

Doctrine Alive! Systematic Theology (ST) – An Introduction (Oct 16, 2009)

I. Group Case Studies:

- a. Read Galatians 5:4 → “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.”
 - **Does ‘falling from grace’ mean that a person can lose his salvation?**
 - In the context of this passage, Paul is addressing those who were saying that circumcision was required for salvation
 - He warned these believers that if a person seeks justification by God through human effort in obeying the Law, then he has rejected the way of salvation that God provided through the gracious gift of His Son -- he has departed from the way of grace, or is "fallen from grace."

- b. Read 1 Corinthians 7:1 → “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman”
 - **Paul isn’t outright disagreeing with this church had wrote him about. So is it indeed wrong for a man to have sexual relations with a woman?**
 - Context of 6:12-20 → men in the church at Corinth were committing sexual immorality of all sorts, including soliciting prostitutes (6:16)
 - Paul reminds them that if they claim to be followers of Christ, they are already have become ‘one spirit with Him’ (6:17); therefore he exhorts the church to flee from sexual immorality
 - So Paul agrees with this statement... but only in part; the context of the follow verses tells us that there is only one relationship within which it is permissible, even good, for a man to sexual relations with a woman – marriage

- c. Read 1 John 3:6-10 → “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”
 - **Does this mean that, in order to maintain his status as a Christian, a believer must never sin?**
 - In the context of the entire book of 1 John this interpretation would be incorrect, because John clearly states that Christians do sin (e.g. 1 John 1:8,10; 2:1; 5:16), and that believers have a remedy when that occurs (1 John 1:9). Therefore, we must seek another interpretation of 1 John 3:6-10 that is more consistent with the context of the entire message of the book.

- d. Read 1 Cor 1:3, Titus 2:11-13, Acts 5:3-4
 - 1 Cor 1:3 → “Grace and peace to you from **God our Father** and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

- Titus 2:11-13 → “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of **our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ**”
- Acts 5:3-4 → “Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? **You have not lied to men but to God.**”
- **Does this mean that there are three Gods, since the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all called “God” in the Bible?**
- No... because elsewhere the Bible explicitly teaches us that God is one
 1. Deuteronomy 6:4 → “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”
 2. James 2:19 → “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.”

II. 20 Reasons why we ought to study the Bible – Psalm 119

1. To know how to walk in the ways of the Lord (v.1)
2. To know how to truly seek after God, not in vain (v.3)
3. To remain pure in heart, to keep away from evil (v.11, 101)
4. To be taught by God Himself (v.12, 33)
5. To know what our soul ought to be consumed by – the proper affections of our hearts (v.20, 37)
6. To receive just admonishing and rebuke and discipline from God (v.21)
7. God’s Word give us life (v.25)
8. To receive wisdom, understanding, judgment and knowledge (v.27, 34, 66, 99, 125)
9. God’s Word is proof of His great and unwavering love for us (v.41, 64)
10. To know God’s plan of salvation for us (v.41)
11. God comforts us through His Word (v.50)
12. To remain steadfast in the Lord, especially when adversity is present (v.51)
13. To receive God’s blessing when we obey His commands! (v.56 and throughout)
14. His Word is a means of His grace to us (v.58)
15. God reveals His great riches to us through His Word (v.72)
16. To receive comfort in our time of need (v.76, 82)
17. God’s Word is trustworthy, unlike the words and thoughts of man (v.86)
18. God’s Word is eternal (v.89, 152)
19. God’s Word is only thing that will satisfy our deepest longings (v.131)
20. His Word informs us how to worship and praise Him properly (v. 108)

III. Basic ground rules for appropriately, effectively and powerfully studying Scripture

- a. **All of Scripture is God-breathed – literally it is the very Word of God**
 - Though God chose to use man to reveal His Word, every single word as recorded in Scripture was super-intended by God Himself through His Holy Spirit

- “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 competent, equipped for every good work.” – 2 Tim 3:16-17
- “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty... And we have **something more sure, the prophetic word**, to which will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that **no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. 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.**” – 2 Pet 1:16, 19-21

b. The Bible contains doctrines that may be paradoxical, but not ‘contradictory’

- A paradox is something that seems opposite or contradictory, but only because it isn’t fully understood – e.g. “God is three persons, and one God” is a paradox
- To say that “God is three persons, but also not three persons” is a contradiction
- Scripture does not contradict itself
- “The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever” – Psalm 119:160
- God’s words are true **individually**
- God’s words are also try **viewed together as a whole** – ultimately, there is no internal contradiction either in Scripture or in God’s own thoughts
- Also called “analogous Scriptura”

c. God has chosen only to reveal certain and specific elements of His truth and His ways to us; there are countless things that only God knows and has full wisdom and insight into

- “The **secret things belong to the Lord our God**, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” – Deut 29:29
 1. Note: this means there are many things that are secrets to us, and perhaps will always remain secrets – and they belong to God... they are God’s thoughts, God’s ways, God’s precepts, God’s reasons – not ours
 2. But also clear is that there are specific things that God has revealed to us, how?
 - Through His creation (Romans 1:20)
 - Through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (“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...” – Hebrews 1:3a)
 - Through His Holy Word
- “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘For **as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.**’” – Isaiah 55:8-9
- Should this not mean that we ought to be approaching studying the Bible with tremendous **humility**?

- How often do we have the attitude that we can fully understand God and His ways, then we walk away “disappointed with God” when we don’t get what we want, or the understanding we want? (book table examples)
- Consider God’s rebuke of Job even as Job searches for an answer as to why God allowed so much suffering into Job’s life:
- “Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: ‘Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?... **Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.**’” – Job 38:1,4
- Then God proceeds with at least 80 challenges to Job of demonstrations of God’s glorious feats of wisdom, might, precise understanding and design, all of which absolutely no human mind can even begin to comprehend!
- “Tell me, if you have understanding”... it’s a rhetorical question! We don’t have understanding – we are fools if we think we do!

d. 4 key principles:

- **The Literal Principle: Scripture should be understood in its literal, normal, and natural sense.**
 1. While the Bible does contain figures of speech and symbols, they were intended to convey literal truth. In general, however, the Bible speaks in literal terms, and we must allow it to speak for itself.
 2. **An obscure or ambiguous text should never be interpreted in such a way as to contradict the teaching of a plain or clear passage.**
 - 1 Corinthians 15:29 → “Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?”
 - The words "baptized for the dead" should not be interpreted to mean that substitutionary baptism can somehow bring salvation to a person who has already died.
 - This would contradict the plain teaching of many other passages in Scripture, e.g. Hebrews 9:27-28 → “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”
- **The Historical Principle: This means that we interpret in its historical context.**
 1. We must ask what the text meant to the people to whom it was first written. In this way we can develop a proper contextual understanding of the original intent of Scripture.
- **The Grammatical Principle: This requires that we understand the basic grammatical structure of each sentence in the original language.**
 1. To whom do the pronouns refer? What is the tense of the main verb? You will find that when you ask some simple questions like those, the meaning of the text immediately becomes clearer.
- **The Synthesis Principle: Scripture must interpret Scripture**

1. This is what the Reformers called the analogia scriptura. It means that the Bible does not contradict itself. If we arrive at an interpretation of a passage that contradicts a truth taught elsewhere in the Scriptures, our interpretation cannot be correct. Scripture must be compared with Scripture to discover its full meaning.

e. We must NOT “proof text”

- Proof texting is taking verses out of context and use them to support points we think are important; our attempt to make the Bible say what we want to say, rather than letting the text of Scripture say what God intended to communicate
- We’re all guilty of this

f. We must avoid superficial interpretations of passages

- How often do you hear, “This verse means to me...” or “I feel that what Jesus is saying here is...”?
- It doesn’t matter what it means to you, what matters is what would the passage mean even if you didn’t exist? What does it mean, period.

IV. Systematic Theology: What it is

- a. Any study that answers the question, “**What does the whole Bible teach us today?**” about any given topic
 - Old Testament or New Testament theology: e.g. what does the OT or NT say about prayer?
- b. In a sense, our Articles of Faith are a form of systematic theology – CGC’s position on various doctrines are summarized and support by various texts from throughout the Bible
- c. Systematic theology focuses on summarizing each doctrine as it should be **understood by present-day Christians**
- d. Will sometimes involve use of terms and even concepts that were not themselves use by any individual biblical author, but that are the proper result of combining the teachings of multiple biblical authors – e.g. trinity, incarnation, deity of Christ
- e. Focus is on the **collection and then the summary of the teaching of all the biblical passages on a particular subject or doctrine**
 - General doctrine → e.g. “Doctrine of God”
 - Specific doctrine → e.g. “Doctrine of God’s eternity”
- f. Some doctrines have become particularly relevant because of the generation we live in, e.g. the inerrancy of Scripture, the doctrine of Satan and demons, the doctrine of the creation of man and male and female re: roles appropriate to men & women today
- g. Systematic theology does **NOT** “improve” on the Bible by doing a better job of organizing its teachings or explaining them more clearly than the Bible has already done

V. Why systematic theology is helpful

- a. Basic reason for teaching and studying Scripture is that Christ Himself commanded that God's Word be taught
 - Jesus said: "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, **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you**. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."— Matthew 28:19-20
 - "all that Jesus commanded" includes all that was taught through Jesus' apostles, and even the Old Testament, which were written about Him and which He quoted frequently
 1. "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; **and it is they that bear witness about me**, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." – John 5:39-40
 2. The Scriptures that they had in Jesus' time were the Old Testament Scriptures
 - Task of fulfilling the Great Commission **includes not only evangelism, but also teaching**

- b. Systematic theology is merely a **framework** or tool through which we can learn Scripture effectively by being directed to the most relevant passages and building an appropriate summary of the teachings in those passages
 - It allows us to delve deeply into better **understanding the full weight of Scripture** on any particular doctrine or question because every passage about a particular question is sought after, in its context, and in context of what other passages have to say
 - This framework also helps to overcome our wrong ideas about the things of God – if we see a theme that appears throughout the Old and New Testament, the totality of what we read and study should convince us of any wrong ideas we hold to
 - Also helps to ensure balanced consideration of complementary doctrines: e.g. Christ's deity and humanity are studied together; God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, etc.

- c. Because the entirety of the Bible is surveyed, and as we said earlier there is no contradiction within Scripture, this way of studying the Bible must demonstrate consistency within and among various doctrines – if there is inconsistency, then we need to revisit our study of a particular topic (not that we will necessarily understand it clearly or fully, but general consistency will be there)

VI. How we should study Scripture, using systematic theology to help structure our study

- a. **With prayer**
 - "**Open my eyes**, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." – Psalm 119:18
 - "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because **they are spiritually discerned**." – 1 Cor 2:14
 - Studying and understanding Scripture is therefore a spiritual activity in which we need the help of the Holy Spirit

b. With great humility (as we said earlier)

- “Who is wise and understanding among you?... But the **wisdom from above** is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”– James 3:13, 17-18

c. With reasoning, and the intellect that God has given us

- The authors of the Bible will often quote a verse of Scripture and then draw logical conclusions from it – they **reason** from Scripture
- Not wrong to use human understanding, logic and human reason to draw conclusions from Scripture
- Our ability to reason and draw conclusions is **not** the ultimate standard of truth – Scripture is; thus, whenever our reasoning is at odds with what the Bible says, we need to submit whatever thoughts and ideas we have (no matter how clever we may think them to be) under the authority of Scripture

d. In community, and with help from others

- God has put teachers in the church (1 Cor 12:28)
- Study in community, talk about what you’ve learned in community
- Seek after counsel from the teachers whom God has placed in our midst

e. Studying Scripture:

- **Read**
 1. Find all relevant verses; helpful tools are concordances that will help you look up passages relating to the specific doctrine you’re studying
 2. Also, helpful to think through the overall history of the Bible and then turn to sections where there would be information on the topic – e.g. if we were to study prayer, we might want to read passages like Hannah’s prayer for a son (1 Sam 1), Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 King 8), Jesus’ prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26), etc.
 3. Important to read passages in context:
 - Verses immediately before and after the passage
 - Paragraph and entire book where the passages occurs
 - Other books by this author, as well as the overall message of the entire Bible
 - The cultural environment, and historical period of the time when the passage was written
 - Context is important because it forces the interpreter to examine the biblical writer’s overall flow of thought
- **Interpret (Nehemiah 9)**
 1. As you read, make notes on the passage, and try to summarize the points made in the relevant verses.
 - Look for themes that might be repeated
 2. Summarize the teachings of the various verses into one or more points that the Bible affirms about that subject

3. The Bible affirms the need to interpret, to analyze, to digest the Word of God so that we can thoroughly get all God's intended flavour out of it
 - Nehemiah 8: "All the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law... Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up... They read from the Book of the Law of God, **making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.**" – Neh 8:1-3, 5, 8

- **Apply**

1. Spend as much time as you can praying and looking into how what you've just learned about God should change your life – how you think, how you act, what you say, how you live
2. Three questions to ask:
 - What do these passages tell me about God? What are things about God that are new to me? What misconceptions about God need to be corrected because of what I've just learned? What has God reminded me about Himself?
 - What does this mean in my own life? So what that etc...? Should my view of things change? The word, myself, others, my job situation, etc?
 - How would I explain this to someone who's never read the Bible before → do you truly understand what the Bible says about the doctrine you're studying?

VII. A Rough Draft of our Framework for Study:

- Reading and studying Scripture appropriately, effectively and powerfully
- Scripture: its inerrancy, trustworthiness
- Scripture: its authority over all matters of our lives
- The doctrine of God: His 'incommunicable' attributes
- The doctrine of God: His 'communicable' attributes
- The doctrine of the Trinity
- Jesus Christ: His total humanity
- Jesus Christ: His total deity
- Jesus Christ: why and how all of Scripture points to Christ
- Holy Spirit: who He is, and how He is described throughout Scripture
- Holy Spirit: His purpose / how He ought to be at work in our lives
- The doctrine of creation
- Creation of man
- Biblical manhood & womanhood
- Fall of Humanity: God's original design for man, what happened when Adam sinned, and what implications did the sin 'through one man' have on us?

- Total Depravity: where does the Bible teach this, and how should this shape our worldview and our view of God?
- Salvation by grace through faith: God's sovereignty in granting us grace
- Salvation by grace through faith: Man's responsibility in receiving grace through faith
- Atonement of the blood of Christ: what Christ's death bought for us
- The resurrection and ascension of Christ
- Regeneration by the Holy Spirit: how does the Spirit work in salvation? what is our responsibility then in evangelism?
- Believer's eternal salvation: Arminius vs. Calvin - can one lose their salvation?
- Sanctification: what it is, and evidence for it in a believer's life
- Gifts of the Holy Spirit: what these gifts are, what they're used for
- Gifts of the Holy Spirit: AGC's view on charismatic gifts / what happens when churches take things too far and move away from Scripture on issues of gifts (e.g. tongues, healing, etc.)
- Prayer
- Church: what is the Church/church? what is the biblical mandate for church?
- Church: what authority Scripturally does a church have over its members, what the roles of leaders need to be, etc.
- Pre-millennial coming of Christ: AGC's view, other views
- Resurrection of the body: what it means that we will be raised up with Christ, and the hope that this should bring
- Eternal blessedness of the saved, eternal punishment of the lost: what is the Biblical picture of heaven? what is the the Biblical picture of hell?
- Satan: who he is, his personality, how he works
- Angels & Demons
- Baptism: the command given, its significance
- The Lord's Supper: the command given, its significance