

## 1. Approaching theological study

### Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise For Young Theologians*

#### Introduction

Welcome to the Emmanuel Guided Reading Course!

We're beginning the course with three introductory sessions designed to pave the way for the programme of theological study that follows. Here's an outline of the first three weeks:

Session 1: Approaching theological study

Session 2: Godliness and theological study

Session 3: Prayer

As you know, you'll be given around four hours of reading accompanied by study questions before most of the tutorials. The first tutorial, however, is a little different. On this occasion we'll be thinking more broadly about how to approach the reading during the rest of the Course. nonetheless, there is some reading to be done before the tutorial.

The main material to read is Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise For Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962). (I believe Thielicke's name is pronounced "tea-licker." Seriously.) Some of Thielicke's language is a little complicated, but the basic message is pretty clear, and it's extremely important for all students of theology.

If you find some sections hard to follow, don't worry – just skip over them at the stage. We can look in more detail at the important parts during the tutorial. Importantly, *let the study questions (below) be your guide*. In other words, let them guide you towards those parts of the book where your attention should be focussed, and don't worry so much about other parts, especially if you find them tricky to understand. The questions focus on chapters 3-6, 8 and 13.

Finally, please remember to bring the following things with you to the tutorial: this handout, Thielicke's book, a Bible, any other handouts that have been supplied, and something (laptop, notebook, paper, etc.) to make notes with.

#### Outline

Here's an outline of what we'll be doing in the first tutorial. The handout for the final section (Logical Fallacies) will be provided at the tutorial (by email for Skype students). We'll go through it together.

- Welcome; introductions; housekeeping
- What to read and how to read
- Thielicke, *A Little Exercise For Young Theologians*
- Handout: "Logical Fallacies: How *Not* to Think"

## Questions for reflection

Before you begin reading, consider the following questions:

i. Which of the following sins are most likely to result from studying theology? Why?

“For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” (Mark 7:21-23)

“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:19-21)

ii. Are there any sins listed here that you feel personally tempted to?

## Study questions

1. What happens to the “lively, active young man ... when he comes home after his first semester” of theological study (pp. 6-7)?

2. “There is a hiatus [gap] between the arena of the young theologian’s actual spiritual growth and what he actually knows intellectually about this arena” (p. 10). Can you explain the problem that Thieliicke is talking about here? What do you think of the illustrations Thieliicke uses elsewhere in this chapter?

3. Describe the scene Thieliicke depicts in chapter 3 (pp. 13-15). Have you ever witnessed anything like this?

*For reflection:* How do you feel as you read this section?

4. “Theology makes the young theologian vain and so kindles in him something like gnostic pride. The chief reason for this is that in us men love and truth are seldom combined” (p. 16). How does Thieliicke illustrate and explain this in the rest of chapter 6?

*For reflection:* How might the student have responded to his landlord if love and truth *had* been combined?

5. “The church has the prior right to question us, even if it does not and cannot understand the details of our work” (p. 25). Why?

*For reflection:* How could you let people at your church “question” you about what you believe if they can’t understand some of the things you say?

6. “A person who pursues theological study is spiritually sick unless he reads the Bible uncommonly often” (p. 40). How much time do you intend to devote to the prayerful study of Scripture during your time on the Emmanuel Guided Reading Course?