

INTRODUCTION TO EXPERIENTIAL THEOLOGY

*Experiential Theology is not about understanding
God from afar but about experiencing His presence
in the depths of our own being.*



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ABSTRACT

In light of Deivism, experiential theology is examined in this article, which argues in favour of a faith experience based on individual, life-changing interactions with God. Experiential theology places a higher value on a close, personal relationship with God than just ceremonial acts or cognitive agreement. Theologian John Calvin pointed out quite sharply that **"we must taste and see His goodness; it is not enough to know that God is good" (from Institutes of the Christian Religion)**¹. This quote highlights the main notion of experiential theology, which emphasizes having a transformative relationship with God. This method is contrasted with Systematic Theology, which prioritizes doctrinal accuracy over human growth, and Task Theology, which results in an understanding of faith that is centred on acts. Incorporating biblical texts such as Romans 12:2², Ephesians 2:8-9³, and James 4:8⁴, the paper emphasizes that authentic Spiritual Engagement entails a dynamic connection with God, guided by the Holy Spirit and shown by changing experiences. The paper talks about the risks of "commoditizing" faith in order to keep it from become transactional rather than relational. By examining major biblical texts and emphasizing the importance of both communal and individual spiritual activities, the study develops a dynamic, real, and securely founded faith that is based on God's presence. The goal is to provide a more gratifying Theological Experience that speaks to contemporary Christians' need for a deeper, more profound connection with the God.

Keywords: *Experiential Theology, Deivism, Personal Transformation, Divine Encounter, Systematic Theology, Task Theology, Commodification of Faith, Grace, Biblical Integration, Spiritual Engagement, Holy Spirit, Relational Faith, Theological Experience, Authenticity in Worship, Community in Faith.*

INTRODUCTION

Despite life's problems, we feel a profound sense of fulfilment and happiness when we ponder God's goodness. This joy comes from having a deeper understanding of God's nature and His active participation in our lives. Psalm 34:8 says, **"Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him."**⁵ However, in many contemporary faith communities, the concept of grace is either misunderstood

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, Chapter 2, Section 24.

² Romans 12:2 (NIV).

³ Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV).

⁴ James 4:8 (NIV).

⁵ Psalm 34:8 (NIV).

or overemphasized. Growing in the grace of our Lord Jesus and comprehending the intricacies of the cosmos can lead to a more satisfying experience of faith, as 2 Peter 3:18 asks us to do, **"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."**⁶ Our comprehension can be further enhanced by participating in scholarly and philosophical conversations based on biblical viewpoints. In these kinds of conversations, people frequently share their life stories from different perspectives and incorporate biblical insight with them. The importance of this integration is emphasized in Proverbs 2:6: **"For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding."**⁷ This integration helps believers recognize God's active presence in their lives and understand that living out grace is not merely about preaching it but about embodying it, as James 1:22 admonishes: **"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."**⁸

In what ways may we actually embody God's grace in our day-to-day encounters and interactions? What does it mean to live an example of grace instead of just discussing it? These thought-provoking queries lead us to the idea of experiencing theology.

The emphasis of experiential theology is on how our individual interactions with God influence how we comprehend and live out our beliefs. This emphasizes that faith ought to be a live, breathing connection with God rather than only a cerebral game or ceremonial practice. This method emphasizes how faith should be ingrained in our everyday life and how the idea of grace is based in personal experience rather than just theoretical knowledge or conceptual comprehension. We frequently discuss a variety of subjects that provide insight into how we experience and understand spiritual truths in our casual discussions with other Christians over coffee, tea, or a meal. These talks shed light on the ways in which our individual and collective encounters with God mold our beliefs. Recently, I was impressed by a talk about economic experiences and how the concept of selling experiences is spreading outside traditional venues such as theatres and theme parks. This idea encouraged me to think about incorporating the concept of experience within Deivism's theological framework. Deivism, as a philosophical notion, stresses God's active involvement in the world, in stark contrast to Deism, which sees God as a distant creator who does not

⁶ 2 Peter 3:18 (NIV).

⁷ Proverbs 2:6 (NIV).

⁸ James 1:22 (NIV).

intervene in it. Deivism holds that God is not only the creator, but also the sustainer and redeemer of creation. Biblical authority lends credibility to this viewpoint. For instance, Isaiah 45:5-7 states, **"I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me... I am the Lord, and there is no other."**⁹ Similarly, Colossians 1:16-17 affirms, **"For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."**¹⁰

Many people today encounter spiritual and existential quandaries that raise profound issues about faith and meaning. These conundrums frequently appear horizontally as opposed to vertically. Horizontal difficulties arise when concerns from higher echelons of society, such leadership, or social structures, reverberate and impact people in lower echelons. The vast difficulties that arise from this domino effect mirror the difficulties that leaders themselves encounter. All of this means that the pain and struggles that common people go through mirror and are comparable to the issues that their leaders come across. This perspective emphasizes the interdependence between spiritual and societal issues. Ephesians 6:12 reminds us, **"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."**¹¹

Frequently, the spiritual needs of many people are disregarded or mismanaged, which causes them to suffer without having a real encounter with God. A painful question is posed in Psalm 42:5, **"Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God."** The great need for spiritual interaction and the battle to hold onto hope in the face of hardship are reflected in this passage. The lack of spiritual engagement can foster harmful behaviours and attitudes, as described in Galatians 5:19-21: **"The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."**¹² Spiritual exhaustion in our societies can be addressed when experiential theology is combined with Deivism. Confusion brought about by differing theological viewpoints is the root of many unsolved problems. Some see spiritual practices

⁹ Isaiah 45:5-7, NIV.

¹⁰ 2 Colossians 1:16-17, NIV.

¹¹ Ephesians 6:12, NIV.

¹² Psalm 42:5, NIV.

like transactions rather than life-changing encounters, treating theology like a commodity. This commodity of faith results in shallow involvement, with spiritual activities serving as simply tools to acquire heavenly favour rather than pathways for meaningful personal transformation. This transactional approach fosters spiritual burnout and a sense of spiritual enslavement. Matthew 6:24 warns against this transactional view of faith: **"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."**¹³ Jesus highlights the perils of spiritual materialism and warns against limiting spiritual involvement to commercial terms. This caution encourages us to adopt a true, transformative spiritual engagement perspective instead of a transactional one.

Experience-based theology offers a framework for thinking about and dealing with these problems. We can stay away from the traps of commodified faith by acknowledging God's active engagement in our lives and practicing grace in an honest way. In order to assist believers, overcome spiritual obstacles and discover genuine fulfilment in their spiritual journey, this approach promotes a deeper, more meaningful relationship with spirituality. The relevance of one-on-one interactions with God and their life-changing effects are emphasized by experiential theology. John Calvin, a notable theologian, profoundly captured this notion when he said, **"It is not enough to know that God is good; we must taste and see His goodness"** (from **Institutes of the Christian Religion**). This quotation reflects the core of experiential theology: the invitation to encounter God's goodness in a way that changes our life, rather than just intellectually acknowledging it. By combining Deivism and experiential theology, we embrace a more vibrant, nuanced understanding of faith. It enables us to have a closer, more genuine relationship with God and get past the problems of transactional spirituality. By doing this, we can resolve spiritual disorientation and fatigue and promote a deeper, more intense spiritual experience. This method invites us to embody God's grace in a way that represents a sincere and life-changing encounter with the supernatural, and to live out that grace in our everyday interactions and experiences.

In conclusion, Deivism redefines theology by rejecting it as a mere commodity to be traded, a good to be owned, or a service to be consumed. Instead, it views theology as a deeply personal, memorable, and transformative experience. By focusing on creating meaningful spiritual encounters, Deivism aims to liberate believers from the confines of transactional faith and guide them into a deeper, more fulfilling relationship with God. This approach ensures that theology remains a dynamic and living interaction with God, enriched by personal encounters, communal wisdom, and the ongoing guidance of the Holy Spirit.

¹³ Matthew 6:24 (NIV)

The narrative of Peter and the beggar in Acts 3:6¹⁴ vividly exemplifies this experiential approach. Peter's offer of an encounter with God, rather than material wealth, underscores the transformative power of experiencing God's presence. Through Experiential Theology, believers are invited to embark on a more vibrant and authentic faith journey, marked by profound and life-changing interactions with the divine.

Comparing Approaches to Faith: Experiential Theology vs. Commodified and Task-Oriented Models.

Aspect	Experiential Theology	Commodified Theology	Task Theology
Definition	A transformative journey of personal spiritual experience.	Theology treated as a marketable product or service.	Focuses on completing religious activities and duties.
Focus	Deep, personal encounters with the divine.	Tangible goods or intangible services.	Performing religious tasks and obligations.
Engagement	Dynamic, transformative relationship with God.	Transactional and consumer-oriented approach.	Often routine or ritualistic engagement.
Value	Intrinsic and spiritual, leading to personal growth and renewal.	Interchangeable and material, focusing on external expressions.	Based on fulfilling religious requirements or duties.
Faith Experience	Emphasizes personal and communal spiritual practices.	Focuses on rituals and services as products.	Centers around the completion of tasks and adherence to duties.
Spiritual Impact	Promotes deep, meaningful faith experiences and community.	Risks creating superficial engagement and spiritual burnout.	Can lead to a focus on mere compliance rather than spiritual growth.
Role of the Holy Spirit	Guides and enables personal spiritual experiences.	Often overlooked or reduced to a formal aspect of services.	May be seen as a guiding force but often not central to task completion.
Community	Encourages shared wisdom and support.	May reduce believers to passive consumers.	Often involves communal participation in tasks and responsibilities.
Practical Application	Involves prayer, meditation, worship, service, and compassion.	Often focuses on acquiring or using religious products.	Involves participation in religious services, rituals, and adherence to duties.

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