

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## Outline #2:

### Introduction to Systematic Theology - Why should Christians study Theology?

#### 1. The basic reason:

Jesus commanded His disciples and now commands us also to teach believers to observe all that He commanded

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. Matthew 28:19-20

The task of fulfilling the Great Commission includes therefore not only evangelism, but also TEACHING. The task of teaching all that Jesus commanded us is, in a broad sense, the task of teaching what the whole Bible says to us today.

The basic reason for studying systematic theology, then, is that it enables us to teach ourselves and others what the whole Bible says, thus fulfilling the second part of the Great Commission.

#### 2. The benefits to our lives:

A. *Studying theology helps us overcome our wrong ideas.* We all have areas where our understanding of The Bible's teaching is inadequate. In these areas, it is helpful for us to be confronted with the *total weight of the teaching of Scripture* on that subject, so that we will more readily be persuaded even against our initial wrongful inclinations.

B. *Studying systematic theology helps us to be able to make better decisions later.* We cannot know what new doctrinal controversies will arise in the churches in which we live and minister ten, twenty or thirty years from now, if the Lord does not return before then. The appropriate understanding of the biblical teaching on the gifts of the Holy Spirit is an example of a doctrinal question that has arisen in our century with much more forcefulness than ever before in the history of the church.

C. *Studying systematic theology will help us grow as Christians.* The more we know about God, about His Word, about His relationships to the world and mankind, the better we will trust Him, the more fully we will praise Him and the more readily we will obey Him. Studying Systematic Theology rightly will make us more mature Christians. Paul speaks of this in 1 Timothy 6:3 and Titus 1:1 as well as the contrasting result in 1 Timothy 1:10

## **Definitions:**

**Major Doctrine** - A Major Doctrine is one that has a significant impact on our thinking about other doctrines, or that has a significant impact on how we live the Christian life. I.e. The authority of the Bible, The Deity of Christ, Justification by Faith, etc.

**Minor Doctrine** - A minor doctrine is one that has very little impact on how we think about other doctrines and very little impact on how we live the Christian life. I.e. Forms of church government, some details about the observance of the Lord's Supper, etc.

## **How Should Christians Study Systematic Theology?**

### **1. We should study Systematic Theology with Prayer.**

Just as the Psalmist prays in Psalm 119:18, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law," so we should pray and seek God's help in understanding His Word. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that the "unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." Studying theology is therefore a spiritual activity in which we need the help of the Holy Spirit. Since it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the ability rightly to understand Scripture, we need to realize that the proper thing to do, particularly when we are unable to understand some passage or some doctrine of Scripture, is to pray for God's help. Often what we need is not more data, but more insight into the data we already have available. This insight is given only by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:14 as stated above and Ephesians 1:17-19)

### **2. We should study Systematic Theology with Humility.**

Peter tells us, "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). How ugly it would be if anyone were to use this knowledge of God's Word simply to win arguments or to put down a fellow Christian in conversation, or to make another believer feel insignificant in the Lord's work. James' counsel is good for us at this point: "Let every man be quick to hear. Slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God." (James 1:19-20). He tells us that one's understanding of Scripture is to be imparted in humility and love:

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom... But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. And the harvest of

righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. James 3:13, 17-18

Systematic theology rightly studied will not lead to the knowledge that “puffs up” (1 Cor 8:1) but to humility and love for others.

### **3. We should study Systematic Theology with Reason.**

We find in the New Testament that Jesus and the New Testament authors will often quote a verse of Scripture and then draw logical conclusions from it. They *reason* from Scripture. It is therefore not wrong to use human understanding, human logic and human reason to draw conclusions from the statements of Scripture. Nevertheless, when we reason and draw what we think to be correct logical deductions from Scripture, we sometimes make mistakes. The deductions we draw from the statements of Scripture are not equal to the statements of Scripture themselves in certainty or authority, for our ability to reason and draw conclusions is not the ultimate standard of truth--only Scripture is.

We are free to use our reasoning abilities to draw deductions from any passage of Scripture so long as these deductions do not contradict the clear teaching of some other passage of Scripture.

### **4. We should study Systematic Theology with help from others.**

God has “appointed” teachers, 1 Cor 12:28. We should allow those with the gift of teaching to help us understand Scripture.

### **5. We should study Systematic Theology by collecting and understanding all the relevant passages of Scripture on any topic.**

This point was mentioned in our definition of Systematic Theology, but the actual process needs to be described here. How does one go about making a doctrinal summary of what all the passages of Scripture teach on a certain topic?

The process would look like this:

*A. Find all the relevant verses.* The best help in this step is a good concordance, which enables one to look up key words and find the verses in which the subject is treated.

*B. Read, make notes on and try to summarize the points made in the relevant verses.* Sometimes a theme will be repeated often and the summary of the verses will be relatively easy. At other times, there will be verses difficult to understand, and the student will need to take some time to study a verse in depth until a satisfactory understanding is reached.

*C. Finally, the teachings of the various verses should be summarized into one or more points that the Bible affirms about that subject.* The summary does not have to take the exact form of anyone else’s conclusions on the subject, because we each may see

things in Scripture that others have missed, or we may organize the subject differently or emphasize different things.

## **6. We should study Systematic theology with Rejoicing and Praise!**

The study of theology is not merely a theoretical exercise of the intellect. It is a study of the Living God, and of the wonders of all His works in creation and redemption. WE CANNOT STUDY THIS SUBJECT DISPASSIONATELY!

Deuteronomy 6:5

Psalm 139:17

Psalm 19:8

Psalm 119:14

Psalm 119:103

Psalm 119:111

Psalm 119:162

Often in the study of theology the response of the Christian should be similar to that of Paul in reflecting on the long theological argument that he has just completed at the end of Romans 11:32. He breaks forth in joyful praise at the richness of the doctrine which God has enabled him to express:

O, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be prepaid?”

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory for ever. Amen Romans 11:33-36

***End of Introduction; TIME TO DIVE IN!!!!***

## **The Doctrine of The Word of God**

### **What are the different forms of the Word of God?**

What is meant by the phrase “the Word of God”? Actually, there are several different meanings taken by this phrase in the Bible. It is helpful to distinguish these different senses clearly at the beginning of this Study.

### **The Word of God as a person: Jesus Christ**

Sometimes the Bible refers to the Son of God as the “Word of God”. In Revelation 19:13, John sees the risen Lord Jesus in heaven and says, “The name by which he is called is The Word of God”. Similarly, in the beginning of John’s gospel we read, “In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God” John 1:1. It is clear that John is speaking of the Son of God here, because in verse 14 he says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.” John

may also be referring to Jesus as the Word of Life in 1 John 1:1.

## **The Word of God as Speech by God**

### **God's Decrees**

Sometimes God's words take the form of powerful decrees that cause events to happen or even cause things to come into being. "And God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light"(Gen 1:3). These powerful, creative words from God are often called God's decrees. A decree of God is a word of God that causes something to happen. These decrees of God include not only the events of the original creation but also the continuing existence of all things, for Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Christ is continually "upholding the universe by His word of power."

### **God's words of personal address**

God sometimes communicates with people on earth by speaking directly to them. These can be called instances of God's Word of personal address. Examples are found throughout the Old and New Testament. God speaks to Adam, Gen 2:16-17, Gen 3:16-19 God speaks to Moses Ex 20:1-3 God speaks to all present at Jesus' baptism Matt 3:17

In these and several other instances where God spoke words of personal address to individual people it was clear to the hearers that these were the actual words of God: they were hearing God's very voice, and they were therefore hearing words that had absolute divine authority and that were absolutely trustworthy.

Some theologians have argued that since human language is always in some sense "imperfect", any message that God addresses to us in human language must also be limited in its authority or truthfulness. But these passages and many others that record instances of God's words of personal address to individuals give no indication of any limitation of the authority or truthfulness of God's words when they are spoken in human language. Quite the contrary is true, for the words always place an absolute obligation upon the hearers to believe them and to obey them fully.

### **God's Words as speech through Human Lips**

Frequently in Scripture God raises up prophets through whom he speaks. Once again, it is evident that although these are human words, spoken in ordinary human language by ordinary human beings, the authority and truthfulness of these words is in no way diminished: they are still completely God's words as well.

Deuteronomy 18:18-20

Jeremiah 1:9

Jeremiah 1:7

Exodus 4:12

Numbers 22:38  
1 Samuel 15:3, 18, 23  
1 Kings 20:36  
2 Chronicles 20:20, 25:15-16  
Isaiah 30:12-14  
Jeremiah 6:10-12, 36:29-31

Anyone who claimed to be speaking for the Lord but who had not received a message from him was severely punished. (Ezekial 13:1-7, Deuteronomy 18:20-22).

### **God's Words in written form: The Bible**

In addition to God's words of decree, God's words of personal address and God's words spoken through the lips of human beings, we also find in Scripture several instances where God's words were put in written form. The first of these is found in the narrative of the giving of the two tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments: "And he gave to Moses, when he had made an end of speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God" Exodus 31:18 Exodus 32:16, 34:1, 28

Further writing is done by humans as indicated in the following verses:

Deuteronomy 31:9-13  
Deuteronomy 31:24-26  
Joshua 24:26  
Isaiah 30:8  
Jeremiah 30:2  
Jeremiah 36:2-4, 27-31, 51:60

Jesus promises his disciples that the holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance the words which he, Jesus, had spoken (John 14:26, 16:12-13)

Paul can say that the very words he writes to the Corinthians are a "command of the Lord" (1 Cor 14:37, 2 Peter 3:2).

Of all the forms of the Word of God, the focus of our study in systematic theology is God's Word in written form, that is, the Bible. It is God's written word that he commands us to study. The man is "blessed" who "meditates" on God's law "day and night" Psalm 1:1-2, Joshua 1:8 It is the Word of God in the form of written Scripture that is "God-breathed" and "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" 2 Timothy 3:16

### **The Canon of Scripture**

#### **What belongs in the Bible and what does not belong?**

The Canon of Scripture is the list of all the books that belong in the Bible.

### **The Old Testament Canon**

The collection of absolutely authoritative words from God grew in size throughout the time of Israel's history. In the New Testament we have no record of any dispute between Jesus and the Jews over the extent of the Canon. Apparently there was full agreement between Jesus and His disciples and the Jewish Leaders or Jewish people that additions to the Old Testament Canon had ceased after the time of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. According to one count, Jesus and the New Testament authors quote various parts of the Old Testament Scripture as divinely authoritative over 295 times<sup>1</sup>

The Apocrypha:

No discussion of the Canon of Scripture can be complete without a discussion of The Apocrypha. Briefly, The writings of the Apocrypha should not be regarded as part of Scripture because:

1. They do not claim for themselves the same kind of authority as the Old Testament writings.

2. They were not regarded as God's words by the Jewish people from whom they originated.

3. They were not considered to be Scripture by Jesus or the New Testament authors.

4. They contain teachings inconsistent with the rest of the Bible.

They have value for historical and linguistic research, but they have never been part of the Old Testament Canon and they should not be thought of as part of the Bible.

### **The New Testament Canon**

The New Testament consists primarily of the writings of the apostles. A few new Testament books (Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews and Jude) were not written by apostles, but by others closely associated with them and apparently authorized by them. We will discuss this further shortly.

Jesus promised this empowering of His disciples (who were called apostles after the resurrection) in John 14:26: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." Similarly, Jesus promised further revelation of truth from the Holy Spirit when he told his disciples, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" John 16:13-14. In these verses the disciples are promised amazing gifts to enable them to write scripture: the Holy Spirit would teach them "all things," would cause them to remember "all" that Jesus had said, and would guide them into "all the truth."

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<sup>1</sup> See Roger Nicole, "New Testament Use of the Old Testament," in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F.H. Henry (London: Tyndale Press, 1959), pp. 137-41

Furthermore, those who have the office of apostle in the early church are seen to claim an authority equal to that of the Old Testament prophets, an authority to speak and write words that are God's very words. Peter encourages his readers to remember "the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles"(2 Peter 3:2). To lie to the apostles(Acts 5:2) is equivalent to lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3) and lying to God (Acts 5:4).

This claim to be able to speak words that were the words of God Himself is especially frequent in the writings of the apostle Paul. He claims not only that the Holy Spirit has revealed to him "what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived" (1 Cor 2:9), but also that when he declares this revelation, he speaks it "in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit, interpreting Spiritual things in Spiritual words" (1 Cor 2:13, translation of Wayne Grudem <sup>2</sup> Paul also claims that his directives to the church at Corinth are not merely his own, but a command of the Lord. Later, in defending his apostolic office, Paul says that he will give the Corinthians "proof that Christ is speaking in me" (2 Cor 13:3). Other similar verses could be mentioned (Romans 2:16; Galatians 1:8-9; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 4:8, 15; 5:27; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14)

In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter shows not only an awareness of the existence of written epistles from Paul, but also a clear willingness to classify "all of his(Paul's) epistles" with "the other scriptures": Peter says, "So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures." 2 Peter 3:15-16. The word scripture here is the word *graphe*, a word that occurs fifty-one times in the New Testament and that refers to the Old Testament Scripture in every one of those occurrences.

In 1 Timothy 5:17-18, Paul says, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages.'" The first quotation from "Scripture" is found in Deuteronomy 25:4, but the second quotation is found nowhere in the Old Testament. It does occur in Luke 10:7(with exactly the same words in the Greek text). So here we have Paul apparently quoting a portion of Luke's gospel and calling it "Scripture" that is, something that is to be considered part

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<sup>2</sup> This is Wayne Grudem's own translation of the last phrase of 1 Cor 2:13): see Wayne Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge(Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1983), p. 365, n. 61. But this translation is not crucial to the main point: namely, that Paul speaks words taught by the Holy Spirit, a point that is affirmed in the first part of the verse, no matter how the second half is translated.

of the canon.<sup>3</sup>

Because the apostles, by virtue of their apostolic office, had authority to write words of Scripture, the authentic written teachings of the apostles were accepted for the traditional views of authorship of the New Testament writings<sup>4</sup> then we have most of the New Testament in the canon because of direct authorship by the apostles. This would include Matthew, John, Roman to Philemon(all of the Pauline epistles); James<sup>5</sup>, 1 and 2 Peter, 1,2 and 3 John and Revelation.

This leaves 5 books, Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews and Jude, which were not written by apostles. The details of the historical process by which these books came to be counted as part of the Scripture by the early church are scarce, but Mark, Luke and Acts were commonly acknowledged very early, probably because of the close association of Mark with the apostle Peter, and of Luke(the author of Luke and Acts) with the apostle Paul. Similarly, Jude apparently was accepted by virtue of the author's connection with James (see Jude 1) and the fact that he was the brother of Jesus<sup>6</sup>.

The acceptance of Hebrews as canonical was urged by many in the church on the basis of an assumed Pauline authorship. But from very early times there were others who rejected Pauline authorship in favor of one or another of several different suggestions. The intrinsic qualities of the book itself must have finally convinced early readers, as they continue to convince believers today, that whoever its human author may have been, its ultimate author can only have been God himself. The majestic glory of Christ shines forth from the pages of the epistle to the Hebrews so brightly that no believer who reads it seriously should ever want to question its place in the canon.

### **In conclusion,**

we can rest our confidence in the faithfulness of God our Father who would not lead all his people for two thousand years to trust as his word something that is not. And we find our confidence repeatedly confirmed both by historical investigation and by the work of the Holy Spirit in enabling us to hear God's voice in a unique way as we read from every one of the sixty-six books in our present canon of Scripture. God's faithfulness to his people convinces us that there is nothing missing from Scripture that God thinks we need to know for obeying and trusting him

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<sup>3</sup> Luke himself was not an apostle, but his gospel is here accorded authority equal with that of the apostolic writings. Apparently this was due to his very close association with the apostles, especially Paul and the endorsement of his gospel by an apostle.

<sup>4</sup> For a defense of traditional views of authorship of the new Testament writings, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> James seems to be considered an apostle in 1 Cor 15:7 and Gal 1:19. He also fulfills functions appropriate to an apostle in Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 2:9, 12.

<sup>6</sup> The acceptance of Jude in the canon was slow, primarily because of doubts concerning his quotation of the no canonical book of 1 Enoch.

fully. The canon of Scripture today is exactly what God wanted it to be, and it will stay that way until Christ returns.