

## The Three Perspectives of Van Til and Frame

By now, some students of these lessons have noticed a recurring motif in this presentation: three “orthos” (orthodoxy, orthopraxis, orthopathos), three divisions (Biblical Division, Doctrinal and Historical Division, Practical Theology Division), and three topics (Biblical Exegesis, Interaction in Community, and Christian Living). This point in the *Building Your Theology* series is opportune for explaining the strategy behind our method.

It is our intent in these lessons to present an epistemology by which individuals can construct their own Christian theology. “Epistemology” is a term students of philosophy use to refer to the way we form beliefs, the way determine “how we know what we know to be true.” It is, in short, a theory of knowledge.

These lessons utilize a paradigm that was originally conceived by Cornelius Van Til, a Reformed theologian who spent much of his career first at Princeton Theological Seminary, and later at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. It was subsequently refined by one of his students, John Frame, who at the time of this writing teaches Epistemology and Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida.

In essence, the entire corpus of what is considered “knowledge” can be seen from three viewpoints: Normative, Situational and Existential. These are not three different “types” of knowledge; they are all perspectives on the same knowledge. Each perspective mutually interrelates, corrects and reinforces the others.

Although this construct can be applied to the justification of all knowledge, for our purposes we are only concerned with the justification of theological knowledge. So, we will replace Frame’s technical terms with corresponding terminology: “Scripture” will represent the normative perspective, “The World” will correspond to the situational perspective, and “The Self” will represent the existential perspective.

Our lesson explains the nuts and bolts of this mechanism. In examining any particular belief, we take into account what the Bible says (Scripture), what our fellow believers say, and have said throughout the history of the church (Interaction in Community), and finally what the Holy Spirit says to us (the Self) as we “live out” the Christian life in worship, prayer, and ministry. The Bible reinforces what other believers say, and what our heart tells us to be true. Other believers, along with our own understandings, support a particular interpretation of the Bible. Interaction with the Bible, along with fellow believers, has much to teach us about ourselves. And so on.

Our construct of Biblical Exegesis, Interaction in Community, and Christian Living lies along similar lines. And for the purposes of these lessons, Orthodoxy, Orthopraxis and Orthopathos will be understood in the same fashion.

Understanding how these elements interrelate and reinforce one another will not only help you grasp the content of these lessons. Its ultimate objective is to help you construct a theology in which you will be able to place your confidence.