

## Part One – Introduction to Systematic Theology

- I. Introduction
  - a. What is Systematic Theology?

Systematic Theology is really nothing more than an attempt to formulate an orderly, rational, and coherent understanding of the Christian faith by organizing (or categorizing) its teachings under the headings I just mentioned. Some of the more notable Systematic Theologians that one would do well to look for on the bookshelves of used bookstores include:

- Herman Bavinck
- Louis Berkhof
- John Brown of Haddington
- John Frame
- John Gill's "A Body of Doctrinal Divinity" is a very good resource
- Wayne Grudem (be aware of his charismatic tendencies)
- Michael Horton (fairly recently released his own ST)
- J. Gresham Machen
- Robert Reymond
- Augustus Strong
- Cornelius Van Til
- B.B. Warfield
- Thomas Watson's "A Body of Divinity" is a very good title

There are some who actually oppose Systematic Theology as a discipline. Why? Because they feel that to categorize the truth of the Scriptures is not natural; they claim that one runs the risk of placing the Bible within the Academy, making it an object of scientific inquiry versus God's complete, perfect, and inseparable body of truth. Many of those who view Systematic theology in this way favor other systems of theological inquiry:

- **Biblical Theology** – Seeks to discover what the Bible has to say from the same time (context) and perspective of those who penned it. It also seeks to arrive at a coherent, synthetic whole rather than fragmenting the Scriptures into various categories. Biblical theology is indeed a very necessary method for understanding Scripture, but it should be viewed, not as being at odds with Systematic Theology, but as one of many branches of theological study that should be undertaken by the believer. Other branches would include:

- **Practical or Pastoral Theology** – Seeks to apply what is learned from the Scriptures to daily life
  - **Historical Theology** – Investigates the development of Christian thought in its growth through the centuries
- b. What is the relation between Systematic Theology and Hermeneutics?

Hermeneutics is the science of Biblical interpretation. One simply cannot interpret the Bible correctly without first understanding the way each truth presented in the Scriptures falls into one or more of the various doctrinal categories I mentioned earlier. Let me give you a very simple example of this. In **Genesis 6:6**, we read that God was sorry or, as it appears in some versions, repented that he had made man. Was God sorry in the same sense that we are sorry when we do something we shouldn't? NO! How do we know. We know because we are taught throughout the word of God that God is immutable or unchangeable. And how do we remember that? We remember it most effectively because we have studied "Theology Proper" and have systematized God's Immutability under the subheading of His non-communicable attributes or perfections. This understanding will undeniably assist us in making sure that we don't misinterpret what God's word may appear to be saying in its individual parts.

- c. Why is it important to study the Bible systematically?

God is a God of order. As the image bearers of God we, too, think (or at least we should think) in a very orderly fashion. Everywhere we look, things are systematized. In our counting system, 2 always follows one, 3 always follows 2, etc.; our alphabets and the words and languages which spring from them follow an orderly set of rules; libraries divide books up by category (fiction, non-fiction, reference, etc.); grocery stores are systematically arranged. In short, we are conditioned to view things systematically. Studying Systematic Theology is a very effective way to take the truths of God's word and arrange them in such a way that we have a comprehensive, orderly way of understanding who God is and how He operates in the realm of mankind.