

Part I: Introduction to Systematic Theology

I. Definition of Systematic Theology:

- A. Any study that answers the question, “What does the whole Bible say to us today?” about any given topic (--John Frame, RTS)
 - 1. Emphases
 - a. whole Bible
 - b. to us
 - c. today
 - 2. Meaning of “systematic”
 - 3. Meaning of “doctrine”
 - 4. Every Christian does “Systematic theology”
- B. Relation to other disciplines
 - 1. Exegesis
 - 2. Biblical theology (emphasis on historical development, individual authors)
 - a. Old Testament
 - b. New Testament
 - 3. Historical theology
 - 4. Philosophical theology
 - 5. Apologetics
 - 6. Ethics

II. Initial Assumptions of Course

- A. The Bible is true
- B. God exists and is who the Bible says he is

III. Why should we study systematic theology?

- A. Many inadequate answers
- B. The basic reason: To obey the Great Commission
 - 1. Matt. 28:18-20(= to learn and teach “all that Jesus commanded”)
 - 2. “All that Jesus commanded”
 - 3. But teaching requires summarizing and synthesizing Scripture (systematic theology gives answers to our questions!)
- C. Other benefits
 - 1. Helps us overcome sinful ideas
 - 2. Better decisions later (e.g. jigsaw puzzle)
 - 3. Helps us grow as Christians (Col. 1:9-10; 1 Tim. 4:6, 6:3)
- D. Objections to systematic theology
 - 1. “Conclusions too neat to be true”; “must be distorting Scripture”
 - Answer:
 - a. Where misinterpreting Scripture?
 - b. Truth should fit together, be consistent
 - 2. “The choice of topics dictates the conclusion”
 - Answer:
 - a. It is right to ask questions of Scripture which were not the main concern of biblical authors
 - b. Alternative: “unsystematic theology”; “disorderly and random theology”
 - c. Any order of topics—same answers

IV. How should Christians study systematic theology? (= how should we study Scripture?)

- A. With prayer (Ps. 119:18; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 1:17-19; Note on meditation on Scripture: Ps. 1:2)
- B. With humility (1 Pet. 5:5; Jas. 1:19-20, 3:13, 17-18; 1 Cor. 8:1)
- C. With reason
 - 1. “We are free to use our reasoning abilities to draw deductions from any passage of Scripture as long as those deductions do not contradict the clear teaching of some other passage of Scripture” (Isa. 55:8-9; Ps. 139:6; Rom. 11:33-34)
 - 2. Paradox is acceptable in systematic theology (“a seemingly contradictory statement that may nevertheless be true”); (inevitable with finite understanding)
 - 3. Contradiction is not acceptable (Ps. 119:160)
- D. With help from others (1 Cor. 12:28)
- E. With rejoicing and praise (Deut. 6:5-6; Ps. 139:17; Rom. 11:33-36)
- V. Causes of theological error
 - A. Not: obscurity of Scripture
 - B. But: usually personal sins
 - 1. Pride (1 Tim. 6:4; 2 Pet. 2:18)
 - 2. Greed (1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Pet. 2:3, 14-15)
 - 3. Cowardice (in face of cultural trends/pressures) (Gal. 2:12, 5:11; Luke 6:22-23)
 - 4. Laziness, negligence in studying Scripture (then following personal leaders instead) (Ps. 1:2; Gal. 2:13; 2 Pet. 2:2)
 - 5. Other personal sins (2 Pet. 2:13-14, 18-19; 1 Tim. 1:9-10, 19-20)
- VI. More important / less important doctrines
 - A. Does it affect other doctrines?
 - B. Does it affect people’s faith, Christian life?
 - C. P.S. Note that people can take any minor doctrine and make it “major” (split churches)
- VII. Relationship between doctrine and life
 - A. Sound doctrine is a necessary part of Christian maturity (Eph. 4:12-14; Titus 1:9, 2:1-6, 10; Col. 1:9-10, 29; 1 Tim. 6:3)
 - B. False doctrine harms the church, turns people away from the faith (Titus 1:11, Rom. 1:18, 21, 25; 1 Tim. 1:5-6, 10, 4:1, 6:20-21; Acts 20:27)
 - 1. Note the harm from unbelieving “Christian” churches
- VIII. Our challenge
 - A. Titus 1:9
 - B. Col. 1:28-29
 - C. Jude 3
- IX. What are the distinctive emphases of my approach to systematic theology?
 - A. A Clear Biblical Basis for Doctrines
 - B. Clarity in the Explanation of Doctrines
 - C. Application to Life
 - D. Focus on the Evangelical World
 - E. Hope for Progress in Doctrinal Unity in the Church
 - F. A Sense of the Urgent Need for Greater Doctrinal Understanding in the Whole Church