

A Book List for Understanding Key Theological Issues¹

Compiled by Jack Phelps

1. Christian Calling

What are we about? What does it mean?

Following Jesus by N.T. Wright

Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis

Heaven Misplaced by Douglas Wilson

2. Justification, Sanctification, Adoption, Predestination

What does it mean and how do I defend it?

The Flight From Humanity by R.J. Rushdoony²

Calvin's Doctrine of the Atonement by Robert Peterson³

The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination by Loraine Boettner⁴

The Way of Righteousness by Norman Shepherd

3. The Character of God

Specifically the Trinity. What does it say about my life?

Knowledge of the Holy by A.W. Tozer⁵

(see also Chapter 10 in Machen, listed below under Faith)

“Antitrinitarianism” by B.B. Warfield in *Selected Shorter Writings, Volume I.*

Knowing God by J.I. Packer

4. The Bible

What authority does it have? How do we study it?

By This Standard by Greg Bahnsen

The Last Word by N.T. Wright⁶

5. Prayer

What is it? How do we do it?

George Mueller of Bristol by A.T. Pierson⁷

Prayer by O. Hallesby⁸

E.M. Bounds on Prayer by Edward McKendree Bounds

¹ Under each category I have listed one or more works that will help the Christian young person better understand and act upon the Faith. Where two or more are listed, they appear in the order of recommended reading, not necessarily the order of importance.

² A brief, but important work. It will prepare the ground for subsequent reading because Rushdoony here identifies the problem of the modern world's perception of Christian teaching regarding sin and man's alienation from God. You can consider this book prolegomena to the doctrines under this heading.

³ This is the best work of synthesis on Calvin's important approach to the atonement this writer knows of. It demonstrates that "Calvinism" must be seen as much more than simply the so-called "five points" of soteriology. Everyone who calls himself a "Calvinist" should read this book.

⁴ A larger work of theology, but perhaps one of the most important of its type written in the 20th Century. Parts of this book were required reading for my kids when they were going to school at home. Highly recommended.

⁵ This is perhaps my favorite devotional book of all time. I have read it repeatedly and am always challenged by Tozer's infectious piety and ability to communicate the awesomeness of God.

⁶ Wright presents a different twist on the topic and we may not completely agree with him at every point. But it will force you to think through important issues and is very much worth the time spent reading it.

⁷ Actually a biography of a man of great faith, this book will challenge you to a greater life of and dependence on prayer.

⁸ Although obscured by more recent works (it was written in 1931), this book remains in print and is, I think, one of the very best treatments of the topic. Hallesby was a Norwegian Lutheran and is best known for his book on temperaments. I think this book is much more important.

6. Grace

What is grace? What does it mean?

The Call of Grace by Norman Shepherd⁹

7. Faith

What is faith? How do you cultivate it?

The Christian Faith in the Modern World by J. Gresham Machen¹⁰

8. Baptism

What is baptism? Why do we believe in infant baptism and what does it mean?

Why Baptize Babies? by Mark Horne

To a Thousand Generations by Doug Wilson

Baptism: Two Vital Questions (booklet) by Jack Phelps¹¹

9. Communion

What is it? What does it mean? Why do we give our kids communion?

Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament by Ronald Wallace¹²

The Case for Covenant Communion by Gregg Strawbridge (ed.)

10. The Church

What is it? What power does it have? What's my role in it?

Sociology of the Church by James Jordan¹³

The Kingdom and the Power by Peter Leithart

12. Worship

What is it? Why do we do it the way we do it?

The Taste of Sabbath by Stuart Bryan¹⁴

The Lord's Service by Jeff Meyers

The Primer for Worship and Reformation by Doug Wilson

13. The Family

What is it? What's its purpose? What does that look like?

The Four Loves by C. S. Lewis

Standing on the Promises by Doug Wilson

Family: God's Weapon for Victory by Robert Andrews¹⁵

⁹ This book has created some controversy. It is listed here because I generally agree with the approach of the writer, but also because he has been willing to tackle head-on an issue that has been scrupulously avoided by Reformed writers for too long. That is, of course, why the book is controversial!

¹⁰ Nearly 100 years old, this book still deserves reading by Christians. I think every Reformed church in America would be stronger if its members read and digested the contents of Machen's book.

¹¹ This booklet is only included at my fellow-elder's urging and encouragement.

¹² This book was, some 30 years ago, one of the earliest influences on my own understanding of Lord's Day worship. It was read by Jordan, Meyers and others, and helped lead a certain segment of the Reformed American church to rethink and reform its worship practices. Although it was originally published 60 years ago, it remains important and influential, although not as well known as books written more recently by men who were influenced by Wallace's work.

¹³ One of Jordan's early works and one of his best. There are some things in it that should be subjected to further discussion and debate – and have been. I don't agree with all that is in here (for example, much of Chapter 9), but the book is very much worth reading and the arguments worthy of serious consideration.

¹⁴ One of the best short books I have read in the past year. It can be read in an hour or so, but you may be well-repaid if you stop every so often and contemplate what Bryan has written. I like this book a lot.

14. Marriage

Why was it created? What should it look like? How does it further Christ's kingdom. How do you get there?

Reforming Marriage by Doug Wilson

Praise Her in the Gates by Nancy Wilson

Fruit of Her Hands by Nancy Wilson

15. Apologetics

How do we appropriately defend the faith?

Always Ready by Greg Bahnsen¹⁶

Every Thought Captive by Richard Pratt¹⁷

¹⁵ I hesitated to include this book because I have not read it. It comes to me, however, with hearty recommendations, so in the end I relented and listed it. Once I have read it, I reserve the right to make a further decision on its inclusion.

¹⁶ One of Bahnsen's most important works, although it was published after his death.

¹⁷ An excellent distillation of Van Til's approach to apologetics. I have used this as a textbook with young people with some significant success.