

CONCISE
Theology

J. I. Packer

 CROSSWAY®
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Concise Theology

Copyright © 1993 by J. I. Packer

Published by Crossway
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

Originally published in the U.S.A. by Tyndale House Publishers Inc. under the title *Concise Theology*, by J. I. Packer. Worldwide English edition © 2020 by Crossway with permission of Tyndale House Publishers Inc. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law. Crossway is a registered trademark in the United States of America.

Cover design: Jordan Singer

First printing 2020

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

Scripture references marked NIV are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-6954-8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Packer, J. I. (James Innell), author.

Title: Concise theology / J. I. Packer.

Description: Wheaton, Illinois : Crossway, 2020. | Originally published: Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House, c1993. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019050312 | ISBN 9781433569548 (hardcover)

Subjects: LCSH: Theology, Doctrinal—Popular works.

Classification: LCC BT77 .P235 2020 | DDC 230/.044—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019050312>

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

XX	29	28	27	26	25	24	23	22	21	20				
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

CONTENTS

Publisher's Foreword	13
Preface	15

PART 1

GOD REVEALED AS CREATOR

1 Revelation: Scripture Is the Word of God	21
2 Interpretation: Christians Can Understand the Word of God	24
3 General Revelation: God's Reality Is Known to All	27
4 Guilt: The Effect of General Revelation	29
5 Inward Witness: Scripture Is Authenticated by the Holy Spirit ...	31
6 Authority: God Governs His People through Scripture	34
7 Knowledge: True Knowledge of God Comes through Faith ...	37
8 Creation: God Is the Creator	39
9 Self-Disclosure: "This Is My Name"	41
10 Self-Existence: God Has Always Been	44
11 Transcendence: God's Nature Is Spiritual	46
12 Omniscience: God Sees and Knows	49
13 Sovereignty: God Reigns	51
14 Almightyness: God Is Omnipresent and Omnipotent	53

15	Predestination: God Has a Purpose	55
16	Trinity: God Is One and Three	58
17	Holiness: God Is Light	61
18	Goodness: God Is Love	63
19	Wisdom: God's Twofold Will Is One	66
20	Mystery: God Is Surpassingly Great	69
21	Providence: God Governs This World	72
22	Miracles: God Shows His Presence and Power	75
23	Glory: God's Glory-Showing Requires Glory-Giving	77
24	Idolatry: God Demands Total Allegiance	79
25	Angels: God Employs Supernatural Agents	81
26	Demons: God Has Supernatural Opponents	83
27	Satan: Fallen Angels Have a Leader	85
28	Humanness: God Made Human Beings in His Image	87
29	Humankind: Humans Are Body and Soul, in Two Genders.....	90

PART 2

GOD REVEALED AS REDEEMER

30	The Fall: The First Human Couple Sinned	95
31	Original Sin: Depravity Infects Everyone	98
32	Inability: Fallen Human Beings Are Both Free and Enslaved	101
33	Covenant: God Takes Sinful Humans into a Covenant of Grace	103
34	Law: God Legislates, and Demands Obedience	107
35	Law in Action: God's Moral Law Has Three Purposes	110

36	Conscience: God Teaches and Cleanses the Heart	112
37	Worship: God Gives a Liturgical Pattern	114
38	Prophets: God Sent Messengers to Declare His Will	118
39	Incarnation: God Sent His Son to Save Us	120
40	Two Natures: Jesus Christ Is Fully Human	124
41	Virgin Birth: Jesus Christ Was Born by Miracle	127
42	Teacher: Jesus Christ Proclaimed God's Kingdom and Family	129
43	Sinlessness: Jesus Christ Was Entirely Free from Sin	132
44	Obedience: Jesus Christ Fulfilled His Father's Redemptive Will	134
45	Vocation: Jesus Christ's Mission Was Revealed at His Baptism	137
46	Transfiguration: How Jesus Christ's Glory Was Revealed	139
47	Resurrection: Jesus Christ Was Raised from the Dead	141
48	Ascension: Jesus Christ Was Taken Up into Heaven	143
49	Session: Jesus Reigns in Heaven	145
50	Mediation: Jesus Christ Is the Mediator between God and Man	147
51	Sacrifice: Jesus Christ Made Atonement for Sin	150
52	Definite Redemption: Jesus Christ Died for God's Elect	153

PART 3

GOD REVEALED AS LORD OF GRACE

53	Paraclete: The Holy Spirit Ministers to Believers	159
54	Salvation: Jesus Rescues His People from Sin	162
55	Election: God Chooses His Own	164

56	Effectual Calling: God Draws His People to Himself	167
57	Illumination: The Holy Spirit Gives Spiritual Understanding	169
58	Regeneration: The Christian Is Born Again	171
59	Works: Good Works Are an Expression of Faith	173
60	Repentance: A Christian Changes Radically	176
61	Justification: Salvation Is by Grace through Faith	178
62	Adoption: God Makes His People His Children	181
63	Sanctification: The Christian Grows in Grace	183
64	Liberty: Salvation Brings Freedom	186
65	Legalism: Working for God's Favor Forfeits It	189
66	Antinomianism: We Are Not Set Free to Sin	192
67	Love: Loving Is Basic to Christian Behavior	195
68	Hope: Hoping Is Basic to the Christian Outlook	197
69	Enterprise: A Christian Lives to Please God	199
70	Prayer: Christians Practice Fellowship with God	201
71	Oaths and Vows: Christians Must Be Truthful	204
72	The Kingdom of God: Christians Must Manifest Kingdom Life	207
73	Apostles: Jesus's Representatives Exercised His Authority	210
74	Church: God Plants His People in a New Community	212
75	Word and Sacrament: How a Genuine Church Is Identified	216
76	Elders: Pastors Must Care for the Church	218
77	Sacraments: Christ Instituted Two Seals of God's Covenant...	220
78	Baptism: This Rite Exhibits Union with Christ	223

79	The Lord's Supper: This Rite Exhibits Communion with Christ	227
80	Discipline: The Church Must Uphold Christian Standards ...	230
81	Mission: Christ Sends the Church into the World	233
82	Spiritual Gifts: The Holy Spirit Equips the Church	236
83	Marriage: Matrimony Is Meant to Be a Permanent Covenant Relationship	238
84	The Family: The Christian Household Is a Spiritual Unit ...	241
85	The World: Christians Are in Society to Serve and Transform It	243
86	The State: Christians Must Respect Civil Government	246

PART 4

GOD REVEALED AS LORD OF DESTINY

87	Perseverance: God Keeps His People Safe	251
88	Unpardonable Sin: Only Impenitence Cannot Be Forgiven ...	254
89	Mortality: Christians Need Not Fear Death	257
90	Second Coming: Jesus Christ Will Return to the Earth in Glory	260
91	General Resurrection: The Dead in Christ Will Rise in Glory	263
92	Judgment Seat: God Will Judge All Mankind	267
93	Hell: The Wicked Will Be Banished into Endless Misery ...	270
94	Heaven: God Will Welcome His People into Everlasting Joy	273
	General Index	277
	Scripture Index	279

PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

First published in 1993 (by Tyndale House Publishers), *Concise Theology* has proved itself to be a strikingly valuable book, and many have benefited from its crisp presentation of historical Christian doctrine. It is with great pleasure and humility that Crossway has now been granted permission to publish Dr. J. I. Packer's classic book. The need for theological literacy remains one of the foremost challenges facing the church in the twenty-first century, and Packer's *Concise Theology* provides readers a trusted resource for growing in the knowledge of God, in a fuller understanding of biblical teaching, and in a readiness to live faithfully and steadily in this confusing world.

In *Concise Theology* Dr. Packer offers a lucid introduction to Christian belief. It is concise, yes, but not simplistic—as Packer is able to present a surprisingly great deal of theological content in a small space, and in a clear and compelling way. His discussions run the gamut from knowing God as he has revealed himself in Scripture, to recognizing our desperate state in sin; from celebrating the joy of redemption in Christ, to living in grateful affirmation of the Holy Spirit's enabling grace; from ordering our lives, families, churches, and governments in this our earthly journey, to anticipating the hope of eternal life and joy in God's presence. Not only is there much content here, but here also there is much wisdom from Packer's pen.

Crossway also wishes to express its appreciation to Tyn-dale House Publishers for granting us permission to publish this volume. We are greatly privileged to offer this classic book for the benefit of readers today. It is our hope that many will find their faith deepened and strengthened as a result of engaging with Dr. J. I. Packer's *Concise Theology*.

Crossway, 2020

PREFACE

This book sets out in short compass what seem to me to be the permanent essentials of Christianity, viewed as both a belief system and a way of life. Others have other ideas of how Christianity should be professed, but this is mine. It is Reformational and evangelical, and as such, so I maintain, historic and classic mainstream.

These briefings, which were first planned for a study Bible and have now been revised, have an intentionally scriptural cast and, like other of my writings, are peppered with texts to look up. I submit that this is how it should be, for it is basic to Christianity to receive biblical teaching as God's own instruction, proceeding, as John Calvin put it, via human agency from God's holy mouth. If Scripture is indeed God himself preaching and teaching, as the great body of the church has always held, then the first mark of good theology is that it seeks to echo the divine Word as faithfully as it can.

Theology is, first, the activity of thinking and speaking about God (theologizing), and, second, the product of that activity (Martin Luther's theology, or John Wesley's, or Charles Finney's, or John Wimber's, or J. I. Packer's, or whoever's). As an activity, theology is a cat's cradle of interrelated though distinct disciplines: elucidating texts (exegesis), synthesizing what they say on the things they deal with (biblical theology), seeing how the faith was stated in the past (historical theology), formulating it for today (systematic theology), finding its implications for conduct (ethics), commending

and defending it as truth and wisdom (apologetics), defining the Christian task in the world (missiology), stockpiling resources for life in Christ (spirituality) and corporate worship (liturgy), and exploring ministry (practical theology). The following chapters, sketchy as they are, range into all these areas.

Remembering that the Lord Jesus Christ called those he wanted fed *sheep* rather than *giraffes*, I have aimed to keep things as simple as possible. Archbishop William Temple was once told that he had made a complex issue very simple; he was hugely delighted, and said at once, “Lord, who made me simple, make me simpler yet.” My heart goes with Temple’s, and I have tried to keep my head in line with it.

As I often tell my students, theology is for doxology and devotion—that is, the praise of God and the practice of godliness. It should therefore be presented in a way that brings awareness of the divine presence. Theology is at its healthiest when it is consciously under the eye of the God of whom it speaks, and when it is singing to his glory. This, too, I have tried to bear in mind.

These short studies of great subjects feel to me, now that I have done them, rather like the lightning tours of England that enterprising bus companies run for American visitors (fifteen minutes at Stonehenge, two hours in Oxford, theater and overnight in Stratford, an hour and a half in York, an afternoon in the Lake District—*phew!*). Each chapter is a mere sketchy note. Yet I dare to hope that my compressed material, Packer-packed as it is, might expand in readers’ minds to lift their hearts Godward, in the way that a different form of hot air lifts balloons and their passengers skyward. We shall see.

My frequent quoting of the Westminster Confession may raise some eyebrows, since I am an Anglican and not a Presbyterian. But since the Confession was intended to amplify the Thirty-Nine Articles, and most of its framers were Anglican clergy, and since it is something of a masterpiece, “the ripest fruit of Reformation creed-making,” as B. B. Warfield called it, I think I am entitled to

value it as part of my Reformed Anglican heritage and to use it as a major resource.

I gratefully acknowledge the hidden hand of my much-admired friend R. C. Sproul, from whom came the germ idea for several of these outlines. Though our styles differ, we think very much alike, and have cooperated happily in a number of projects. I find that we are sometimes referred to as the Reformed Mafia, but hard words break no bones, and on we go.

J. I. Packer, 1993

PART 1



GOD REVEALED
AS CREATOR

REVELATION

Scripture Is the Word of God

The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

Exodus 32:16

Christianity is the true worship and service of the true God, humankind's Creator and Redeemer. It is a religion that rests on revelation: nobody would know the truth about God, or be able to relate to him in a personal way, had not God first acted to make himself known. But God has so acted, and the sixty-six books of the Bible, thirty-nine written before Christ came and twenty-seven after, are together the record, interpretation, expression, and embodiment of his self-disclosure. God and godliness are the Bible's uniting themes.

From one standpoint, the Scriptures (*Scriptures* means "writings") are the faithful testimony of the godly to the God whom

they loved and served; from another standpoint, through a unique exercise of divine overruling in their composition, they are God's own testimony and teaching in human form. The church calls these writings the Word of God because their authorship and contents are both divine.

Decisive assurance that Scripture is from God and consists entirely of his wisdom and truth comes from Jesus Christ and his apostles, who taught in his name. Jesus, God incarnate, viewed his Bible (our Old Testament) as his heavenly Father's written instruction, which he no less than others must obey (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; 5:19–20; 19:4–6; 26:31, 52–54; Luke 4:16–21; 16:17; 18:31–33; 22:37; 24:25–27, 45–47; John 10:35), and which he had come to fulfill (Matt. 5:17–18; 26:24; John 5:46). Paul described the Old Testament as entirely “breathed out by God” (2 Tim. 3:16)—that is, a product of God's Spirit (“breath”), just as the cosmos is (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 33:6)—and written to teach Christianity (2 Tim. 3:15–17; cf. Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). Peter affirms the divine origin of biblical teaching in 1 Peter 1:10–12 and 2 Peter 1:21, and so also by his manner of quoting does the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 1:5–13; 3:7; 4:3; 10:5–7, 15–17; cf. Acts 4:25; 28:25–27).

Since the apostles' teaching about Christ is itself revealed truth in God-taught words (1 Cor. 2:12–13), the church rightly regards authentic apostolic writings as completing the Scriptures. Already Peter refers to Paul's letters as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15–16), and Paul is apparently calling Luke's Gospel “Scripture” in 1 Timothy 5:18, where he quotes the words of Luke 10:7.

The idea of written directives from God himself as a basis for godly living goes back to God's act of inscribing the Decalogue on stone tablets and then prompting Moses to write his laws and the history of his dealings with his people (Ex. 32:15–16; 34:1, 27–28; Num. 33:2; Deut. 31:9). Digesting and living by this material was always central to true devotion in Israel for both leaders and ordinary people (Josh. 1:7–8; 2 Kings 17:13; 22:8–13; 1 Chron. 22:12–13; Neh. 8; Ps. 119). The principle that all must be governed

by the Scriptures, that is, by the Old and New Testaments taken together, is equally basic to Christianity.

What Scripture says, God says; for, in a manner comparable only to the deeper mystery of the incarnation, the Bible is both fully human and fully divine. So all its manifold contents—histories, prophecies, poems, songs, wisdom writings, sermons, statistics, letters, and whatever else—should be received as from God, and all that Bible writers teach should be revered as God’s authoritative instruction. Christians should be grateful to God for the gift of his written Word, and conscientious in basing their faith and life entirely and exclusively on it. Otherwise, we cannot ever honor or please him as he calls us to do.

INTERPRETATION

Christians Can Understand the Word of God

Give me understanding, that I may keep your law
and observe it with my whole heart.

Psalm 119:34

All Christians have a right and duty not only to learn from the church's heritage of faith but also to interpret Scripture for themselves. The church of Rome doubts this, alleging that individuals easily misinterpret the Scriptures. This is true; but the following rules, faithfully observed, will help prevent that from happening.

Every book of Scripture is a human composition, and though it should always be revered as the Word of God, interpretation of it must start from its human character. Allegorizing, therefore, which disregards the human writer's expressed meaning, is never appropriate.

Each book was written not in code but in a way that could be understood by the readership to which it was addressed. This is true