

[Dictionary of Everyday Theology and Culture](#)

INTRODUCTION

Dictionary of Everyday Theology and Culture is an easy-to-use book about theology and culture for ordinary people living in the everyday world. In particular, it's a practical guide to Christian theology and to key social and cultural issues in the contemporary world. The focus of the *Dictionary* is practical: understanding core Christian truths that provide the framework of the Christian worldview and applying these truths to the task of everyday life and service as followers of Jesus.

The word *theology* means reflection or discourse about God and his relationship to the world. Because we build our faith on correct understanding about God, theology also means knowing God, loving him, and serving his kingdom in our needy world. The ultimate end of theology is to reflect and extend the glory of God in every dimension of life.

The term theology doesn't appear in Scripture. However, the word doctrine—a near synonym—is found several times in the New Testament. The apostle Paul commanded us as Christians to uphold “sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:10; Titus 1:9; 2:1) and to renounce every appearance of false doctrine (1 Timothy 1:3). Paul urged the critical importance of holding fast to faithful doctrine with the command, “Watch your life and doctrine closely” (1 Timothy 4:16).

Each article in the *Dictionary* is divided into two main parts: “Everyday Definition” and “Everyday Application.” Approximately equal attention is given to defining the meaning of each term and to applying the meaning of the term to our lives and service in the world.

Because we must first gain a clear understanding of a doctrine or a cultural issue before living out its implications

as good servants in daily practice, the Everyday Definition attempts to explain each term in nontechnical, everyday language. If we want to be solidly grounded in the faith, to develop spiritually, and to serve effectively, we need clear understanding of core Christian truths. A sound theology—drawn primarily from authoritative Scripture, as well as from the reflections of trusted Christians from both church history and the current church—is basic to every aspect of our lives as Christian disciples.

Of course, Scripture realistically asserts that this side of heaven “we know in part” (1 Corinthians 13:9) and we “see only a reflection as in a mirror” (verse 12, TNIV). So while thorough and detailed, the Everyday Definitions in the *Dictionary* remain inherently incomplete. We will only attain certain and complete knowledge on all points of doctrine in the life to come when, ushered into Christ’s presence (1 Corinthians 13:12), we will see all things clearly.

Theology isn’t simply an intellectual exercise of reflecting on God’s existence and works. Unfortunately, in some periods of church history, theology morphed into a largely intellectual undertaking where applications to real life were never made clear. Thus, the goal of the *Dictionary* isn’t merely to produce correct definitions of theological and cultural terms. After all, it’s possible to be knowledgeable in these areas yet remain spiritually dull and practically ineffective. So the *Dictionary* intentionally addresses the relevance and application of each term to godly living and Christian service with the Everyday Application. This section highlights how each term affects and applies to our relationship with God, self, others, and the surrounding world. So, while the *Dictionary* doesn’t neglect formal truths, it’s intentionally practical—or life related—because it emphasizes the relevance of theology for Christian living and service in today’s complex cultural setting.

To this end, the *Dictionary* is written for informed everyday Christians. However, pastors, other ministry leaders, and seminary and Bible college students will also find its explanations and life applications informative, enriching, and helpful.

The creative team behind the *Dictionary* believes its practical focus will make it uniquely useful. After all, if we want to be effective disciples of Jesus Christ, we must know the truth with our minds, feel the truth with our hearts, and obey the truth with our entire lives. Professor and author Dallas Willard wisely unites these two goals of understanding and application: “Every Christian must strive to arrive at beliefs about God that faithfully reflect the realities of his or her life and experience, so that each may know how to live effectively before him in his world. That’s theology!”

What’s more, the *Dictionary* also brings attention to issues of importance and relevance in the world of today. While fundamental truths of theology remain unchanged from God’s perspective, biblical, historical, and theological studies have brought to light new insights that enhance our understanding and facilitate our service for the kingdom. Christian theology isn’t static. Because theology means knowing God, loving him, and serving his kingdom in our world, our conversations about theological issues must reengage with every new generation. Each age presents new issues and poses revolutionary questions.

The editors and contributors pray that this *Dictionary* will enhance your understanding of essential topics of theology and important issues of contemporary society and at the same time enable you to live virtuously and fruitfully for the glory of God and for the good of the church.
