

Week 1: Introduction to Systematic Theology

Definition: *Systematic theology is any study that answers the question, “What does the whole Bible teach us today?” about any given topic.* (Grudem, 21)

Doctrine – *the result of the process of doing systematic theology with regard to one particular topic.* (Grudem, 25)

Biblical Theology – *gives special attention to the teachings of individual authors and sections of Scripture, and to the place of each teaching in the historical development of Scripture.* (Grudem, 22)

Historical Theology – *a historical study of how Christians in different periods have understood various theological topics.* (Grudem, 21)

*****Good systematic theology demands that the whole = the sum of the parts. If it does not, then it is wrong, and the system must change to fit all the parts.*****

But, be aware of “Spread Sheet Theology” (Anderson, *Free Grace Soteriology*, 295-324). A system of theology fits nicely and neatly together. If we change one part of the system, it may well affect the rest of the system. Consider the implications of your doctrinal positions.

“Because of the large number of topics covered in a study of systematic theology and because of the great detail with which these topics are analyzed, it is inevitable that someone studying a systematic theology text or taking a course in systematic theology for the first time will have many of his or her own personal beliefs challenged or modified, refined or enriched. It is of the utmost importance therefore that each person beginning such a course firmly resolve in his or her own mind to abandon as false any idea which is found to be clearly contradicted by the teaching of Scripture. But it is also very important for each person to resolve not to believe any individual doctrine simply because this textbook or some other textbook or teacher says that it is true, unless this book or the instructor in a course can convince the student from the text of Scripture itself. It is Scripture alone, not “conservative evangelical tradition” or any other human authority, that must function as the normative authority for the definition of what we should believe.”
Grudem, 25

Why do we study systematic theology?

1. Overcome our wrong ideas
2. Make better decisions on new questions of doctrine that may arise
3. Help us grow as Christians

How should we study systematic theology?

1. Prayer
2. Humility
3. Reason
4. With help from others
5. Collecting relevant passages
6. Rejoicing & praise

Questions? (Grudem, 38)

- 1.) Why do you want to study systematic theology?
- 2.) What is the proper way to begin a systematic theology study?
- 3.) What tools should we have available to do such a study?
- 4.) What is likely to happen to a church (or believer) that gives up studying (or does not study) systematic theology?
- 5.) Are there any doctrines in the syllabus for which a fuller understanding would help solve a personal difficulty in your life at the present?
- 6.) How will you handle challenges to your current beliefs during this study?
- 7.) Are you prepared to change your mind on a certain doctrine if you come to understand your prior position contradicted Scripture as a whole?