

PROLEGOMENA¹

(Introduction)

I. Definition of Systematic Theology.

A. Word Origins.

1. The word “theology” combines the Greek words *theos* (God) and *logos* (rational expression or discourse) as used in this connection to yield the meaning discourse about God².
2. Accordingly, many theologians think of theology as simply, the science of God.
3. This restrictive, etymological meaning of theology is also used in the sense of Theology Proper which specifically treats the being, attributes, and works of the Godhead as distinct from anthropology (the doctrine of man), soteriology (the doctrine of salvation), ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church), and other separate divisions of biblical doctrine.

Theology may also be used in the more general sense of Systematic Theology which indicates a particular approach to theological study and includes all of the other divisions of theology.

4. The etymological meaning of Systematic Theology is organized discourse about God.

B. Developed definition of Systematic Theology.

1. Statement: Systematic Theology is the science of God and His works which derives doctrines from biblical evidence inductively³ and organizes these doctrines in a comprehensive, coherent, and defensible system.
2. Significance.
 - a. Systematic Theology concerns.
 - (1) God’s nature and character (Who He is and what He is like.)

¹ Henry W. Holoman, “Classroom Notes for Theology I,” Talbot Theological Seminary, 1982.

² Augustine, *The City of God*, viii. 1, gives the meaning of theology as “*de divinitate rationem sive sermonem*” (“rational discussion respecting the deity”).

³ Inductive reasoning is a method of reasoning in which a body of observations is considered to derive a general principle. Deductive reasoning starts with a general principle or theory and applies it to specific situations to reach a conclusion. Essentially, inductive reasoning is “bottom-up” and deductive reasoning is “top-down.”

- (2) God's works, His activity and His relations to His creation, especially His relationship with man.

Special emphasis is placed upon God's Christ centered redemptive program.

The material which theology includes is "... vaster than that of any other science," and "it is also the most necessary of all sciences."⁴

b. Systematic Theology functions as a science.

- (1) Basic procedure

- (a) Collects, observes, and interprets biblical evidence.
- (b) Formulates doctrines from this evidence.
- (c) Systematizes these doctrines.

- (2) Source of facts: The Bible is the only infallible source for Systematic Theology.

- (a) Three main sources other than the Bible have been proposed.

- i) Human reason.
- ii) Church tradition.
- iii) Religious experience.

All three of these extra-biblical sources either originate from fallible man or heavily involve his participation so that human subjectivity becomes the theological authority.

- (b) Biblical revelation:

- i) Comes to man as divine truth.
- ii) Originates external to man.
- iii) Exists in objective (observable or verifiable) form.

- (c) All information from above the extra-biblical sources must be carefully evaluated by Scripture and accordingly received if it conforms to biblical standards or rejected if it proves false.

Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil. (1Thessalonians 5:21-22)

⁴ W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology, I* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 16.

- (d) The proper use of accurate
 - i) grammatical,
 - ii) historical,
 - iii) geographical,
 - iv) and cultural

information is essential for correct interpretation of Scripture.

These fields of knowledge are not independent sources of theology, but are integral elements of Scripture itself.

- (e) Extra-biblical material may also be used to illustrate biblical doctrine. However, illustrative information should never be used as support for a doctrine.

(3) The primary method of Systematic Theology is the inductive process.

- (a) In accordance with its function as a science, Systematic Theology employs this method to derive logical, appropriate conclusions from data in Scripture. “Doctrine thus corresponds with the generalizations of science.”⁵
- (b) The inductive method first involves the collection and objective interpretation of all biblical evidence about a subject.
- (c) From the factual evidence a conclusion or doctrine is drawn that truly represents, summarizes, explains, and fits the data under consideration.
- (d) We may then define a doctrine as “a conclusive summary statement inductively drawn from all biblical data about a given subject of divine revelation.”

(4) The academic aim of Systematic Theology is the development of a doctrinal system that is coherent, comprehensive, proportionate, and defensible.

- (a) The theological system should categorize and interrelate doctrines according to a logical plan.
- (b) The theological system should include all major

⁵ W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology*, (London: Longmans, Green, 1930), p. 23.

doctrines of Scripture.

- i) Bibliology - Doctrine of the Bible.
 - ii) Theology Proper - Doctrine of God.
 - iii) Anthropology - Doctrine of Man.
 - iv) Christology - Doctrine of Christ.
 - v) Pneumatology - Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.
 - vi) Hamartiology - Doctrine of Sin.
 - vii) Soteriology - Doctrine of Salvation.
 - viii) Ecclesiology - Doctrine of the Church.
 - ix) Eschatology - Doctrine of Last Things.
 - x) Angelology - Doctrine of Angels.
 - xi) Satanology - Doctrine of Satan.
 - xii) Demonology - Doctrine of Demons.
- (c) The theological system should give balanced consideration to each doctrine appropriate to its place and emphasis in Scripture.
- (d) The theological system should be defended against false systems of thought.
- i) If a Systematic Theology is properly derived from the facts of the Bible, then it should represent with great reliability the body of truth found in Scripture.
 - ii) The doctrinal system should expose the falsity of contradictory systems of thought.

“When the work of deriving doctrines from Scripture has been done, the theologian must defend them against attacks, answering objections, and maintaining the reasonableness of revealed truth.”⁶

II. Possibility of Systematic Theology

- A. God exists (Hebrews 11:6; Genesis 1:1; John 1:1; Psalms 14:1). God is and He is the indispensable subject of Systematic Theology.

⁶ Shedd, I, 14-15.