

Building Systematic Theology

RESOURCES

STUDY GUIDES BY SECTION



BUILDING SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
STUDY GUIDE 1.1
Lesson 1: What Is Systematic Theology?
Section 1: New Testament

OUTLINE FOR TAKING NOTES

Introduction

I. New Testament

A. Systematic Theology

1. Biblical
2. Logical
3. Traditional

B. New Testament Theology

1. Diversity
2. Pastoral Character
3. Genres
4. Basic Framework

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How does Louis Berkhof define systematic theology?
2. What are the characteristics of systematic theology?
3. Number the following theological topics in the order that they are traditionally studied and give a brief description of each one.

Soteriology
Eschatology
Bibliology

Theology proper
Ecclesiology
Anthropology

4. In what ways is systematic theology like New Testament theology?
5. In what ways is systematic theology different from New Testament theology?
6. The New Testament writers structured their theology around what theme? Explain the importance of this theme. Explain the difference between Old Testament Jewish expectations and New Testament theology regarding this theme.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. How do you feel about the subject of systematic theology? Do you think it is necessary? Why? How would you answer someone who says, "All we need is the Bible"?
2. Has systematic theology been helpful for you in the past to resolve any issues? Explain.
3. What areas of systematic theology interest you most? Are there any particular questions that you would like to answer in your studies of systematic theology?

BUILDING SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
STUDY GUIDE 1.2
Lesson 1: What Is Systematic Theology?
Section 2: Historical Developments

OUTLINE FOR TAKING NOTES

II. Historical Developments

A. Patristic Theology

1. Cultural Changes
2. Theological Changes

B. Medieval Theology

1. Cultural Changes
2. Theological Changes

C. Protestant Theology

1. Early Reformers
2. Classical Confessions
3. Modern Systematics

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did systematic theology become necessary?
2. Describe the unique theological emphasis of the three areas studied in the lesson: patristic theology, medieval theology, and Protestant theology.
3. What is syncretism? Explain how syncretism is shown in the theology of Philo.
4. What is Neo-Platonism? Describe its characteristics.
5. Explain how Christian theologians responded to each main aspect of Neo-Platonism.
6. Explain the characteristics of medieval scholasticism.

7. How did the reformers respond to the tendencies of patristic theology and scholastic theology? Describe especially the characteristics of the theology of John Calvin, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Charles Hodge.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. With which of the three periods of theology do you identify most? Patristic theology? Medieval scholasticism? Or Reformed theology? Why?
2. What place would you give to reason in building systematic theology? To spiritual intuition?
3. Let's suppose that you are studying the first chapters of Genesis, and you find yourself struggling with how the biblical story of creation fits with current scientific theories about the origin of the universe. How would you proceed to resolve this apparent conflict?
4. What dangers or errors do you see in the tendencies of patristic theology? Of medieval scholasticism? Of reformed theology? Explain why.
5. What can we learn from the way Christian theologians fit into their historical context? What are the good examples they give us? What are some of the errors they committed as they dialogued with non Christian thinkers of their day? How does this help us dialogue with non believers today?

BUILDING SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
STUDY GUIDE 1.3
Lesson 1: What Is Systematic Theology?
Section 3: Values and Dangers

OUTLINE FOR TAKING NOTES

III. Values and Dangers

A. Christian Living

1. Enhancement
2. Hindrance

B. Interaction in Community

1. Enhancement
2. Hindrance

C. Exegesis of Scripture

1. Enhancement
2. Hindrance

Summary

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Name the three theological resources mentioned in the lesson, and describe the unique focus of each one.
2. Name the three aspects of Christian living mentioned in the lesson, and describe the unique focus of each one.
3. Describe how systematic theology enhances and hinders Christian Living.
4. Name the three aspects of interaction in community, and describe the unique focus of each one.
5. Describe how systematic theology enhances and hinders interaction in Community.
6. Name the three aspects of exegesis, and describe the unique focus of each one.

7. Explain how systematic theology enhances and hinders exegesis.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. How can we successfully navigate the dangers of systematic theology in order to take advantage of its values?
2. How does systematic theology help you most in living the Christian life?
3. How does systematic theology help you most in interaction in community?
4. How does systematic theology help you most with exegesis?
5. What is the most significant insight you have learned from the study of this complete lesson? Explain.
6. Reflecting on the teaching of the lesson regarding the Patristic period, the Medieval period, and the Protestant period, try to discern the source of the following quotes. (After answering the questions, you may look at the source of the quotes at the end of all the study guides. See *)

Quote A:

"Hence it is impossible that what pertains to philosophy should be contrary to what is of faith, though they fall short of it. ...If something contrary to the faith should be found in philosophy, this is not philosophy, but rather an abuse of philosophy because of defective reasoning."

- A Patristic theologian
- A Medieval Scholastic theologian
- A Protestant Reformed theologian
- I'm not sure.

Quote B:

"Since for unbelieving men religion seems to stand by opinion alone, they, in order not to believe anything foolishly or lightly, both wish and demand rational proof that Moses and the prophets spoke divinely. But I reply: the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit."

- A Patristic theologian
- A Medieval Scholastic theologian
- A Protestant Reformed theologian
- I'm not sure.

Quote C:

"Utterly inexpressible and indescribable is Divine beauty blazing like lightning; neither word can express nor ear receive it. If we name the brightness of dawn, or the clearness of moonlight, or the brilliance of sunshine, none of it is worthy to be compared with the glory of true light, and is farther removed therefrom than the deepest night and the most terrible darkness from the clear light of midday. When this beauty, invisible to physical eyes and accessible only to soul and thought, illumined some saint, wounding him with unbearable yearning desire, then, disgusted by earthly life, he cried: 'Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!'...'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God'...."

- A Patristic theologian
- A Medieval Scholastic theologian
- A Protestant Reformed theologian
- I'm not sure.

BUILDING SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
STUDY GUIDE 2.1
Lesson 2: Technical Terms in Systematics
Section 1: Orientation

OUTLINE FOR TAKING NOTES

Introduction

I. Orientation

A. Definition

B. Terms and Concepts

1. Language in General

2. Language of Scripture

C. Need

1. Many Terms-One Concept

2. One Term-Many Concepts

D. Place

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How does Dr. Pratt define "theological technical terms"?
2. Do terms always have a direct one to one correspondence with a concept? Explain.
3. Give examples from our general use of language where many terms can be used for one same concept.
4. Give examples from our general use of language where one term can correspond to several different concepts.
5. Give examples from Scripture language where many terms can be used for one same concept.
6. Give examples from Scripture language where one term can correspond to several different concepts.
7. Explain why theological technical terms may sometimes be necessary.

8. Describe the steps for building systematic theology. Explain the example of analyzing the death of Christ for systematic theology.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. How do you feel about the use of theological technical terms? Do you think they are necessary? Do you think they are helpful?
2. Describe your experiences in the past in struggling to understand theological technical terms. How did you deal with this?
3. How can the principles "many terms can describe one concept" and "one concept can describe many terms" help you in your understanding and interpretation of Scripture?
4. When do you think it is necessary to use technical terms, and when do you think it is better to use more simple terms? For example, in what situation would it be better to use the term "justification" and explain it? In what circumstances would it be better to use a more simple term to communicate the same concept? How about the term "atonement"?

BUILDING SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
STUDY GUIDE 2.2
Lesson 2: Technical Terms in Systematics
Section 2: Formation

OUTLINE FOR TAKING NOTES

II. Formation

A. Biblical Terms

1. Emphasizing One Term
2. Emphasizing One Meaning
3. Creating New Meanings

B. Extra-Biblical Language

1. Common Terminology
2. Philosophical Terminology
3. Combined Terminology

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain why it may be helpful to emphasize the term "regeneration," even though the Bible may use various different terms.
2. Explain why it may be helpful to emphasize only one meaning of the term "justify," even though the Bible may use the term in different ways.
3. Explain why it may be helpful to create new theological phrases that are not found in the Bible.
4. Explain the origin of the word "Trinity."
5. Describe terms used by the Council of Chalcedon in ways that they are not used in the Bible.
6. Give examples of technical theological phrases that combine biblical words with extra-biblical words to form a new phrase.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. How do you feel about using theological terms that are not found in the Bible? Can you accept them? How about the term "Trinity," for example?
2. Some terms are used in society today to mean something different than the way the Bible uses them. We sometimes need to explain the difference. How would you explain the difference between the biblical use and the common use of the terms "faith" and "hope"?

BUILDING SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
STUDY GUIDE 2.3
Lesson 2: Technical Terms in Systematics
Section 3: Values and Dangers

OUTLINE FOR TAKING NOTES

III. Values and Dangers

A. Christian Living

1. Enhancement
2. Hindrance

B. Interaction in Community

1. Enhancement
2. Hindrance

C. Exegesis

1. Enhancement
2. Hindrance

Summary

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Give examples from the lesson of how theological technical terms can both enhance and hinder Christian living.
2. Give examples from the lesson of how theological technical terms can both enhance and hinder interaction in community.
3. Give examples from the lesson of how theological technical terms can both enhance and hinder exegesis.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. How can you, as a student of theology, guard against the sin of pride as you learn more about the Bible, theology, and technical terms?
2. What is the most important thing you have learned from this whole lesson? Why?
3. Read the quote by Augustine and write down the theological terms you find.

"For the Omnipotent God, whom even the heathen acknowledge as the Supreme Power over all, would not allow any evil in his works, unless in his omnipotence and goodness, as the Supreme Good, he is able to bring forth good out of evil."

[Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chapter 3, in *Confessions and Enchiridion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 342.]

4. Read the words below of the hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy." Write down the words you consider "technical theological terms" that are found in the hymn.

Holy, Holy, Holy
Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee;
Holy, Holy, Holy, Merciful and Mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!
Holy, Holy, Holy! All the saints adore thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
Who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.
Holy, Holy, Holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
Though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
Only thou art holy, there is none beside thee
Perfect in pow'r, in love and purity.
Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!
All they works shall praise thy Name, in earth and sky and sea;
Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and Mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

[Quoted from *Trinity Hymnal*, published by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, 1961, hymn # 87.]

BUILDING SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
STUDY GUIDE 3.1
Lesson 3: Propositions in Systematics
Section 1: Orientation

OUTLINE FOR TAKING NOTES

Introduction

I. Orientation

A. Definition

1. Indicative
2. Factual
3. Theological
4. Direct

B. Legitimacy

C. Place

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Write the definition of a "theological proposition" given in the lesson.
2. Explain the difference between universal and particular statements. Give examples.
3. Explain the difference between affirmative and negative statements. Give examples.
4. Explain the difference between "theology proper" and "general theology."
5. Explain what is meant in the lesson by "direct" statements.
6. Explain the challenges to theological propositions today.
7. What is the "via negativa"?
8. Make sure you are familiar with the content of the following Bible passages: Isaiah 55:8-9, Deuteronomy 29:29, and Matthew 15:7.
9. How did Jesus verify theological claims? What was His standard for testing them?

10. How does Dr. Pratt explain the four aspects of the theological process in this lesson? Describe the parts of the illustration he uses.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. In what ways did this lesson help you understand the unique language of systematic theology?
2. Do you think theological propositions are necessary? Why?
3. Can you think of any other way to do systematic theology without the use of theological propositions, as explained in the lesson? Explain your answer.
4. Do you have a favorite systematic theologian, or a favorite text on systematic theology? If so, explain why the author or book is your favorite.

BUILDING SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
STUDY GUIDE 3.2
Lesson 3: Propositions in Systematics
Section 2: Formation

OUTLINE FOR TAKING NOTES

II. Formation

A. Philosophical Interactions

B. Interpretation of Scripture

1. Challenges
2. Factual Reduction
3. Factual Collation

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What attitude does the New Testament exhibit toward philosophy?
2. What characteristics of the Bible present challenges to systematic theologians? Explain why they are challenges.
3. In the theological task, what is "factual reduction"? Give examples.
4. In the theological task, what is "factual collation"? Explain the difference between "repetitive collation" and "compositional collation." Give examples.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. Before this lesson, what was your attitude toward philosophy? Has it changed because of this lesson? In what way?
2. Why do you think the Bible is not organized in the same way as a textbook on systematic theology? Does this mean that systematic theology is inappropriate? Explain.
3. How do you feel about the theological methods of "factual reduction" and "factual collation"? Do you think they are valid? Do you sometimes use them? How?

BUILDING SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
STUDY GUIDE 3.3
Lesson 3: Propositions in Systematics
Section 3: Values and Dangers

OUTLINE FOR TAKING NOTES

III. Values and Dangers

A. Christian Living

1. Enhancement
2. Hindrance

B. Interaction in Community

1. Enhancement
2. Hindrance

C. Exegesis

1. Enhancement
2. Hindrance

Summary

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain how theological propositions can be both an enhancement and a hindrance to Christian living. Give examples.
2. Explain how theological propositions can be both an enhancement and a hindrance to interaction in community. Give examples.
3. Explain how theological propositions can be both an enhancement and a hindrance to exegesis. Give examples.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. Do you see systematic theology as more of a help or a hindrance? Why? Write down some examples of ways in which systematic theology has been either a help or a hindrance to you.

2. What are the most important things you have learned from this entire lesson? Explain.

3. Read the following quote by C. S. Lewis. Then write in your own words a theological proposition that expresses the main point of this quote, as you understand it.

Remember: A "theological proposition" is "an indicative sentence that asserts as directly as possible one or more factual theological claims." Keep your proposition simple. Make sure you write an indicative sentence, and make sure you state a theological truth as directly as possible.

"We can, perhaps, conceive of a world in which God corrected the results of this abuse of free will by His creatures at every moment; so that a wooden beam became soft as grass when it was used as a weapon, and the air refused to carry the sound waves that carry lies or insults. But such a world would be one in which wrong actions were impossible, and in which therefore, freedom of the will would be void."

"Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself. Perhaps this is not the 'best of all possible' universes, but the only possible one."

[C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), pp. 33-35.]

Theological proposition:

4. The musical video of the song "Imagine Me," by Kirk Franklin, shows painful experiences that have deeply affected people, destroying their sense of self-worth:

- a) A wounded soldier returns from war in a wheel chair, missing a leg, only to sense the rejection of his wife.
- b) A young girl watches her father mistreat her mother, and runs to hide in her room.
- c) A young lady invites a man to her home for dinner, and soon finds that he is only interested in having a sexual experience.
- d) A woman lies in bed with cancer, struggling with depression.

In the second half of the video, each person makes a decision to let the past go, to accept God's love and let Him define who they are. The song asks us to imagine that God is whispering in our ear, telling us that the painful experiences are gone.

["Imagine Me" as seen in YouTube: <http://youtu.be/l66SDeRQsJ4> (August 1, 2013)]

Write a theological proposition that expresses the main point of this song, as you understand it.

Remember: A "theological proposition" is "an indicative sentence that asserts as directly as possible one or more factual theological claims." Keep your proposition simple. Make sure you write an indicative sentence, and make sure you state a theological truth as directly as possible.

Theological proposition:

BUILDING SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
STUDY GUIDE 4.1
Lesson 4: Doctrines in Systematics
Section 1: General Orientation

OUTLINE FOR TAKING NOTES

Introduction

I. General Orientation

A. Definition

1. Topics
2. Synthesis
3. Explain

B. Legitimacy

1. Jesus
2. Paul

C. Goals

1. Positive
2. Negative

D. Place

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Make sure you memorize the definition that Dr. Pratt gives for a "doctrine."
2. How would you explain the difference between a "theological proposition" and a "doctrine"?
3. Write the names of the six traditional areas of systematic theology and give a brief description of each.
4. What does "synthesis" mean in the process of systematic theology?
5. Give examples of the three levels of complexity of systematic theology.

6. Explain the example given in the lesson of how Jesus did systematic theology.
7. Explain the example given in the lesson of how Paul did systematic theology.
8. Explain what Dr. Pratt means when he says that systematic theology has a positive aspect and a negative purpose.
9. Using the illustration of a building, what part represents doctrines?

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. Before this lesson, how did you feel about "doctrines"? Did the lesson change your attitude? Explain.
2. Do you sometimes do systematic theology? In what ways?

BUILDING SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
STUDY GUIDE 4.2
Lesson 4: Doctrines in Systematics
Section 2: Formation

OUTLINE FOR TAKING NOTES

II. Formation

A. Biblical Support

1. Process

2. Example

B. Logical Support

1. Authority

2. Deductive Implications

3. Inductive Certainty

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe Berkhof's arguments against the theory of perfectionism, and explain how he constructs them.
2. Explain the view expressed in the lesson regarding the proper use of logic in the theological task.
3. Explain the law of non contradiction, and give an example of how it is used.
4. Explain the causes of apparent contradictions in Scripture. How does Dr. Pratt suggest we resolve these apparent contradictions?
5. Explain the difference between deductive logic and inductive logic. Give examples.
6. Explain the difference between repetitive inductive arguments and compositional inductive arguments. Give examples.
7. What is the "inductive gap"? Explain the example Dr. Pratt gives of how Berkhof forgets this gap.

8. Explain the "cone of certainty." Where does Dr. Pratt locate eschatological doctrines in this scheme?

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. How do you think the Bible is sometimes used improperly to develop doctrinal views? Can you think of a specific example?
2. How do you think logic should be used in the task of systematic theology?
3. What examples can you give of errors made in misusing logic, such as forgetting the "inductive gap," in doing theology?
4. Can you think of a specific example, looking back over your own life, in which you yourself misused the Bible to develop a doctrinal view that you now believe to be wrong? What was your mistake in the way you developed that erroneous doctrine? How could you avoid such mistakes in the future?

BUILDING SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
STUDY GUIDE 4.3
Lesson 4: Doctrines in Systematics
Section 3: Values and Dangers

OUTLINE FOR TAKING NOTES

III. Values and Dangers

A. Christian Living

1. Enhancement
2. Hindrance

B. Interaction in Community

1. Enhancement
2. Hindrance

C. Exegesis of Scripture

1. Enhancement
2. Hindrance

Summary

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Identify the values and dangers of systematic theology with regard to Christian living. Note the example given of the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 10:31.
2. Identify the values and dangers of systematic theology with regard to interaction in community.
3. Identify the values and dangers of systematic theology with regard to exegesis. Explain the example of the "lapsarian question."
4. Make sure you are familiar with the contents of Deuteronomy 29:29.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. Have you observed a misuse of systematic theology in your own Christian community? Explain.
2. How do you think systematic theology can be most helpful for you?
3. What dangers do you think you especially need to avoid as you study systematic theology?
4. What is the most important thing you have learned in this whole course?
5. "The Good-O-Meter"

In the video skit called "The Good-O-Meter," people are lined up to be evaluated to see where they will spend eternal life. They hand over a folder with their life records, then stand on the scales that compare their good deeds with their bad deeds. Sadly, they all come out "bad."

The first man says he "tried to live a good life," but his acts of lying and stealing tip the scales to the bad side.

A woman admits that she cheated on a test, but argues that she picked up some trash in the park afterwards, and thinks that it should "balance out." Nevertheless, the scales tip to the bad side again.

Another man claims that he has done many good deeds, even digging wells in Africa and helping with an orphanage in India. When they ask him about a subscription to a certain magazine with pornographic pictures, he claims that he only "read the articles." Again, the scales tip to the bad side.

One after another, people hope that something will tip the scales to the good side, maybe because their family went to church, or because were baptized. One even offers to pay with an American Express credit card!

Finally, one man hands over a thick folder, and hangs his head in silence. He makes no attempt to defend himself. Suddenly another man steps up with another folder and hands it to the inspectors. The name on his T-shirt is "Jesus." Inside the folder, it says "Child of God." Instead of asking the first man to step on the scales, they ask Jesus to take his place. The scales indicate the highest possible score on the "Good" side.

Jesus escorts the man to the waiting room for eternal life, and tosses the man's old folder in a pile of trash. When the others complain that it is "not fair," the inspector says, "That's why it's called grace!"

["The Good-O-Meter" as seen in YouTube: <http://youtu.be/vRZi0J61X0> (August 1, 2013)]

Write below what "doctrine" you find expressed in the "Good-O-Meter" skit.

Remember that a "doctrine" is more complex than a "theological proposition." A doctrine is a "synthesis and explanation of biblical teachings on a theological topic." Make sure that you include more than one simple statement and that you include some element of explanation.

Doctrine:

* Source of the quotes for question 6 of Study Guide 1.3:

A. "Hence it is impossible that what pertains to philosophy should be contrary to what is of faith..."

Source: Thomas Aquinas (Medieval theologian, 1225-1274), *On Boethius, On the Trinity*, question 2, article 3. See *Thomas Aquinas, Selected Writings*, ed. Ralph McInerny, New York: Penguin Books, 1998.

B. "Since for unbelieving men, religion seems to stand by opinion alone, ...they demand rational proof..., but I reply: the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason."

Source: John Calvin (Protestant Reformed theologian, 1509-1564), *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, Chapter 7, Section 4. (Library of Christian Classics edition, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, edited by John T. McNeill. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967.)

C. "Utterly inexpressible and indescribable is Divine beauty blazing like lightning; neither word can express nor ear receive it..."

Source: St. Basil the Great (Patristic theologian, 329-379 AD). Excerpt from *Philokalia*, compilation of works of the Desert Fathers. Quoted from the web site "Orthodox Mysticism; Teachings of the Desert Fathers."

<http://www.orthodox.cn/patristics/apostolicfathers/mystic.htm>

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