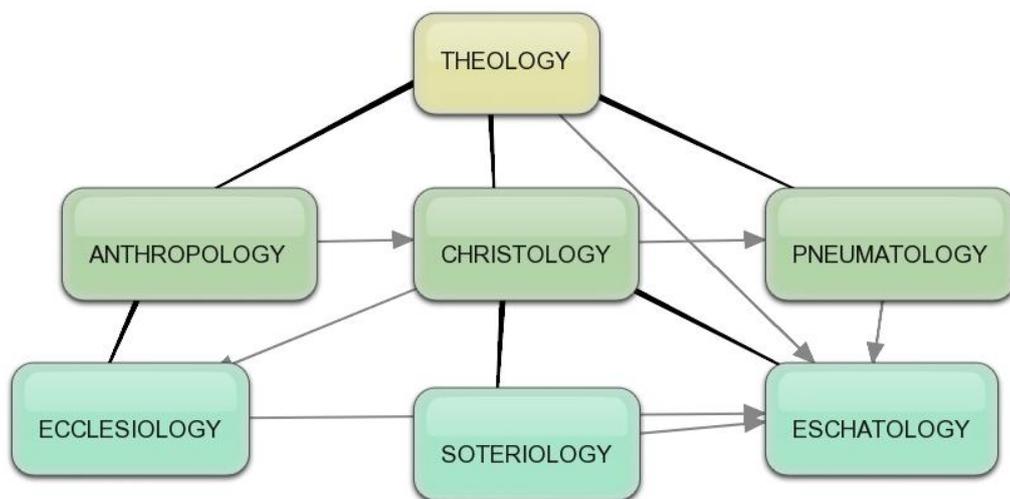


SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY – AN INTRODUCTION



What is Systematic Theology? It is any study that answers the question: “What does the whole Bible teach today?” about any

given topic. It involves collecting and understanding all the relevant passages in the Bible on various topics and then summarising their teachings clearly so that we know what to believe about each topic.

SOURCES:

We could use the Bible as our only source to do this, but over the years many people have worked prayerfully to systematise the subjects in the Bible and we can learn a lot from them. The Rivers of Life family of churches have done just that. Beginning over 40 years ago Jorge Pradas, Daniel Garcia and others have produced notes in Spanish and we will be drawing from these. In English our main source books will be the Systematic Theologies of Louis Berkhof and Wayne Grudem. The latter has written what is probably most used Systematic Theology today and we will be using it as our main sourcebook.

READING THE BIBLE Vs SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

In our church we encourage prayerful reading of the Bible daily. It is God’s word to mankind and doing so will cause us to become more like Jesus every day. However, if we want to know what the Bible teaches on a given subject, such as marriage or the second coming, we could start from Genesis and work right through to Revelation but it would

take a long time to find the answers! So it's sensible to use the work of others who have done just that, and learn from their findings.

TERMS USED OUTSIDE THE BIBLE

The terms: Trinity, Incarnation, Theology, Deity of Christ, etc are not words we find in the Bible but are used as titles of important Bible topics. In our studies we will explore these themes.

BEING SYSTEMATIC

Like having a tidy room, we work better if we organise our mind and know where to find things! It may take time to tidy up but it will save time in the end and also make us clear in our thinking. Systematic Theology is usually organised into sections similar to the following:

- 1 The Doctrine of the Word of God
- 2 The Doctrine of God (Theology)
- 3 The Doctrine of man (Anthropology)
- 4 The Doctrine of Christ and the Holy Spirit (Christology and Pneumatology)
- 5 The Doctrine of the application of redemption (Soteriology)
- 6 The Doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology)
- 7 The Doctrine of the future (Eschatology)

OUR STUDIES

For our studies we will start with section 4 – 7 followed by 1 – 3. Once we have finished each section you will have the option to take a short oral exam to test your grasp of the topic and a certificate will be given on successful completion. The course will be structured in such a way that it should be possible for newcomers to join us at any time (rather like the way people joined the disciples of Jesus at different times)

APPLICATION TO LIFE

The study of theology can easily become a fascination in itself but if we don't move on to applying it to our daily lives it won't glorify God. Perhaps one of the greatest dangers in living in a society that values

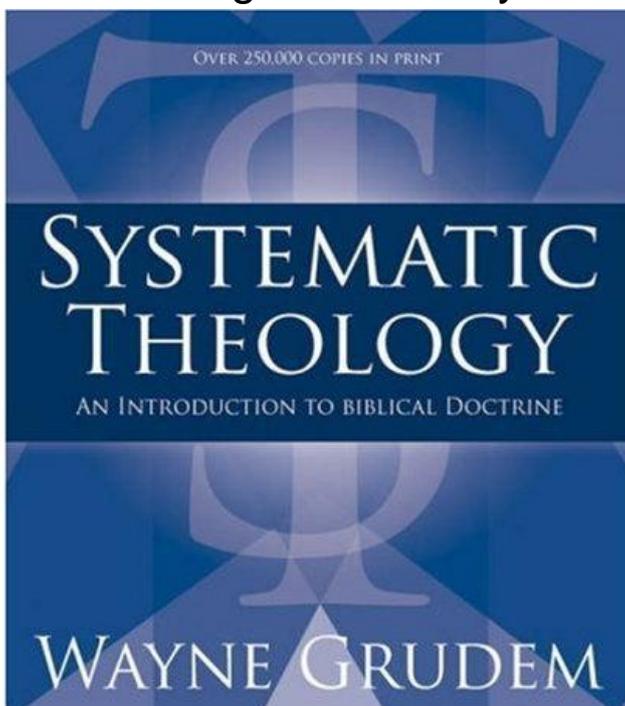
knowledge for its own sake is that we become proud of what we know and don't apply it to our lives. The New Testament has many doctrinal books such as Romans, but the same letter has long sections devoted to practicalities such as how to love one another, the need to evangelise, instructions about food, etc.

HOW TO STUDY SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

How should Christians study Theology?

- Prayerfully. The psalmist says: "Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law" (ps119:18) so we should pray and seek God's help in understanding His Word.

- With humility. Peter tells us: "Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pe 5:5). We also learn that "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Cor 8:1). So if we allow our study to make us proud, it will do harm rather than good. Humility needs to be closely guarded at all times.



This is the Theology book most in use in the English speaking church today. We recommend buying a copy to use as reference.

- With reason. Applying our mind, discussing topics, thinking things through are all ways in which our minds are developed to become more like the mind of Christ.

- With rejoicing and praise. All study should lead us to be full of joy and praise. The end goal is always to "declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pe 2:9). The more we study the more our praise should become meaningful and genuine. "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart." Ps 19:8. "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" Ps 119:103.

WHY DO WE STUDY THEOLOGY?

Above all we study theology in order to glorify God more. As we learn with a humble heart and practice what we learn, so every day we become more like Jesus in character and deed and know His will more clearly.

Another important reason is that as we read the Bible daily and study theology honestly so we should all arrive at the unity of the faith as declared in Ephesians: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph 4:11-13)

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS:

Give some reasons why we study Theology?

Can you think of any doctrines today that divide people who call themselves Christians?

How can we be sure that the conclusions we reach in our study are correct?