

1. **Introduction:** The inspiration for this study was R.C. Sproul's book entitled **Everyone's a Theologian** (Reformation Trust, 2014).
2. **A useful definition:** Systematic Theology is the study of what the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, teaches about any given topic.
 - There are many Systematic Theology books. All are carefully organized by topic. An excellent example is Wayne Grudem's **Systematic Theology** (1290 pages) published in 1994 by Intervarsity Press.
 - **Systematic Theology** assembles biblical truths as doctrines, each summarizing what the whole Bible teaches about a particular topic.
3. **Doctrines** organize Biblical knowledge. Seven major doctrines are used to structure Grudem's book. They include (in the sequence they appear) God's Word, God, Man, Christ and the Holy Spirit, Application of Redemption, the Church, and the Future.
 - The subject of systematic Theology is God's revelation of His character, will, plan, actions, and the interaction of God with His creation.
 - Christian Theology is based on God's revelation not on speculative philosophy.
 - When God reveals Himself, He does so according to His own character and nature. God is never the author of confusion (He is never confused). His revelation includes His Holy Law which reflects His character.
 - God's creation of an orderly cosmos reveals a great deal about Him. God's thinking is always clear. His written revelation is in human language to be intelligible and understandable to people.
4. **Theology** assumes (1.) the Bible is true, and (2.) the God of the Bible exists.
 - All Christian theology is to be understood in relation to God's overarching character. That is also true for Christian viewpoints on philosophy, economics, physics, biology, mathematics, and everything else.
 - Systematic theology focuses on extracting, condensing, and accurately explaining each biblical topic using expressions that are easily understood.
 - When God reveals something to us, every detail He utters may impact every other detail. Systematic Theology sets out to determine how all the pieces fit together as an organic, meaningful, and consistent whole.
 - Sometimes there are concepts in the Bible for which biblical authors did not use a single identifying term. Theology assigns these concepts names. Examples include *Trinity*, *incarnation*, *deity of Christ*.
 - Though the terms are not found in the Bible, the concepts are. The terms used to represent such concepts are assigned descriptive meanings that enable each term to usefully and correctly summarize the biblical concept.
 - A non-theological example from Mathematics of such a term is "triangle" used to summarize all the properties of a 3-sided plane geometric figure.

5. **Westminster Confession 1.6:** *“The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men.”*
- God has revealed Himself both through natural things and through the writings of God-inspired prophets and Apostles. To *Reveal* is to make plain that which has previously been hidden.
6. **Revelation** in and through nature is called **General Revelation**. The inspired writings of the Bible inspired writings are called **Special Revelation**.
- Christianity is based on revealed truth. Though God cannot be seen with our eyes, we know Him through His revelation that removes the veil that hides Him from us.
 - Not only Christian truth but all truth depends on God’s work of general and special revelation. God is the source of all truth.
7. **Augustine** taught the principle that we as creatures could know nothing if it were not that God made knowledge possible for us.
- Augustine illustrated that principle with the example of the limitations of physical sight. To see, there must be light. To know divine light must enable understanding.
 - Take a person with perfect eyesight into a totally dark room filled with beautiful objects. Though the person has the necessary visual capability to see objects, in the absence of light, they cannot and will not see anything. Turn on a light and the beauty that was there all the time will be seen. Light makes sight possible.
 - In the same way, we possess the capability of “seeing” truth, but we need God’s light of divine revelation to perceive any truth whatsoever. Unless God shines His divine light, we will “see” no truth.
8. **General Revelation** is called “general” because it is available to all, and because it is general in content. General revelation provides no information about our need for redemption or God’s redemptive work on our behalf.
- General Revelation can be either “mediate” (*through some mediator*) or “immediate” (*direct*). Mediate means something lies between. TV, radio, and newspapers mediate communication. Collectively, we call them “the media.”
 - “Nature” and is the principal medium of God’s mediate General Revelation.
 - Immediate Revelation is more complex. Paul in Romans 2:15 says the law of God has been written on our hearts. That is a form of immediate revelation.
 - Think of the gospel song “Tell Me the Story of Jesus.” The second line is “Write on My Heart Every Word.” That is a prayer for immediate revelation.
 - God’s revelation to the prophets was often immediate but not always. Think of Hosea being instructed by God to marry a harlot.
 - The knowledge God conveys impacts our conscience and God-awareness.

- God's eternal power and deity are made clear to the whole world through general revelation. To deliberately ignore the knowledge God gives through nature doesn't remove a person's accountability for that knowledge.
9. **Special Revelation:** In general revelation, God reveals something of Himself to all people. Special revelation is limited to those exposed to biblical teachings.
- Biblical teaching discloses the problem of sin and separation from God, as well as God's remedy for the problem in His plan of redemption.
 - Special Revelation tells of the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection.
 - These things cannot be discovered through studying the natural realm.
 - Special revelation is found in sacred Scripture and in God's direct action in people. Heb.1:1-3 bears witness to how God revealed Himself in special ways.
 - God's special revelation in Scripture manifests the qualities of His character and nature. Scripture was written by many authors over the span of many centuries.
 - It deals with a variety of topics. Yet within that diversity of topics, authors, and centuries there is unity.
 - All the information in Scripture – the incarnation, the atonement, future things, the judgment of God, the mercy of God, the wrath of God – have unity in God Himself so there is unity, consistence, and coherence in the Bible's content.
10. **Hebrews 1:1-3:** *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”*
- **Systematic Theology** strives to take all the information God has revealed at various points in time and put it together in a way that shows how each bit fits into a meaningful whole.
 - Christianity is based on knowledge from God in the form of both general and special revelation. In OT days, God at times spoke directly to people.
 - Sometimes He revealed Himself through dreams and special signs (like with Gideon). Sometimes God revealed Himself through theophanies.
 - A **theophany** is visible manifestation of the invisible God who is pure spirit, altogether non-physical.
 - Probably the best-known OT theophany was to Moses in the Midianite wilderness. He saw a burning bush that was not consumed by the fire.
 - As Moses approached the bush, God spoke directly to him saying, “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14).
 - The pillars of cloud and pillar fire, that led the Israelites on their wanderings in the wilderness after the exodus, were theophanies.

11. **Prophets**: But the primary way in which God communicated with Israel was through prophets who served as God's "agents of revelation."
- These men were beings just like us. They depended on human language and understanding.
 - But God communicated directly with them. Their words became conduits of divine revelation. For that reason, they began their prophecies with, ***"Thus says the Lord."***
 - The prophets' words were put into writings which became the inscripturated Word of God. In this way the OT was produced by real people who were designated by God to speak for Him to His people.
 - Not all who claimed to be prophets were genuine prophets of God. Israel struggled with false prophets who were known for teaching what the people wanted to hear rather than true revelation from God.
 - Jeremiah experienced great problems with false prophets. He was told to warn of God's impending judgment. False prophets conveyed a different message opposing his true prophecy, doing all they could to obscure his message.
 - Three tests were provided to distinguish between genuine and false prophets. (1.) There must be a divine call. God's prophets were anxious to show that they had been called directly by God and commissioned for their prophetic task. Men like Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel gave details of their call.
 - (2.) Miracles were present where there were genuine prophets. Knowing when something that appeared to be a miracle was real was a problem because of fake miracles that were simply deceptive tricks.
 - (3.) The third test asked was, do the prophet's prophecies come true? If not, they were proven to be false prophets.
12. **Apostles**: In the NT, Apostles were analogous to the OT prophets.
- A direct call from Jesus was required to be designated as an Apostle.
 - Apostle means one sent or commissioned with the authority of the one doing the sending. Jesus said to His Apostles, ***"Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me"*** (Mt. 10:40).
 - The Apostle Paul was not an exception to the requirement of a direct call, but his call came from the risen Christ. He is unique in that respect.
13. **Both Prophets and Apostles** received direct communication from God.
- Heb. 1 identifies the incarnate Word as the pinnacle of special revelation.
 - Special revelation comes to us through the written Word, especially the Word of God incarnate. It also comes to us through God "writing on our heart."
 - The Word of God incarnate is the One about whom the written Word declares, ***"in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."***
 - Some verses suggest the need for and importance of Systematic Theology.

14. **Matthew 28:19-20**: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

- Verse 19 is a clear command to evangelize. Verse 20a is a command to teach all disciples *“all that I have commanded you.”* What is included in *“all?”*
- In a narrow sense it could mean to teach the content of Jesus’ oral teaching as recorded in the gospel narratives.
- But the resurrected Jesus lives and continues to act (think of Paul’s conversion).
- He continues to teach through the Apostles. They were instructed to wait in Jerusalem until they were anointed with the Holy Spirit who would remind them of all Jesus taught.
- So, in a broader sense “all” includes the interpretation and application of all pertaining to Jesus’ life and teachings as found in the whole Bible as written under the supervision and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
- Effective teaching of the whole Bible’s truth on any given topic implies the necessity for collecting, summarizing, and arranging all Scripture verses related to that topic. That is Systematic Theology applied.
- We might be answering questions like: What does the whole Bible teach about the work of the Holy Spirit, or about Christ, prayer, sin, or end times?

15. **The Value of Studying and Understanding Theology**: Many people see little value in studying Theology. They say, “I don’t need theology; I just need Jesus.”

- The truth is that no Christian can avoid theology. Every attempt to understand what Scripture is saying involves theology. Who is Jesus? What does Jesus require of us? How does the Holy Spirit apply salvation? What is regeneration?
- God has taken great pains to reveal Himself to His people. His revelation is mostly in written form, a book to be read, memorized, studied, and understood.
- Consider comments by Paul on the value of Scripture to Timothy. **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, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”*
- (1.) Careful study of Scripture is a profitable investment to use in teaching others. You can only teach well that which you understand. Teaching from an incorrect understanding can cause the person you teach to be misled.
- (2.) Scripture is also profitable for reproof of ourselves and others. The Word of God exposes sin, our own and that of others. It is wise to heed the criticism of God as it comes to us from our careful study of Scripture.
- (3.) Scripture is profitable for correction. We need constant biblical reminders to enable us to discern and avoid the flood of false teaching encountered every day. False teaching encourages false understanding and false living.

- (4.) Scripture is profitable for “training in righteousness.” To avoid the deceit of false teachings, we must discern what is wrong, know and do what is right.
- Knowing and doing what is right enables us to become complete, equipped for every good work. The purpose of theology is not intellectual stimulation.
- Its purpose is to instruct us in the ways of God so that we can grow into mature obedience of Him. Theology is essential for every Christian.
- The organized, categorized knowledge of Systematic Theology provides vital information that can be quickly and efficiently assimilated for use. (Think about Encyclopedias and Dictionaries).

16. Our next topic will be God’s character and attributes.