from ourselves; it is God’s gift...” (Ephesians 2:8).*

*Grace is being reconciled with God and neighbor,  
not by what we have done, but by what God has done for all of us through Jesus Christ, our Lord & Savior.*

#### ***Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone):***

*“All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

*The belief that the Bible contains what we need to be reconciled to God  
and live righteously was important to the reformers.*

***Scripture is above all other authorities, including the Church and tradition.***

## IV. What are some examples of Christian theology that we hear espoused and believed to be wrong?

### 1. Views on homosexuality...

*We used to interpret these as literally and without historical context, but now are free to interpret them differently*

- *Noah and Ham (Genesis 9:20–27) – homosexuality or rape and attempted rape?*
- *Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1–11) – homosexuality or rape and attempted rape?*
- *Levitical laws (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13) -- homosexuality or cultic prostitution*
- *two NT vice lists (1 Cor 6:9–10; 1 Tim 1:10) – homosexuality or male prostitution and pederasty?*
- *Paul's letter to the Romans (Romans 1:26–27) – homosexuality or the Isis cult in Rome?*

### 2. Views on the ordination of women...

- *Women should not be permitted to teach (1 Timothy 2:8-15) but read rest of verses for cultural context*
- *Women are subordinate to men (1 Corinthians 11:3-12) but allows for praying and prophesying*
- *Women should be silent in the churches (1 Corinthians 14:34-35) but read in cultural context*
- *Women should be submissive to men (Titus 1-2) but read in cultural context*

### 3. Views on the age of first communion...

- *Must be old enough to understand (1 Corinthians 11:29) –  
"For he that eats & drinks unworthily, eats & drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."  
What were you taught that that meant?  
We used to think it meant you had to discern/understand that the bread was really the body of Christ;  
but in context it is clear that by "body", Paul meant the congregation*

### 4. Views on the age of baptism...

- *Those who believe in infant baptism justify the practice by assuming that children and babies were included in household baptisms mentioned in Acts 11:14, 16:15, 33, 18:8, 1 Corinthians 1:1), but this assumption goes beyond what the text of the Bible says*
- *Those who believe in adult baptism justify the practice because*
  - *Jesus was baptized by John (Matthew 3:13–17; Luke 3:21)*
  - *Jesus taught his disciples to baptize those **who repented of their sins, and believed** (Acts 2:4,38; 9:17–18; Matthew 28:19) which an infant cannot do*
- *Neither infant baptism nor adult baptism can save a person.*

*We are saved by grace through faith & not by works (Rom 3:28; 4:5; 5:1; Eph 1:13; 2:8–9; Gal 2:16; 3:24; Phil 3:9).*
- *What we learned in our six-month study of the book of Acts, specifically about how infant baptism – which is so central to our Lutheran understanding of grace - is not well grounded in scripture – we just take a few references to "households" being baptized and jump to the assumption that those households included infants.*

*When other denominations hang their own theology on a thread as thin as this ("women should be silent in church", and "sodomites will not enter the kingdom of God" e.g.), we accuse them of misusing scripture.*

*We can't have it both ways.*

*If taking a few thin verses & constructing a whole theology around them is wrong for some denominations, then it is wrong for all denominations.*

*If we claim the right to do that, we can't fault others for doing it or we are hypocrites.*

## **V. Why do we need to be open to a changing theology?**

*"ecclesia semper reformanda," which can be translated as "the church must always be reformed."  
It actually comes from St. Augustine but was and is a constant Reformation principle.*

*Theologians spend years - sometimes lifetimes - writing books on Lutheran theology.  
New ones are written every year.  
That in itself argues that our theology continues to be challenged and to change.*

*I, myself, have been studying scripture since I entered seminary in 1977,  
and throughout my 40 years of ordained ministry in the Lutheran Church since.  
Over 30 of those years have been within the confines of the Lutheran Church.  
My three years in seminary and the last five years of ministry  
I have taken a look at Lutheran theology not from within but from without.  
That allows me to broaden my knowledge and to understand how we are viewed by others.*

*"The recent decline in church membership is an indication  
that many of our past assumptions are questionable. Or wrong!"  
– The Rev Walter Huffman, retired ELCA pastor*

## **VI. Why is it important to engage in theological conversation with those not like us?**

*The need to have everyone conform to uniform beliefs is a tell-tale mark of pseudo community.  
Within true community, there is room for differences of opinion.  
And the goal of conversation is not to prove someone wrong in order to exclude them,  
but rather to understand, accept, welcome, and love them.  
If there is a difference of opinion, we need to talk TO each other, not ABOUT each other.  
(Matt. 18:15-17)  
As we continue with this discussion, we should all aim to err on the side of love.*

*The body of Christ includes all Christians and all Christian denominations.  
We are not all supposed to be the same.*

*We are different parts, with different functions,  
and we need each other in order to operate as a unified body.  
That means that we all have strengths and we all have our weaknesses.  
We all get some things right and some things wrong –  
whether it be in our theology or our polity or our worship practices.*

*We NEED each other.*

*We need to be in conversation with each other.*

*We need to be open to learning from one another.*

*If we are not open to asking questions, to listening to different interpretations, to respecting each other,  
to loving each other, and to being transformed by our relationships to each other,  
then we are simply modern-day scribes and Pharisees and not followers of Jesus.*