

Discipleship Night Lecture #1 – Introduction to Systematic Theology

What is Systematic Theology?

Some Definitions To Get Us Started

Theology:

Doctrine: Most simply, doctrine means _____.

Systematic Theology: Any study that answers the question, 'What does the whole Bible teach us today?' about any given topic."

Other types of theological study....

Historical theology - study of the development of theology throughout history.

Philosophical theology - study of theology using philosophic reasoning and not necessarily the Bible.

Apologetics - defending the truth of Christianity to persuade unbelievers.

Ethics - concerns questions of how we should live.

Old Testament theology - theology limited to the O T.

New Testament theology - theology limited to the N T.

Biblical theology - the study of the doctrines of the Bible, arranged according to their chronology and historical background. In contrast to systematic, which categorizes doctrine according to specific topics, biblical theology shows the unfolding of God's revelation as it progressed through history.

Theology studies two primary aspects of God

** In studying theology we are seeking to know **two aspects** of the living God.*

1. God's B_____.

2. God's A_____.

Three Aspects to the "Theology" that we will be studying:

Aspect #1: We are talking about C_____, rather than non-Christian theology.

Aspect #2: Our focus will be P_____, rather than Roman Catholic theology.

Six Key Protestant Beliefs that came out of the reformation:

#1. Solus Christus – _____ Alone (Answers the question, "Who saves us?") – Acts 4:12

#2. Sola Fide – _____ Alone (Answers the question, "How are we saved?") – Eph. 2:8

#3. Sola Gratia – _____ Alone (Answers the question, "What saves us?") – Eph. 2:8-9

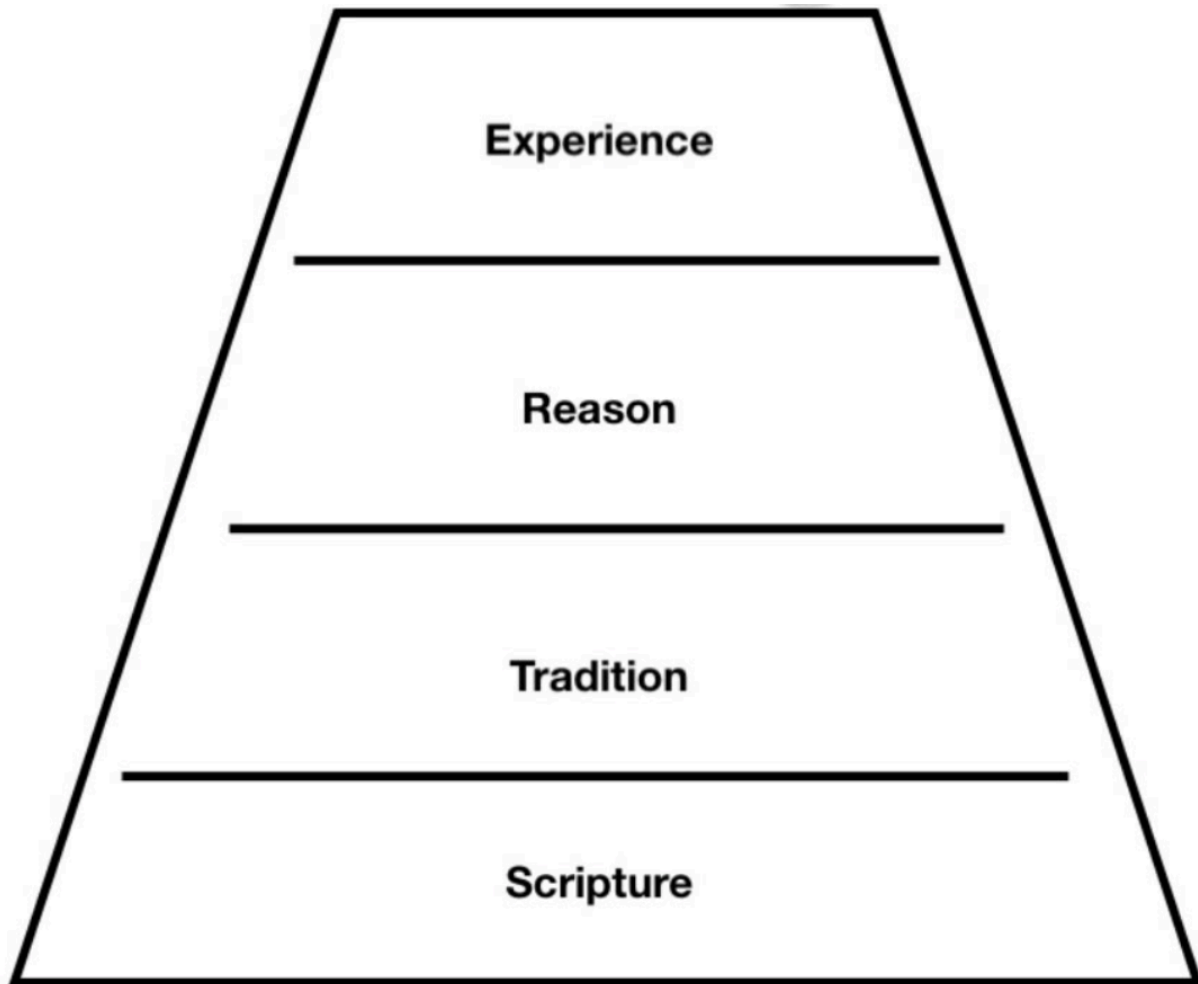
#4. Sola Scriptura – _____ Alone (Answers the question, “What is our authority?”) – 2 Tim. 3:16-17

#5. Soli Deo Gloria – _____ Alone (Answers the question, “Who is our salvation ultimately for?”)

#6. Priesthood of all believers (Answers the question, “What is the church?”) - 1 Pet. 2:9

At the root of it, Protestants and Catholics disagree over the issue of authority. What is our authority as Christians?

John Wesley's Quadrilateral



Aspect #3: Within Protestantism, we will express E_____ theology.

Four Primary Characteristics of Historic Evangelical Protestantism:

1. **C**_____: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience and a life-long process of following Jesus.
2. **F**_____ **AND A**_____: the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts.
3. **Trustworthiness and A**_____ **of the Bible:** a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority.
4. **The c**_____ **of the Cross and Resurrection:** a stress on both the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, as well as his resurrection, making possible the redemption of humanity.

A quick note on primary and secondary doctrines...

People sometimes ask what the difference is between a “major” and a “minor” doctrine or a “primary” and “secondary” doctrine. As biblical Christians, it’s important for us to seek agreement on major doctrines but also allow for differences on minor doctrines.

Scholar Michael Horton uses the following guideline: *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. 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.*

According to Horton, “By this standard, doctrines such as the authority of the Bible, the Trinity, the deity of Christ, justification by faith, and many others would rightly be considered major doctrines. People who disagree with the historic evangelical understanding of any of these doctrines will have wide areas of difference with Christians who affirm these doctrines.

By contrast, it seems to me that differences over forms of church government, or some details about the Lord's Supper, or the timing of the great tribulation, concern minor doctrines. Christians who differ over these things can agree on perhaps every other area of doctrine and can live Christian lives that differ in no important way and can have genuine fellowship with one another.

Mystery, Paradox, Contradictions, and Tension

God is m_____.

- See Deut. 29:29

Two Ditches to Avoid:

1)

2)

Contradiction - A contradiction is a statement that says something can be what it is and not be what it is at the same time.

Paradox (Antinomy) - A seemingly self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true.

Verse to keep at the forefront of our minds when studying theology: "For my ways are above your ways and my thoughts are above your thoughts, says the Lord" – Isaiah 55:8

You Are A Theologian!

Robert Fugate: *"Where Biblically sound systematic theology is absent, a vacuum does not remain; unbiblical theology replaces it. Systematic theology cannot be avoided. It is never a question of theology or no theology; it is always a question of what theology—Biblical theology or unbiblical theology. Theology is an inescapable concept! Everyone has a theology (whether good or bad, consistent or inconsistent). Everyone is a theologian."*

A good theologian understands that our study of theology must be concerned with TWO main themes:

#1. T_____ and #2. L_____.

Why should we study Systematic Theology?

#1. Systematic Theology is the most important _____ in the universe.

#2. Systematic Theology is important because Jesus commanded us to love God with our _____. (Matt. 22:37, Mark 12:28-30).

Mark Dever - *Individually we must study theology so that we may be sanctified and grow in knowledge and faith. We don't just want to know about God, as though he can only be known at a distance. No, we actually want to know God personally and to have a relationship with Him. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). When we learn to despair of ourselves and humbly seek to know the God of the Bible, it's then that the study of God begins to be impressed upon our hearts and minds, and it becomes real to us, as we find life and all blessings in Him alone.*

D. Martin Lloyd Jones: *What we have in the Bible is Truth; it is not an emotional stimulus, it is not something primarily concerned to give us a joyful experience. It is primarily Truth, and Truth is addressed to the mind, God's supreme gift to man; and it is as we apprehend and submit ourselves to the truth that the feelings follow. I must never ask myself in the first instance: What do I feel about this? The first question is, Do I believe it? Do I accept it...? "*

Mark Dever - *We must seek to understand God's truth revealed to us in Scripture if we're to ever understand God and ourselves, as we should. It's intellectual suicide to believe that absolute truth exists but not search for it in the Scriptures that claim this truth. To do otherwise is nothing more than spiritual folly.*

#3. Systematic Theology enables us to obey and _____ the Great Commission.

- Matt. 28:18-20

Rick Cornish: *"Yes, we glorify God by Godly living, but Godly living proceeds from Godly thinking, including the study of theology. Lazy and irrational thinking does not glorify God. A real lover of God and disciple of Jesus develops and uses the mind."*

#4. Systematic Theology empowers us to _____ God in greater ways.

Westminster Confession of Faith: *"The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."*

#5. Systematic Theology helps us to form the _____ we need to endure pain and suffering with hope and joy.

James 1:2-4 - *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Job 1:21 - *And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."*

#6. Systematic Theology _____ Christians.

- Eph 4:1-6, 11-16

#7. Systematic Theology _____ the Church and Christians from believing false doctrine and slipping into error-filled thinking.

- God's Word separates truth from error, teaching "sound doctrine" (1Tim 1:10; 4:6; 6:3-4a; 2 Tim 1:13-14; 4:3; Tit 1:9; 2:1, 10), while warning against false doctrine (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6-9; 1Tim 1:3; 4:1; 6:3).

Causes of theological error

1. Obscuring and misusing _____.
2. Usually personal _____.
 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 (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)

#8. Systematic Theology _____ us in sharing our faith with non-Christians.

#9. Systematic Theology spurs us on in our sanctification and _____ as Christians.

#10. Systematic Theology brings _____ as we study and worship Him.

- Ultimately, we study theology to glorify God. God is glorified when we seek to know Him (Philippians 1:9-11). The objective of studying theology is to come to know God better and to increasingly learn how to please Him. 1 John 2:3 says that **"we know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands."**

How should we study Systematic Theology?

#1. With p_____. (Our prayer: Ps. 119:18; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 1:17-19;

- Note on meditation on Scripture: Ps. 1:1-2)

#2. With h_____. (1 Pet. 5:5; Jas. 1:19-20, 3:13, 17-18; 1 Cor. 8:1)

Alan Scholes argues there are different levels with which we should hold to certain theological beliefs:

#1. C_____.

#2. P_____.

#3. O_____.

Scholes: "I often shudder when I hear Christian brothers or sisters speak of their own pet theories as if they had a certain word from the Lord. The reason it frightens me is that I have known several believers who seemed to hold everything they believed at the same high level of dogmatic conviction. When they told you which Bible translation you should read, it was with the same intensity and tone of voice they used when they talked about the deity of Christ."

#3. With r_____.

- Mark 12:30 – "Love God with our mind"
- God's thoughts are above our thoughts. Rom. 11:33-34, Isa. 55:8-9; Ps. 139:1-6;)

#4. With help from o_____ Christians. (1 Cor. 12:17-20; 28)

#5. With help from other Christians throughout church h_____.

#6. By collecting and u_____ all relevant passages of Scripture.

- Find all relevant verses - **use a good concordance!**

#7. With rejoicing and p_____! (Deut. 6:5-6; Ps. 139:17; Rom. 11:33-36)

J.I. Packer: "Theology is for doxology!"

Romans 11:33-36 - *"Oh, 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 repaid? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen."*

Psalm 95:6-7: *Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*

"Prayer of Worship" from *The Valley of Vision* (Puritan prayer book)

GLORIOUS GOD,
It is the flame of my life to worship thee,
the crown and glory of my soul to adore thee,
heavenly pleasure to approach thee.
Give me power by thy Spirit to help me
worship now,
that I may forget the world,
be brought into fullness of life,
be refreshed, comforted, blessed.
Give me knowledge of thy goodness
that I might not be over-awed by thy greatness;
Give me Jesus, Son of Man, Son of God,
that I might not be terrified,
but be drawn near with filial love,
with holy boldness;
He is my Mediator, Brother, Interpreter,
Branch, Daysman, Lamb;
him I glorify,
in him I am set on high.
Crowns to give I have none,
but what thou hast given I return,
content to feel that everything is mine
when it is thine,
and the more fully mine when I have yielded it
to thee.

Let me live wholly to my Saviour,
free from distractions,
from carking care,
from hindrances to the pursuit
of the narrow way.

I am pardoned through the blood of Jesus —
give me a new sense of it,
continue to pardon me by it,
may I come every day to the fountain,
and every day be washed anew,
that I may worship thee always
in spirit and truth.

Amen

Sources:

Robert Fugate, *Why Study Theology*
Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*
Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*
The Valley of Vision