



Core Seminar Systematic Theology II Session 14: Introduction & Review

Good morning, folks, let me welcome you again to the Systematic Theology Core Seminar; this is part two of the Systematic Theology class. In today's class, we are going to be turning around and looking back at all 13 weeks of the first half of the Systematic Theology core seminar. Do you know what that means for you? You are about to get a feast; we are about to go through a ton of information in a very short time. So that might also mean that we don't have a lot of time to get into a lot of complex questions, which I'm confident the content of this class will illicit.

If you're following along on your handout, you'll see a very simple outline for our class this morning; it's basically going to cover all the content from Systematic 1, and the first question we want to ask is from the introduction to Systematic 1. Our question is, "What is Systematic Theology?" What is Systematic Theology?

Systematic Theology answers the question what does the whole Bible teach us today about any given topic? For example, what does the whole Bible say about the attributes of God? Or even more particularly, what does the whole Bible teach about God's omniscience? Systematic Theology seeks to take a whole landscape and give a scenic overlook. That's a great way to describe what Systematic Theology does: it gives us a comprehensive, Scriptural vantage point.

So if any of you have been driving in the mountains, it's likely you've come to a scenic overlook. You pull over your car, you get out and look, and you see a beautiful, vast view of a mountain scape in the distance. In the same way, Systematic Theology gives you a scenic overlook of the whole Bible. We seek to understand what Scripture says about a whole topic in a comprehensive way.

Systematic Theology also provides us with an interpretive guide or framework for understanding the Scripture. So we seek to understand Scripture in ways that are first and foremost true to Scripture's teaching. So, if we have a topic like the immutability of God, which says very clearly in Scripture that God does not change, how do we understand passages that seems to imply that God has changed in some way? Systematic Theology provides us with a framework for how to interpret those individual passages that may be less clear in light of the passages that are clearer. That doesn't mean that Systematic Theology becomes a straitjacket in any way such that we need to force the Scriptures into our pre-conceived notions of what we think they should say; no, we need to sit under the Scriptures and be informed by them always. But it is also true that we can synthesize these truths into a consistent framework because God is truth; he is logical in and of himself. He doesn't contradict to himself. So we should understand that the Bible isn't going to contradict himself.

Another reason we need to study Systematic Theology because of religious pluralism. **So, here's a question for you all: What are some other belief systems that exist today? (Example:**

Universalism – everyone will be saved). Why is Systematic Theology important for us to study? Because Systematic Theology teaches us what is true about God. For example, we know that polytheism isn't true because when we open up our Bible, we know that the LORD our God is one; there is one God. So you see how Systematic Theology is helpful for us to study today, so that we know as Christians how to defend the faith in a way that is gracious, kind, and truthful. The last reason we study Systematic Theology is Head, Heart, Hands, Habitat (it sounds like four reasons but I'll move it into one).

Our heads are supposed to be full of theology. Consider the numerous instructions throughout Scripture to meditate on the Word of God. We should be meditating on the word of God day and night. That's what Psalm 1 says the blessed man does – he meditates on the law of God day and night. It is delight, and that word delight gets into the second aspect of why we should study Systematic Theology, it should go from our head to our hearts and cause us to delight in the Lord. What we know about God should stir up the affections of our heart.

How we all live, what you and I choose to do on a daily basis, has more to do with what we love than what we know. How many of you do things that you know you shouldn't do? I do, and I'm doing the things that my heart loves most. What we do has more to do with what we love than what we understand. And those things that we love will actually affect what our hearts will do.

Do you see? Head → Heart → Hands. Systematic Theology should affect the way that we live, and our habitat – what is around us. So when you come to understand what it means to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength – that implies that your hands are working with your habitat to help your neighbor in some way. So, Systematic Theology is important for us to understand.

Then, after week one of Systematic Theology, when we talked about what Systematic Theology is, we moved on to point II in your hand out.

II. The Doctrine of the Word

Scripture is clear – not only is there a God; he has spoken. He's not only spoken creation into being, so in Genesis 1 we see he speaks and all things come into creation, but he's also spoken specific words to us so that his mighty deeds might be understood by us. One of my favorite Psalms is Psalm 145 – “Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised and his greatness is unsearchable!”

Scripture contains specific words, which delineate God's mighty deeds throughout time and space. Scripture teaches us the story and the unfolding plan of redemption. And God's specific words are meant to be understood by us, which means that Scripture is God's self-revelation through human authors. Scripture is God's self-revelation through human authors.

We think of texts like 2 Peter 1:21: “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Scripture comes to us making claims, and what it claims about itself is that it is nothing less than God's Word written by human authors. So when we touch on this aspect of the doctrine of the Word, inerrancy,

which we'll briefly touch on in a moment, if any of you are interested enough, the best treatment on what the Bible has to say about God's Word and its perfection as God's Word is B.B. Warfield's treatment on the inerrancy of Scripture.

Scripture also involves historical progression; it comes to us as God's Story, and the story of redemption doesn't happen to us all at once. So in Genesis 3, you have the promise of the seed coming who will crush the serpent's head. But does he come and do that in Genesis 3? No! Thousands of years pass before he does; Scripture is God's unfolding story of what happens throughout redemption; it twists and turns through separate but related stories that occur through different time periods.

And then we also talked in our last course about the attributes of Scripture. These would be: divine inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency. We notice that the Scriptures that contain the story of redemption are marked by specific attributes—the first is that the Scriptures are inspired. **Can anyone name a text in Scripture that clearly speaks to the inspiration of God's Word?** 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

Scripture is the product of God's creative breath. The term theologians use to refer to the inspiration of scripture is "verbal plenary." Here's what that means:

Verbal – all words in their forms and their matter (their syntax, their structure, and their tenses) are inspired.

Plenary – this refers to all of Scripture, so every word form, every syntax, every structure in the original manuscripts as given by God was inspired by God. All of it, the totality of it – think of what Jesus says, not even the slightest dot will pass away. What he's referring to is the yod in Scripture; it is the smallest little tick on the page, and all of it is breathed out by God.

Not only is Scripture inspired, it is also inerrant. What inerrancy basically means is that the whole Bible is fully truthful in what it says according to the genres and standards of the grammatical conventions in which the authors operated. So when an author clearly intended to communicate a round number of people who died in a battle (e.g. 7,000), if we found the records and it was 7,003 who died, we don't say, "The author was wrong!" As a member of staff, I live about 500 yards from here. I'm telling you the truth, but if we measure it out, it may be 501. It's not that I'm trying to lead you astray. The Bible follows common conventions of language and it does so according to its authors' standards.

So, that sums up our review of the Doctrine of the Word. **I want to pause here for any questions?**

III. The Existence and the Attributes of God

When we talk about the attributes of God, we're talking about what God is like. Of God's many virtues, some are reflected in the child of God who has the Spirit of God in him—consider: Love, grace, and mercy. Those are the attributes of God reflected in us, we who have his Spirit.

But there are some attributes that are only true of God himself. So, God is independent or self-existent. John 5:26 says, "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself." The Father has life in himself; he is independent of all other life. But not only is he independent, he is also immutable, meaning that God does not change. This is taught clearly in Scripture. Malachi 3:6: "I, the LORD, do not change." Doesn't get much clearer than that, does it? Then we see this in James 1:17 "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

Not only is God independent and immutable, he is also infinite. He exists outside of time and space. Infinite means without limits, and because God is infinite he is also transcendent. He is exceedingly far above all creation. God is not like us; he is very different than us in this way.

Then we also looked at the unity of God. The Bible teaches that there is one God. This is what makes Christianity (as opposed to polytheism) monotheistic. The Bible teaches clearly that there is one God. Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." The Lord is one. There is one God. Yet, in his great majesty and mystery and incomprehensibility, we also know that in the one being that is God, there eternally exists three co-equal and co-eternal person—namely the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This refers to the doctrine of the trinity.

So, God is independent, immutable, infinite, transcendent, and in the one God, in the God head, there are three persons. If there's any question about the divinity of Jesus or the Holy Spirit, we see the divinity of Jesus in passages like John 1:1—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Hebrews 1:1-4 is a glorious passage referring to the divinity of Jesus Christ (for the sake of time, I won't read it now). We also see the divinity of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. So when Ananias and Sapphira bring only a portion of the sale of their property to Peter, Peter says to them, why have you lied to the Holy Spirit? You have not lied to men, *but to God!* Or we think of verses like Hebrews 9:14 that speaks of the eternal Spirit.

Then after we looked at the trinity, we also looked at God's other attributes: things like God's omniscience (he knows all things); his truthfulness, God does not lie. His wisdom, his holiness. Think of Isaiah 6: "Holy, holy, holy are you LORD." We looked at his righteousness and justice. Just look at the Psalms to see how often they speak of his righteousness and justice. Our God is full of goodness, love, and mercy. He is a transcendent and awesome God who is also personal and draws near to the lowly and broken-hearted.

Then after the existence and attributes of God, we looked to the doctrine of creation. You'll see that next on your hand out under bullet point four.

IV. The Doctrine of Creation

We looked at six statements about the doctrine of creation:

1. **God created *ex nihilo*.** (That's the Latin term; if you've ever heard anybody say that it just means that he created out of nothing). There was no pre-existent matter that God worked with; he didn't open up a tub of cosmic play-doh. God created the play-doh and then worked with it. There was nothing and then there was something.
2. **He not only created out of nothing, God also created all things.** He created time and matter. "*In the beginning...*" that's when time began. That's when God started it. He created the heavens and the earth. Space and matter.
3. **He also creates by his word** (we talked about this already), but you see the repetition of God's spoken and creative power in Genesis 1. He speaks and creation comes into existence.
4. **Creation was a triune act.** It was not only the work of the Father; it was the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All were active in creation. We see the Son at work in creation in texts like John 1:3 ("through him all things were made"), or Colossians 1:15-17. We also see the Holy Spirit; he's present in verse two of the Bible. Job 33:4 speaks to the Spirit's role in creation. Not only was creation a triune act, it was also very good.
5. **Creation was very good.** Look at verse 31 of Genesis 1. God saw all that he had made and behold, it was very good.
6. **The purpose of all of creation is the glory of God.** It's for his glory. Psalm 19:1 – "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim his handiwork." There is nowhere on earth where his voice is not heard through his creative power. Everything proclaims his majesty and was created for his glory.

But we also know the account of creation in Genesis is highly contested. Under the doctrine of creation, we talked about the six predominant views of creations:

1. **Theistic Evolution:** This would probably be the most popular among some Christians, and any other Christians who might say there is a God but want to put as much weight as possible on the scientific community's findings. Theistic evolution means that God begins the process of evolution, and implants the laws that the development of creation has followed. Theistic evolutionists would say that God has intervened at specific points because according to evolution you can't get from non-life to life. So a theistic evolutionist would say. So for example, he intervened to create humans, but everything else evolution has brought about.
2. **The Gap Theory:** This basically says that God created the heavens and the earth as Genesis 1:1 says. But after Genesis 1:1, between verses 2, and 3, and so on—there is unstated passing of billions of years. And at the end of that passing of billions of years, there is a cataclysmic event, where all of creation is destroyed and brought to not. And

then in verse 2, where the Spirit is hovering over the earth and being formless and void, that's the result of the cataclysmic event. Everything is messed up and the Spirit is at work bringing everything back to creative order.

3. **The Day-Age View:** This view says that the days in Genesis 1 are very long periods of time in which natural processes are at work.
4. **The Literary Framework View:** This view says that the whole sequence in chapter 1 about creation and the days there is not a chronological or historical account, but rather a literary device that tells a story. And inside of that story, if you open up that envelope, there's a theological truth there. But when you say that it's not chronological and that it's historical, you start running into issues. For example, was Adam real? Did sin actually happen? Is that part of the story? Is there a theological truth under that? You see how this gets us into trouble.
5. **Young Earth Creationism:** This takes the days as literal days, and seeks to work backward through the timeline that Scripture has provided for us through history. It works back to a beginning date for creation that's going to be somewhere between 10 and 20 thousand years depending on which Young Earth Creationist you talk to.
6. **Historic Creationism:** This says that the universe and everything in it is created in Genesis 1:1, and that what follows – the six creative days – don't refer to the creation of the universe, but rather to the preparation of the promised Eden for the people of God, Adam and Eve.

In Systematic 1, we also looked at some non-Christian views of creation: Pantheism, dualism, and materialism. Materialism would be the reigning view in Europe and America today. We also talked about God's relationship to creation, which we talked about already: that he's transcendent (that he's above), and that he's immanent, he's in and active in creation. We also talked about man and woman: how they came to be created, what their essence and nature are, what their function is, and what their relationship to God is.

Before we move on, are there any questions?

V. The Doctrine of Providence

“Providence” literally means “seeing what comes before.” So God's providence is referring to God's prior knowledge of and provision of the world. The world is also used to summarize God's ongoing relationship to his creation. It includes his omniscience (that he knows all things and therefore knows what's coming); his omnipotence (that he's all powerful and therefore has the power to bring it about).

Three aspects of God's providence to touch on briefly:

1. **Preservation:** This refers to God's continuous activity in which he maintains all that he has created. Hebrews 1 says the Son is the one who sustains all things by the power of his

word.

2. **Concurrence:** This refers to the relationship between divine and human activity by which God cooperates with created things in every action. We'll touch on that again momentarily.
3. **Government:** This means that God has a purpose in all that he does in the world, and he providentially governs and directs all things in order that they accomplish his purposes.

Just consider how much comfort and encouragement these three things should bring you as a Christian. Some people want to say that God can't know what's coming in order to protect God from the charge of being evil. While the intention there may be laudable, these folks fail to see how that undermines the Christian faith. God is in control of everything. None of the circumstances in your life are on accident; they're not by chance. You can know that there is a sovereign, good, loving God at work in everything that happens in your life.

In this discussion, we naturally come to the relationship between sovereignty and human responsibility (and we could spend an entire course on this topic). There are three propositions that you need to understand from Scripture regarding God's providence:

1. God is absolutely sovereign, yet his sovereignty never functions in a way that human responsibility is curtailed or minimized.
2. Humans are morally responsible. We choose, rebel, obey, and are rightfully held accountable for our decisions.
3. God is perfectly good. He is never, ever presented as an accomplice to evil. He does not stand behind evil the same way that he stands behind good.

Then in week 9 of Systematic 1 we looked at biblical anthropology.

VI. Biblical Anthropology

We touched on the problem of sin. Just as you can't open the Bible and say that God is not completely sovereign, you can't open the Bible and say that God doesn't exist. In fact, you can close the Bible and still not be able to say, sin doesn't exist: it's everywhere!

Sin is a fact, and sin, as human beings, is our biggest problem. There are results of sin (poverty and injustice), which are big problems. But the biggest problem is the root of those problems. Romans 5 talks about Adam as our representative head, and in him, we have all inherited guilt. We are guilty. You might say, "That's not fair!" and I would say, "Neither is your salvation in Christ as your representative head!" His righteousness is counted to us and we aren't righteous in ourselves. We are totally depraved. Maybe you've heard that phrase before; it doesn't refer to the fact that we're as bad as we could be. Instead, it means that sin and its corruption has affected every area of our lives. We're totally unable to keep the law of God, and a single sin makes us

legally guilty before God, and because of that we deserve God's eternal wrath. God is righteous, and he is just, and therefore he will not let the smallest of sin go unpunished.

The doctrine of sin leads us to cry out as humans, "What can be done about the state that I am in!" And next in Systematic 1, we talked about the doctrine of Christology.

VII. The Doctrine of Christology

We looked at the deity of Christ; we see it clearly in the Old Testament (Daniel 7; 2 Samuel 7; Isaiah 9). The deity of Christ is throughout the New Testament also. A good acronym, if you want to think about the deity of Christ, is the word HANDS.

H – Jesus shares the **honors** due to God.

A – Jesus shares the **attributes** of God.

N – Jesus shares in the **names** of God.

D – Jesus shares in the **deeds** that God does.

S – Jesus shares the **seat** of God's throne.

So we talked about how Christ is fully God, and then we talked about how Christ is fully man. 1 John 4:2-3 says that Jesus was born of a woman. We also see in Scripture Jesus' weaknesses and limitations. There are things that according to his human nature that he does not know (e.g. when God the Father will consummate all things). We see Jesus hungry and tired in the Scripture. Finally, we talked about the work of Christ.

VII. The Work of Christ

We talked about the three offices that Jesus fulfills: Prophet, Priest, and King. Hebrews chapter 1 speaks clearly to how Jesus is the greatest prophet and if you keep reading the book you will see how he is our priest. Revelation speaks of Jesus Christ clearly as a king; we also see this in Psalm 2. As a king, priest, and prophet, Jesus Christ has paid the debt fully for our sins, and the result of that is that our sins have been paid for and we've been purified through him. Jesus is our legal substitute (we've been justified through him); he is our Redeemer (he's paid the redemption price). Jesus is our reconciler (he brings us to God); he is also our victor ("Death where is thy sting?") Though we may die, there is no death and condemnation finally for those of us who are in Christ, and that's what we looked at lastly as we thought about the work of Christ in Systematic 1. Our great hope is that we have eternity ahead of us with God.