

Introduction to Systematic Theology

I. The Word Theology- is a compound of two Greek words, (theos-God) and (logos-speech or expression).

- Theology is therefore a rational discourse on or about the subject of God.
- Theology simply means thinking about God and expressing those thoughts.

II. The Varieties of Theology

1. Biblical Theology - is a study of the biblical basis for theology.

- It is the larger category that contains both Old Testament and New Testament theology.
- It give special attention to the teachings of individual authors, sections, and books of the Bible in their historical development.

2. Historical Theology - is a discussion of the theology of the great theologians of the Christian church. It traces the historical development of doctrine through the history of the church.

3. Systematic Theology

A. Its Definition

“Systematic Theology is an attempt to construct a comprehensive and consistent whole out of all revelation from God, whether special(Biblical) or general(natural).” - Norman Geisler

“Systematic Theology correlates the data of Biblical revelation as a whole in order to exhibit systematically the total picture of God’s self-revelation.” -Charles C. Ryrie

Systematic theology may include historical backgrounds, apologetics and defense, and exegetical work, but it focuses on the total structure of biblical doctrine.

To summarize: Theology is the discovery, systematizing, and presentation of the truths about God. Historical theology accomplishes this by focusing on what others through out history have said about these truths. Biblical theology does this by surveying the progressive revelation of God’s truth. Systematic theology presents the total structure.

B. Its Divisions

“Systematic theology is generally divided into the following categories: (1)Prolegomena (Introduction); (2) Bibliology (“Bible”); (3) Theology Proper, the study of God; (4) Anthropology (“human beings”); (5) Harmartiology (“sin”); (6) Soteriology (“salvation”); (7) Ecclesiology (“[the] church”); (8) Eschatology (“the last things”). In addition, the study of the Holy Spirit (a subdivision of Theology Proper) is titled Pneumatology (“spirit”), and discourses about Christ are called Christology. Theological discussions about demons are designated Demonology, those about Satan are titled Satanology, and the study of angels is labeled Angelology.” - Norman Geisler

III. The Preconditions or Presupposition of Systematic Theology

1. Our Study of Systematic Theology will be “Evangelical”

“Evangelical theology is defined here as a discourse about God that maintains that there are certain essential Christian beliefs. These include, but are not necessarily limited to, the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible alone, the tri-unity of God, the virgin birth of Christ, the deity of Christ, the all-sufficiency of Christ’s atoning sacrifice for sin, the physical and miraculous resurrection of Christ, the necessity of salvation by faith alone through God’s grace alone based on the work of Christ alone, the physical bodily return of Christ to earth, the eternal conscious bliss of the saved, and the eternal conscious punishment of the unsaved.” -N. Geisler

2. Evangelicalism Presupposes that there is a Theistic God- (it’s called the metaphysical (meta-”beyond; physics, “the physical”) precondition)

“Theism is the worldview that the physical universe is not all there is. There is an infinite, personal God beyond the universe who created it, sustains it, and can act within it in a supernatural way. He is both transcendent and imminent. This is the view held by tradition Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.”

- A.) as opposed to “atheism” - there is no God at all.
- B.) as opposed to “pantheism” - God is all.
- C.) as opposed to “deism” - God is beyond the universe, but not in it.
- D.) as opposed to “polytheism” - there are many gods beyond the world and in it.

3. Interpretive Presuppositions

If our main source is the Bible, then we must be concerned how we approach and use it. Accurate theology rests on sound exegesis (the authority of scripture).

A. The Necessity of Normal, Plain Interpretation

B. The Priority of the New Testament”

“While all Scripture is inspired and profitable, the New Testament has greater priority as the source of doctrine. Old Testament revelation was preparatory and partial, while New Testament revelation is climactic and complete. The doctrine of the Trinity, for instance, while allowed for in the Old Testament is not revealed until the New Testament. Or, think how much difference exists between what is taught in the Old and New Testaments concerning atonement, justification, and resurrection. To say this is not to minimize what is taught in the Old Testament nor to imply that it is any less inspired, but it is to say that in the progressive unfolding of God’s revelation the Old Testament occupies a prior place chronologically and thus a preparatory and incomplete place theologically. Old Testament theology has its place, but it is incomplete without the contribution of the New Testament truth.” -C. C. Ryrie

C. Objectivity

“Theology must be based on inductive research and conclusions, not deductive reasoning. The theologian must approach the Scripture with a tabula rasa, an open mind, allowing the Scripture to speak for itself without forming prejudicial opinions about what the Scripture should say.” -Paul Enns

4. Personal Presuppositions

A. We Must Believe-1 Cor. 2:10-16

B. We Must Think

Ultimately we must try to think theologically. This involves thinking exegetically (to understand the precise meaning), thinking systematically (in order to correlate facts thoroughly), thinking critically (to evaluate the priority of the related evidence), and thinking synthetically (to combine and present the teaching as a whole).

“Theology and exegesis should always interact. Exegesis does not provide all the answers so that when there can legitimately be more than one exegetical option, theology will decide which to prefer. Some passages, for example, could seem to teach eternal security or not; one’s theological system will make the decision. On the other hand, no theological system should be so hardened that it is not open to change or refinement from the insights of exegesis.” -Charles C. Ryrie

C. We Must Depend

- It’s called “Illumination”
- We must depend on the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. John 16:12-15 KJV
- Prayer and humility.

D. We Must Seek Help from Others

E. We Should Study Systematic Theology with Worship and Praise!

IV. Why Study Systematic Theology?

1. To Understand Christianity

“As a result of systematic theology, Christians are able to have a clear understanding about the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith. The Bible was not written in a doctrinal outline; hence, it is important to systematize the parts of the Bible to understand the doctrinal emphasis of the entire Bible.”
-Paul Enns

See:

A. 2 Tim. 4:1-5

B. 2 Tim. 2:2

C. Jude 3, 4

2. As an Apologetic for Christianity

“Systematic theology enables Christians to defend their beliefs rationally against opponents and antagonists to the faith. Early in the Christian church believers used their systematized beliefs to address opponents and unbelievers. This is perhaps even more important today with the emergence of humanism, Communism, cults, and Eastern religions. The systemized doctrines of the Christian faith must be researched, delineated, and presented as a defense of historic Christianity.” -Paul Enns

3. As a Means of Maturity for Christians

2 Tim. 3:16-17

Notes: