

***The Person of Christ
From Oak Hill Evening Course - Spring 2006***

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The downloads

Systematic theology and how it works

Christ as the 'yes' to God's promises

Christ as God and Human

Christ – God's Prophet

Recommended Books

Solid foundational stuff in:

- *In understanding be men* T.C. Hammond and D.F.Wright IVP: Leicester 6th ed reprinted 1999
- *Know the Truth* B. Milne IVP: Leicester 1999
- *At the heart of the Universe* P.F. Jensen Crossway 1997

Detail in

- *The Work of Christ* IVP: Leicester 1993
- *The Person of Christ* IVP: Leicester 1998

Notes from Week 1

Prologue - Why bother with systematic theology?

‘There is a curious want of system, Betteredge, in the English mind... When we are not occupied in making machinery, we are (mentally speaking) the most slovenly people in the universe.’

The Moonstone Wilkie Collins

1. Introduction

1.1. Welcome

Why this course?

Because over the last couple of years we've noticed that several major disputes actually boil down to who we think Christ is and what we think He did.

1.2. Books

Solid foundational stuff in:

- *In understanding be men* T.C. Hammond and D.F.Wright IVP: Leicester 6th ed reprinted 1999
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2. Tools for the Course

In this course we are going to be using systematic theology.

Ah.

A lot of us come to Systematic Theology with a certain sniff of suspicion. It conjures up some lurid pictures of the worst kinds of 'academic' theology. I suppose there are many reasons behind that, but today I want to think about just three:

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• unbiblical• over-logical• irrelevant |
|--|

Now, since want to use this approach over the course, we need to see why Systematic Theology - if we do it well - is profoundly *useful* for preserving a biblically faithful life.

To show how that's so, we're going to look at things under three main headings

- * **Systematic Theology**
- * **Where it fits**
- * **Must systematics necessarily fit in?**

Then we need to think some more about how faithful Christians should do systematic theology and what's distinctive about it.

2. Systematic Theology

2.1. What is it?

We're discussing a particular branch of theological thought. Systematic Theology is also often called 'dogmatic' theology or 'doctrine'.

It's become fashionable to think in terms of Systematics *as against*, say, 'biblical studies' or exegesis. That implies that Systematics actually is not 'as biblical' as biblical studies. And it's come to have something of a bad name, notably that it's *unbiblical*.¹

Let's look at some of the misgivings:

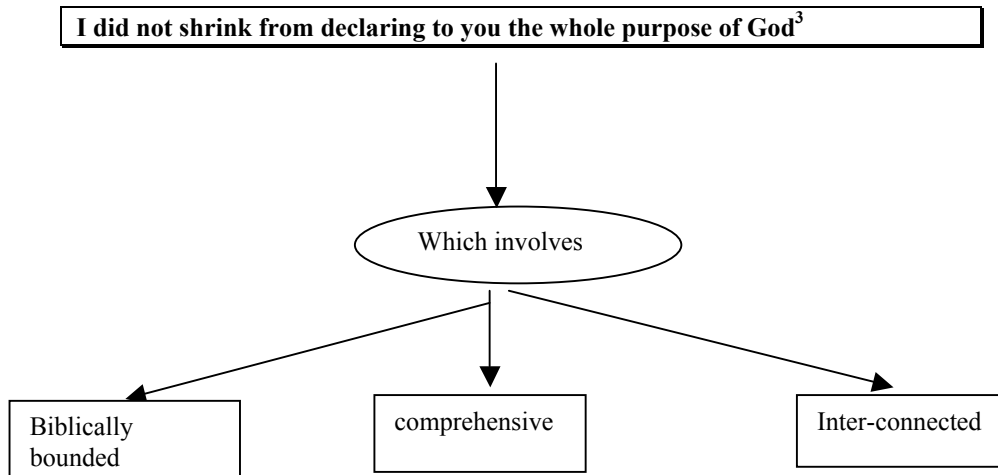
- **adds to/subtracts from scripture¹**
- **---- > ungodly²**

From that point of view, systematics is something that inhibits rather than enhances biblical ministry. Clearly we need to review this. But obviously the first thing to get clear is what precisely we think this thing is.

¹ So, people sometimes cite 1 Cor 4:6, and Is 55:8,9.

² Prov 30:6. Gal 1:9.

The kind of systematic we'll be discussing arises out of Paul's teaching in Acts 20:27:



----- > *in that sense, systematics is simply putting each part of the bible into its ultimate context, the rest of the bible.*

John Frame catches it pretty well:

Systematic theology seeks to apply Scripture *as a whole*. While exegetical theology focuses on specific passages and biblical theology focuses on the historical features of Scripture, systematic theology seeks to bring all the aspects of Scripture together, to synthesise them. Systematics ask, What does it all add up to?⁴

3.2 What that means

If we see Systematic Theology in this kind of way, we see

----- > **Not** unbiblical **BUT** under the bible

----- > **Not** over-logical **BUT** looking for the unity of God's plan



Because of what we believe *about God* – that He is truthful, wise, good, loving and sovereign

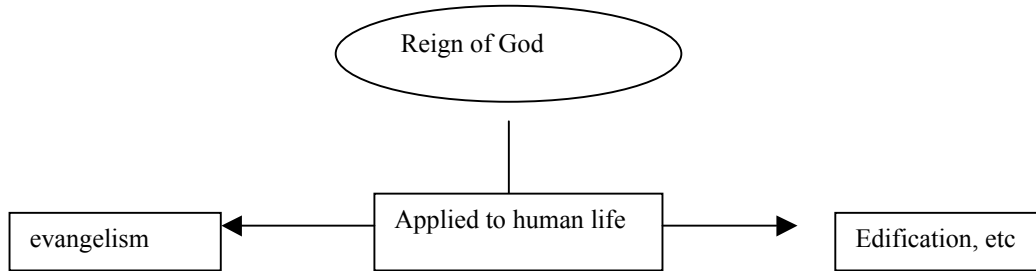
With this in mind we can think a little more about quite where systematics fits in the big scheme of being a biblical Christian.

³ For another notable passage dealing with God's single plan for the cosmos, see Ephesians 1:3ff

⁴ The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God 1987: 212. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing.

3. Where it Fits

It's worth remembering that as Christians we preach the coming of the kingdom or reign of God (Mk 1:15), and that preaching and teaching is about applying that reign of God to human life.

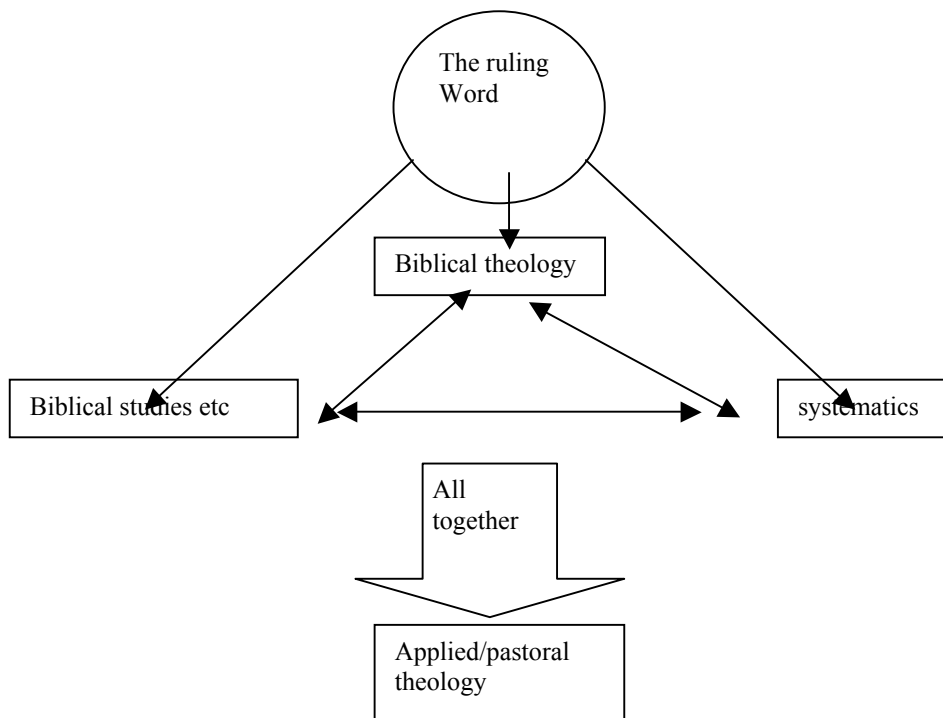


How does God currently rule His people and call men and women to be His people

----- > through His Word

To that extent the people of God apply God's rule by applying His Word.

The practical question is how to apply this Word. In fact several disciplines or techniques are involved.



In that sense we never get to a point where God's Word ceases to be His ruling Word, and in this framework, systematics has several characteristics:

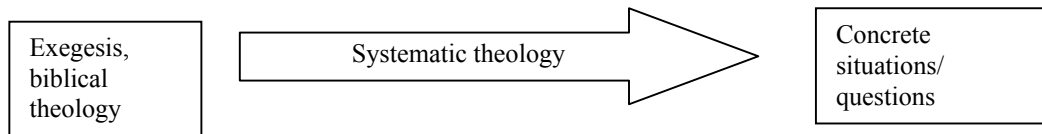
1.1. A *Mediating discipline*

That's to say, it acts as a bridge between other disciplines, joining them.

This occurs in two ways:

4.1.1. *from exegesis to practice*

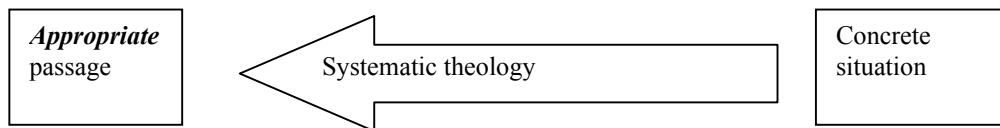
What we're getting at here is that systematics mediates the conclusions of exegesis so that it can be applied to concrete situations or questions.



The fear is that without this, our pastoral responses become unbalanced and unbiblical in that they don't reflect the whole revealed mind of God.

4.1.2. *from practice to exegesis*

How do I know **WHICH** passage to take someone to, in a particular situation? I analyse the situation and see the situation in a particular systematic context and then go to the passage.



1.2. A *regulating discipline*

Again this occurs in two ways:

4.2.1. *tests exegesis*

Even biblical studies are not carried in a vacuum. We come to the text of the bible with certain *systematic* attitudes: - that it is all the product of the Spirit's inspiration of human authors, that one divine plan or mind stands behind it, that at a profound level it does not contain contradictory theologies etc.

4.2.2. *tests the Church's practice*

The Church and its officials are not permitted by the Bible to say whatever they want, no matter how sincere they personally may be about it. What the Church does and says, the Bible teaches, has to be brought to the bar of the faith scripture teaches (note Titus 1:9 in this regard, and Gal 1:9; 2:11-14). Systematics helps do this.

It's important to note:

4.2.2.1. This applies to the Church's exegetical work as well as the rest.

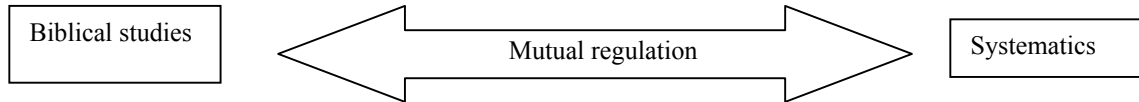
4.2.2.2. This is **necessary** because of the tendency for false teaching to arise within the Church (Note here Acts 20:29-31)

4.3. A *regulated discipline*

This follows from what has already been said. This discipline, and those who practise it are to be subject to the reign of God as expressed by His Word.

In concrete terms, this means

- 4.3.1. systematicians **CANNOT** ignore exegetical conclusions flowing from biblical studies.
- 4.3.2. Systematics and biblical studies need each other to flourish properly under God



5. Must systematics necessarily fit in?

It can be very tempting to see systematics as an optional extra: - is it? Let's take a little problem.

- **All that is necessary is taught by the NT: we lose nothing significant if we concentrate exclusively on the NT in preaching and teaching**

Now you may disagree with this. But how *important* would you rate your disagreement? - yes, this is a moment when you talk it over with your neighbour.

If systematic theology is *merely* an optional extra, our choice is:

Do we have a theology	<i>VS</i>	We don't have a theology
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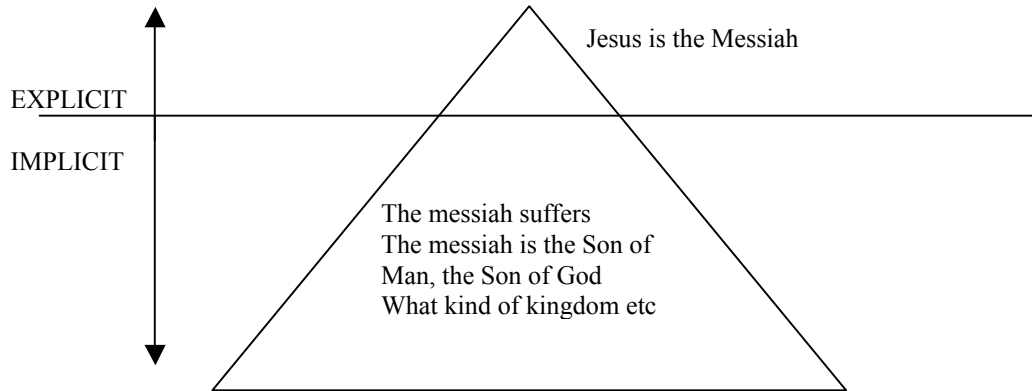
Does that work?

In a way a good historical example of this is Locke: pretty unsympathetic to attempts to systematise, he suggests we only need affirm:

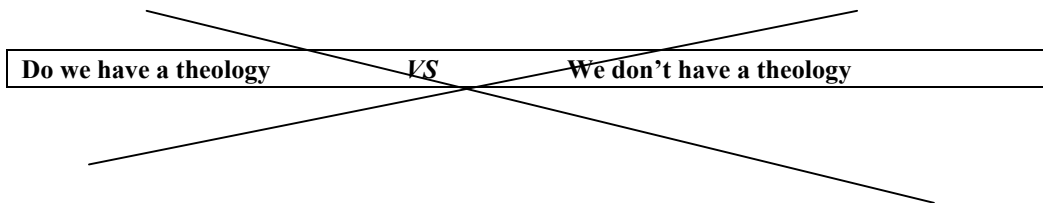
'Jesus is the Messiah'

Obviously a proposal we'd agree with, but then we'd also have to notice that people could (and have) agreed with it who aren't orthodox Christians (those who say Jesus was indeed the son of David but not the eternal Son of the Father)

What we're observing is this:



Ultimately the choice is NOT:

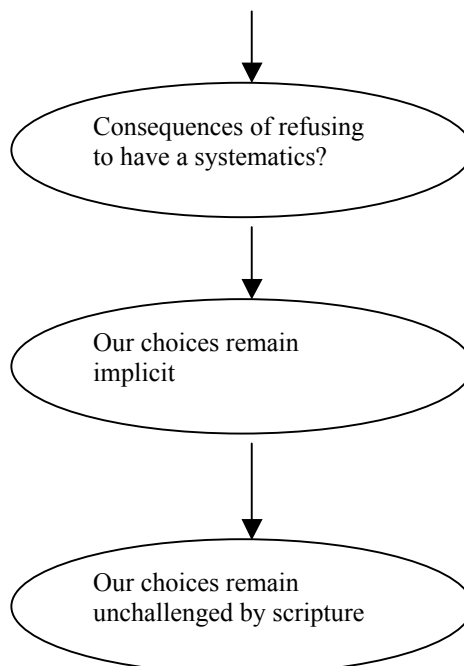


BUT



At this point we note two crucial things:

1. *systematic choices are ultimately inevitable*
2. *we need to make explicit what is implicit*



By contrast, it's worth noting what's going on with systematics: by making explicit what is implicit we can draw proper maps of how things link up in our belief, or if they do at all – we're treating our beliefs as Christians as 'wholes' or systems.

- That's natural enough, because we believe in a God who has one mind or purpose toward us and who reveals Himself.
- That's vital because of our own sinful inclinations even post-conversion at times to suppress truth - systematics helps identify that