

Institutes of Theology (Session 13)
Prolegomena: An Intro to Systematic Theology
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Tonight, as I mentioned, we begin our study of systematic theology by looking at Prolegomena, An Introduction to Systematic Theology. We're going to take a look and consider several introductory matters before we get into our full-blown study of systematics starting this fall with the doctrine of Scripture, also known as Bibliology. But first, I want to begin in Exodus chapter 5.

Well, during one of the most well-known and powerful face-offs in biblical history, Pharaoh asks this infamous question, Exodus 5:2, “Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?” And then Pharaoh goes on to make this emphatic statement, “I do not know the Lord.” I do not know the Lord. So Pharaoh had no doubt heard about the God of the Israelites. Now, keep in mind the context of Exodus 5. He had enslaved God's people for over 400 years. So his statement about not knowing Yahweh could entail that he hadn't heard of that particular name. But coupled with his preceding question, who is Yahweh that I should obey his voice, it seems best to understand that Pharaoh had a flippant view of Yahweh. In other words, men, Pharaoh did not respect or take God, Yahweh, seriously.

Sadly, for Pharaoh and many others throughout human history, their failure to take God seriously, to know God, has resulted in both physical and spiritual death for eternity. It's crucial to understand, and we need to grasp this from the beginning. It's crucial to understand that knowing God is at the heart of the Christian life. In fact, it's Jesus himself, who said in John 17:3, as he's praying to the Father, he equates eternal life with knowing God. Jesus prayed these words, “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” That verb there, to know, means to arrive at a knowledge of someone. The same word can actually be used to describe grasping the significance of something. So according to Christ here, your salvation, your justification, your everlasting destination hinges on what you know about God. And notice Jesus' words. “That they may know you.” He's referring to God, the only true

God, “and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” So this is a Trinitarian knowledge that you must have. Eternal life is knowing the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

DA. Carson, in his wonderful commentary on the Gospel of John, he says these words regarding this verse, “Eternal life turns on nothing more and nothing less than knowledge of the true God.” Now, Carson goes on to say that this knowledge of God isn't merely intellectual or informational, but this knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ entails fellowship, trust, personal relationship, and faith. Men, that's crucial. That's key for us to understand tonight. Knowledge of God isn't merely intellectual or informational. Knowledge of God demands that we have personal fellowship, trust, faith in the one true God. Last semester in Institutes, priority was given to surveying the Old and New Testaments to grasp a holistic understanding of the entire Scripture. This semester, we've considered hermeneutics and a practical process to study the Bible. And next time, as I mentioned, Pastor Tom will conclude that particular process. But tonight, we begin systematic theology. And it is through this discipline of systematic theology that we come to know God better. Again, not merely informational, but life transforming.

BB. Warfield, one of my favorite Princetonian theologians, in the 19th century, he wrote these words, “That systematic theology is nothing other than the saving truth of God presented in systematic form.” Sadly, systematic theology has fallen on hard times. In fact, a cursory understanding of the basic doctrines of the Christian faith seems to altogether be disappearing from the professing evangelical world. A 2022 survey from Ligonier Ministries and Lifeway Research suggests that many professing Christians in the United States don't have a basic understanding of the fundamentals of Christianity. You can say it this way: Many professing Christians don't have a basic understanding of systematic theology. For example, when asked, “Can God change?” Forty-eight percent of professing evangelicals said yes. That's theology proper, the immutability of God. “When asked, are we born innocent?” Sixty-five percent of professing evangelicals agreed that we are born innocent. That's anthropology, hamartiology. The survey goes on to ask, “Does God accept the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam?” Fifty-six percent of professing evangelicals said yes. When presented with this statement, “Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God,” 43% of professing evangelicals agreed. Twenty-six percent agreed that the Bible is helpful but not true. Thirty-eight percent

agreed that belief is a matter of personal opinion, not truth. Now, this theological ignorance isn't just a 21st century problem, although this survey reveals that it absolutely is.

In the 1800s, the first principal of Princeton Seminary and professor of theology, Archibald Alexander, he wrote these words, “It is a lamentable fact that in this land of churches and of Bibles, there are many who know little more of the doctrines of Christianity than the pagans themselves.” Let me read that again. “It is a lamentable fact that in this land of churches and of Bibles, there are many who know little more of the doctrines of Christianity than the pagans themselves.” Again, that's coming off of the heels of the Great Awakening. And you could see even during that time, the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith were not known. The pagans knew more in some cases.

Let me ask you tonight—and we all need to ask ourselves before the Lord—are we equipped in the Scriptures able to defend every single major category of systematic theology? If you were pressed, are you able to explain the doctrine of the Trinity? Can you explain justification, substitutionary atonement? Are you able to explain the ministry of the Holy Spirit? What about the Imago Dei—that man is made in the image and likeness of God? Are you able to defend and define the doctrine of sin? Can you make a biblical case for elder rule? What about a 1,000-year literal kingdom as described in Revelation 20? And the list certainly goes on.

My point is this, men. We must challenge ourselves over the next three years to dive into the Word in a systematic fashion to understand the fundamental doctrines of the faith, and to be able to proclaim those doctrines, not only in our own hearts, in our own lives, but to the dying world that needs the saving faith of Jesus Christ. So over the next three years, Lord willing, we will embark on this journey together, as we will work through every single category of systematic theology, so that we might know the one true God and delight in him.

So let's begin our time by looking at an essential definition of theology. An essential definition of theology. Well the word theology comes from two Greek words, *theos*, which means God, and *logia*, meaning word or discourse. And these two Greek words give us the Latin word *theologia* or *theologia*. So theology in the simplest of terms is a discourse or a formal teaching about God. It's a formal expression about God. It is both a rational reflection of God in general revelation, that which is inherent to all mankind through creation and conscience. We understand that. We

know that all men know God exists through general or natural revelation. We know this from Psalm 19, which tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God. Therefore, by creation alone, every single human being that has ever lived know God exists. We also know this from Romans 2, that the law of God is written on the heart of man, and every single person that has ever lived has the law of God written on their heart, and their conscience either accuses or excuses them. So theology is a rational reflection of God through general revelation, creation and conscience. And theology is studying God in Scripture in what is called special revelation. So rational reflection of God in general revelation and studying God in Scripture both have the aim of knowing Him and understanding what God requires of man.

So simply put, theology is understanding that God has revealed himself, and it is to reflect and study upon that reality and to respond accordingly. Now that understanding or theology-or that definition, rather, of theology—that's not a 21st century invention or even a 21st century idea. In fact, this idea of theologizing goes all the way back to the early church. Augustine, in the 4th century, he says and defines theology as a rational discussion respecting the deity. Jump forward several centuries, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, question number 3, defines theology as, “The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man. That is theology.

Now, it is true that if you did a study on the word theology, that throughout history, it has been used in several ways, in the ancient world in particular, specifically by pagans to promote the idea of worshipping false deities. Greek poets—and this is interesting—Greek poets were often called theologians because their works dealt with a study of the gods. Greek philosophers were also associated with theology because of their speculation about the gods. But this is what I love about Christianity. We will take those words and hijack those words and use them as Christian labels. So in the early centuries of the church, the word theology was captured by Christians, and it was used to describe Christian things or Christian theology.

For example, the early church fathers were referring to those theologians of the first few centuries of the church. Those early church fathers, when referring back to the Apostle John, they referred to him as a theologian. Writing to Gregory of Nazianzus in the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea refers to the doctrine of holy Scripture, Bibliology. He refers to that particular doctrine

as theology. Gregory of Nazianzus, the fourth century Cappadocian father, was considered by others as a theologian because of his staunch defense of the doctrine of Christ. So as time went on, the terms theology, theologians, theologizing came to be connected with the Christian faith. You see, meteorologists study the earth's atmosphere. Theologians study the one true God. Petrologists study rocks and come to the conclusions about their formations. Theologians study the triune God from Scripture, then make conclusions and respond accordingly. Archaeologists study human history from a human perspective. And theologians study divine history from a divine biblical perspective.

Now, in a broad sense, theology refers to studying the Bible, both the Old and the New Testament. But in a narrow sense, and you've used the word in these different forms, but in a narrow sense, theology refers to a study of God's attributes, the person and work of Christ, or Christian morals and ethics. Now, summarizing all aspects of theology, you're familiar with J.I. Packer, but he writes this about theology. He says that theology is "The activity of thinking and speaking about God, and second, the product of that activity." So that's how he simply defines theology. It's actively thinking and speaking about God, but theologizing, and then we do this. Have you had a theological conversation before? You most certainly have.

But secondly, Packer goes on to say, it's also the product of that activity. And then he adds a more lengthy definition, which I think is helpful for us to look at. Packer goes on to say, and track with him here, theology "As an activity, theology is a cat's cradle of interrelated though distinct disciplines, elucidating texts, [that's] exegesis, synthesizing what they say on the things they deal with, biblical theology, seeing how the faith was stated in the past, historical theology, formulating it for today, systematic theology, finding its implications for conduct, ethics, commending and defending it as truth and wisdom, apologetics, defining the Christian task in the world, missiology, stockpiling resources for life in Christ, spirituality, and corporate worship, liturgy, and exploring ministry, practical theology."

Now, that is a heavy and weighty definition, but that is certainly clear and to the point. Theology is more than intellectual information. It's applying every aspect of theology to your life. So doing theology demands a working knowledge of God and responding to that knowledge. So that's an

essential definition of theology. Let's now consider the various kinds of theology. The various kinds of theology.

Now the theological discipline that we will be journeying on and with for the next three years is systematic theology. But we need to understand that other types of theologizing exist. There are other kinds of theologies that we need to engage in because they are all interrelated. They are all connected in some shape or form to systematic theology. So these kinds of theologies have unique methodologies. They have a particular emphases and even specific goals. So let's consider the first kind of theology. You are familiar with this one, and that is exegetical theology.

Exegetical theology. Men, this is what we have been working through the last three sessions that we have met in Institutes. A practical process for studying Scripture. A practical process for knowing and understanding the meaning of any given text from Genesis to Revelation. That's exegetical theology. So exegetical theology, we can define it this way. Exegesis means to explain or lead out of. To exegete the Scripture means you are trying to get the meaning out of the text. In John 1:18, the Greek word is translated declare. So exegesis is to declare the meaning of the text. You know the antonym, eisegesis, which is to import meaning into the text. It's crucial that all theology begin with exegetical theology. So doing this type of theology means that you're using all of the necessary tools to discover the meaning of any given biblical text. It doesn't matter if you're studying the Bible on your own, or preparing to teach a message, or a sermon, in whatever context that might be. That is doing exegetical theology. This is essentially what Jonathan taught in his first two sessions on hermeneutics. As I mentioned, and if you've missed these sessions, go back to that. The first two sessions of Institutes this spring, Jonathan took us through the principles of hermeneutics. Of course, as I mentioned, Pastor Tom took us through Bible study for every Christian in our last three sessions. So exegetical theology at its heart is inductive Bible study.

So not only do you have to mine the depths of the biblical text in terms of meaning, you also have to grasp the whole of Scripture. And that takes us to a second theological discipline, and that is biblical theology. Biblical theology. Now, this discipline, in my view, is the most misunderstood theological discipline because Christians look at that title and assume, oh, well, biblical theology is theology that's built on the Bible. That may be your understanding of what

biblical theology is. And in one sense, that is absolutely true. But let's consider what biblical theology is beyond sort of that cursory understanding of biblical theology. Let me give you a definition here and then illustrate with a couple examples.

First off, biblical theology is tracing a biblical theme as it unfolds chronologically from Genesis to Revelation. For example, tracing the theme of priesthood from Genesis to Revelation. Tracing just the general concept of atonement from Genesis to Revelation. Doing a biblical theology on the concept of elders in both the Old and the New Testament. How many of you guys read *The King and His Beauty* last semester? How many of you attempted to read *King and the Beauty*? That is a biblical theology that focuses on God as King and traces that from Genesis to Revelation. So, that's one aspect of biblical theology. It's finding a particular theme. It is beginning in Genesis and then working your way through every book or every time that theme occurs in Scripture until you get to Revelation. And that's how you formulate a biblical theology on priesthood or a biblical theology on kingship.

The second aspect of that definition for biblical theology, it's also tracing a theme found in a biblical writer or a biblical book. What are examples of that? Well, you could trace the theme of redemption in the Book of Exodus. You could trace the theme of knowing God in the Book of Exodus. Jump forward one book to Leviticus, and you could trace the holiness of God in Leviticus alone. You could jump forward to the New Testament and look at the Book of Galatians and get Paul's theology of Galatians as it relates to justification. You could do that with the doctrine of repentance in First Corinthians.

So you see, the biblical theology has a wide range within its discipline. If I could recommend a couple books to you, let me at least recommend one, a great biblical theology to start with. And it's just a single volume. It's about 200 pages. It's called "The God Who Makes Himself Known." And then the subtitle is "The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus." And it's by W. Ross Blackburn. "The God Who Makes Himself Known." What he does is he begins in Exodus 1 and runs through Exodus 40 and traces the idea that the entire book is centered around the idea of knowing God. It will actually revolutionize your thinking about the Book of Exodus. Often, we think of Exodus in one simple term. How do we define the Book of Exodus? How many of you guys remember that from your Bible knowledge? What's the theme of Exodus? It's redemption.

Well, you will see in Blackburn's book that he makes a great case that Exodus is about knowing God, similar to what we've already talked about. So that's biblical theology.

Let's next look at dogmatic theology. Now, this theology doesn't literally come from dogs, but from the Greek word *decaō*, which means to think or suppose. So dogmatic theology is the conclusion or definitive statements that come by the way of exegetical theology. So you do all of your exegetical work, and then you come to dogmatic conclusions about the exegetical work that you just went through, that you work through. Now, what's key to understand about dogmatic theology is that oftentimes in church history, you will see dogmatic theology and systematic theology as sort of synonymous, two disciplines. Like if you look at Geerhardus Vos has a dogmatic theology that he wrote at the end of the 1800s. It's published now by Lexham Press. It's called "Reformed Dogmatics." It's really a systematic theology. But what I want you to understand about dogmatic theology, although it is sort of synonymous with systematics in some way, dogmatic theology has a particular emphasis on church creeds and confessions. In other words, you take those exegetical conclusions, those dogmatics that you now have, and then you compare those to the ancient creeds and confessions of the church. It's really a helpful study to do that. Find your exegetical conclusions. What does the Bible say about Christ? And then to compare that to what was said in a creed in the 4th century, or a confession in the 17th century.

Next, natural theology. I mentioned this just a few moments ago, but natural theology studies what can be known about God through nature and reality. Another way of saying it is that natural theology is studying what can be known about God through the created order or the created world. Again, Psalm 19, Romans 1 and 2, Acts 14, Acts 17. Those are sort of your hallmark, landmark passages on natural theology.

The next kind of theology is pastoral theology. Pastoral theology, also called practical theology. So this is where you're really bringing it all together here. No matter what discipline of theology you're doing, when you start putting that together, boots to the ground, applying what you're learning, that's the pastoral, the practical theology. That's taking your exegetical conclusions, those that you found from Scripture alone, and bringing them to bear on the minds of the people of the church. Maybe it's your family or whatever context that you're teaching the truth. That's now working in the discipline of practical theology. A.H. Hodge, he defines practical theology

this way. He says, it's "embracing the principles and laws revealed in Scripture for the guidance of Christians in the promulgation of this divine revelation, thus ascertained and interpreted, and thus in bringing all men into practical obedience to the duties it imposes and into the fruition of the blessings it confers." Men, when we apply the truth of Scripture and the theological propositions that flow out of Scripture, we are doing pastoral, practical theology.

The next kind of theology for us to consider briefly is historical theology. Historical theology simply explains how church history has interpreted the Scriptures and formulated its doctrines and teachings for 2,000 years. So we've already done some of this, right? Incorporating quotes from certain theologians in the past. That's doing historical theology. So if you were doing historical theology on your own, this is what you would ask. What did the church fathers teach about the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Why were creeds and confessions written? What did medieval scholars believe about the two natures of Christ? What did the reformers teach about the church? So the questions go on and on, but when you do historical theology, you're looking to go back in history, back throughout church history, and see what Christians have always believed from the beginning. Greg Allison, if you don't have a historical theology, and you need just one, you need to get Greg Allison's book, "Historical Theology." What he does is he works through all the major categories of systematic theology, and he begins with the New Testament church, all the way up until about the present day, demonstrating what the Christian church has historically believed about this particular doctrine. It's really helpful. It's well written. It's footnoted well, so it'll point you in the direction of other resources to get for your library. But Greg Allison, "Historical Theology," and here's how he defines Historical Theology. He says that "Historical theology is the study of the interpretation of Scripture and formulation of doctrine by the church of the past."

Now that brings us to systematic theology. So let's begin looking at systematic theology like we did with theology. Let's start by looking at an essential definition of systematic theology. So the English word systematic comes from a compound Greek word comprised of the prefix *syn*, S-Y-N, which means together or along with. And the word *histanai*, which means to systematize or to set up. Now that Greek word *histanai* is used in the New Testament to describe someone that's standing up. So you get the idea there. Systematic, the idea of synthesizing, bringing together and then organizing it in such a way which it stands on its own. It's complete. It's whole.

You've heard of synthesis, putting one thing together with another. You've heard of a symphony, several instruments making music together. You've also heard of, and hopefully express, sympathy, feeling another person's emotions with them. On the opposite side of that, systematic is not chaotic, disorganized, or scrambled. It's cohesive. So, to systematize means to bring together or collect something. So since we're doing systematic theology, that means to bring together a discourse about God. To bring together a discourse about God. So we can say it this way: Systematic theology seeks to bring together all of the biblical data, all of the exegetical theology of individual passages of the Bible, and neatly organizes it into categories, which in turn gives us a standardized discourse about God. Again, this is why it starts with exegetical theology.

It's not randomly grabbing passages and putting together. It begins by getting down to the meaning of the text first, and then, after you have the meaning of texts, you neatly organize them into specific categories. And when you have those categories organized proficiently, that then gives you a systemized, standardized discourse about God.

Now, let me give you a few definitions from church history so you can see what Christians of the past, what they have said about systematic theology. And they all have a little nuance or an inflection in them, which is very helpful. So John Gill, let's begin with John Gill, an 18th century Particular Baptist. He defined systematic theology this way. "Evangelical truths are spread and scattered about in the sacred Scriptures. And to gather them together and dispose of them in a regularly orderly method surely cannot be disagreeable." So you can see here he's talking about all of these texts scattered throughout Scripture and that they need to be gathered together in an orderly method.

Augustus Strong, many of you have probably heard of him or at least have his systematic theology. He's a 19th century Baptist theologian. He writes about systematic theology, that systematic theology "takes the material furnished by biblical and by historical theology, and with this material seeks to build up into an organic and consistent whole all our knowledge of God and of the relations between God and the universe, whether this knowledge be originally derived from nature [that's that natural theology we talked about] or from the Scriptures." That's exegetical theology.

Charles Hodge, another Princeton theologian, he defines systematic theology this way, “It is the duty of the Christian theologian to ascertain, collect, and combine all the facts which God has revealed concerning himself and our relation to him.” Let me give you two more here.

Geerhardus Vos. In his “Biblical Theology,” which is absolutely phenomenal, if you're wanting to build up your biblical theology library, Geerhardus Vos' “Biblical Theology” is a statement in biblical theology. It is foundational to doing biblical theology. But watch what he does. He compares biblical theology with systematics. He says, in biblical theology, the principle is one of historical. In systematic theology, it is of one, or it is one of logical construction.

Biblical theology draws a line of development, right, from Genesis to Revelation. And systematic theology draws a circle. And then lastly, a modern-day theologian, John Frame, he says this about systematic theology, that it seeks to apply Scripture by asking what the whole Bible teaches about any subject.

So those definitions capture the essence or the heart of systematic theology. But now the question is, how do you organize the system? How have Christians in the past organized systematic theology? After you do your exegetical work and you bring it all together here, how do you demonstrate cohesion? What's the logical order? What is the logical flow? Well, let's begin by looking at the standard categories of systematic theology. Now, we're not going to spend a lot of time here this evening because we'll be drilling down into each of these categories in the semesters to come.

And by the way, if you're looking for an even more in-depth look at systematic theology just in terms of the Countryside world, of course, we'll have four years of material, about seven sessions a semester here in Institutes that you'll be able to refer back to. But when Pastor Tom came to Countryside in 2003, from 2003 to 2006, on Sunday evenings, during the Sunday evening service, he taught through systematic theology. Over 100 messages in systematic theology. So Deon's done a great job at remastering all of that audio, which you can find in podcast form or on the Word Unleashed YouTube channel. But all of that audio is being remastered and will be, I think, all of it available by the end of May. So over 100 sessions. So if you have absolutely nothing to do all summer, you can play those sessions or those lessons in your car over the summer, and you could get all 100 of those on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, YouTube, those things.

So it would be a great journey for you to go through. But let's begin looking at the standard categories of systematic theology.

So if you're going to do systematic theology, where do you start? Well, you start with prolegomena. You start with prolegomena. That's exactly what we're doing tonight. It's just introductory material. You've heard of the word prolegomena before. When you've opened up a book and you see the beginning section titled prologue, right? It's just an introductory section. The two words used there are pro, before, and ligand, to say. So prolegomena is to say something before. So any systematic theology that you have, they all, or most of them is probably a better way to say it, they have these introductory remarks. And depending on the systematic theologian, depending on what he was trying to accomplish in his systematic theology, will determine whether that prolegomena is two or three pages, or it's a hundred pages. But those sections are crucial because it outlines the route for where we are going. Introductory matters. So that's prolegomena.

The next one we'll consider in the fall will be bibliology. This is the doctrine of the Bible and related matters to the canon of Scripture. So we'll begin looking at all of Scripture and what it says about itself. That's bibliology.

Next is theology proper. So not theology in a general sense, like we discussed at the beginning of our time, but theology proper that focuses specifically on the triune God. That word proper helps identify theology proper as a category of theology and not just a general use of the word. This doctrine is a discourse on the existence and attributes of God, including the doctrine of the Trinity. By the way, the existence and the attributes of God. How many of you guys have Stephen Charnock's two volumes on the existence and attributes of God? Excellent, excellent, excellent resource. Now, you need to pick up that and add that to your library. Be sure and ask your wife about that one. It's pretty expensive. But get that one added to your library. So that's theology proper.

Next is Christology. Christology comes from the Greek word Christos, which you know, and that means Christ. So it's a discourse about the person and work of Christ.

Next is Pneumatology, the Greek word Pneuma, which means breath, wind, or spirit. So this category deals with a discourse about the Holy Spirit.

Now, next is Anthropology. Anthropology comes from the Greek word Anthropos, which means man, so a teaching or a discourse about man. What the Bible says about the image of God, and what the Bible says about human depravity. "Ruined Sinners to Reclaim," edited by Jonathan and David Gibson, is an excellent resource on anthropology and talking about human depravity. Over 1,000 pages, but well worth your time, and well worth investing your time in reading that resource. I mean, it's about human depravity, so it's going to beat you up a little bit, but that's going to bring you to the good news of the gospel. So that's anthropology.

And next is hamartiology. Hamartia, which means sin. So this category focuses specifically on a teaching or discourse about sin. This, of course, you'll see in some systematics, it's interrelated with anthropology. So sometimes, depending on the systematic, you'll see these 2 categories connected, or maybe even overlapping.

Next is soteriology. Soteriology comes from the Greek word soteria, which simply means salvation. So this category focuses on the doctrine of salvation, how man can be made right with God. And you see the, you sort of see the logical flow of these categories, right? You've got to know who man is. You've got to know that man's a fallen image bearer, still retains the image of God, but he is a fallen human, a fallen man or woman. Therefore, he is in desperate need of being saved. And that's, that's soteriology. So typically in systematics, those, that section soteriology will work through the order, ordo salutis, which is the order of salvation, which basically takes you from the doctrine of election all the way to the doctrine of glorification. So in the middle there is effectual calling, regeneration, justification, sanctification, all of those words. That's soteriology.

Next is ecclesiology. Ecclesiology, ecclesia, which means assembly or church. Ecclesiology is a study of the church.

Next is angelology. Angelology comes from the Greek word angelos, which means messenger or angel. So this particular category focuses on holy angels, unholy angels, which would be demons, and of course, the ringleader of the demons, Satan.

And then the last category of systematic theology, and this one makes complete sense to go at the end, is eschatology. And eschatology comes from eschatos, which means last things. So it's the last category of systematic theology because it's literally a doctrine about the last things. What

will happen in the future, right? So this is pulling together all of the texts that talk about the great tribulation, that seven-year period described in Revelation. This is the category that talks about the return of Christ in Revelation 19, the millennial kingdom in 20, and then the new heaven and new earth in 21 and 22 of Revelation. Of course, many other texts, but that's eschatology. So those are the categories.

Let's now begin discussing the presuppositions of systematic theology. Now, presuppositions are simply ideas that are presumed beforehand. In our case, these presuppositions are presumed beforehand as we begin to consider or engage in systematic theology. So there are several presuppositions and things for us to consider that we need to have in our mind before we actually get into theology, bibliology, in the fall. So let me challenge you, men, to think through these presuppositions in the coming days and weeks and look to strengthen your understanding of them. Some of them may be more familiar to you than others. Now, you know them, can explain them, and have confidence in them. For others, this may be completely new to you, and you haven't grappled with these presuppositions before. But again, this is part of prolegomena, doing these introductory matters. So let's consider a first presupposition, and it is this.

Scripture alone is the final authority from which we build all our theological conclusions. This is ground zero for the Christian. This is ground zero whether we are discussing expository preaching, whether we are engaging in a theological discipline, or whether we are simply discussing the Christian life in general. Scripture is always the final authority. To use Reformation terminology, sola scriptura, Scripture alone. The Reformers also called the Bible the Norma Normans, which simply mean the rule that rules. But what were they trying to use by those expressions? Well, they were trying to articulate that the Bible is supreme. The Bible is authoritative. Nothing equals it. Nothing surpasses it.

Now, when we investigate bibliology, we will get into the details of Scripture alone, but this view has always been the view of the true, authentic church. The church has always recognized the authority of Scripture. Now, we may not fully agree with their method or hermeneutics or even their conclusions, but we can certainly agree with all of church history with their primary source, Scripture, right? If you go back and look in church history, you're going to come across various hermeneutics, various theological explanations. Some of which we disagree with, and

that's fine. But what I want you to see is that the primary source for which those things were always drawn out of was the Scripture. In fact, and we'll talk about this in a moment, this Christian church has always been able and always ready to engage with other resources to help his understanding of Scripture. Yet, those resources have always set subservient to Scripture. Never the other way around. Never. So what I want you to understand is that Scripture alone is our final authority, but over 2,000 years of church history, Christians have recognized that commentaries, lexicons, creeds, and confessions, and those things are helpful and bring insight to maybe what Scripture means, but they always sit below or subservient to the Scripture.

This was true even during the time of the Reformation. They too were committed to the Scripture as the ultimate and final authority, and—and this is what some people miss about the Reformation—they were trying to bring the Scripture back to its preeminence, that it is the final authority. And, and they did that. But at the same time, the reformers were also trying to rightly argue for the correct place for tradition. You see, they weren't anti-tradition. What they were anti is when the tradition had overstepped its bound above and beyond Scripture. So they rejected that view. Again, we'll talk about this in a moment. And they embraced Scripture alone as the final authority, in all traditions, setting underneath it. It's crucial.

And that actually brings us to the next presupposition. And that is that creeds, confessions, and all other theological works are authorities, but sit subservient to and merely explain Scripture. We understand that. And that's what I want us to see in these presuppositions. That creeds, confessions, and church councils, and all other theological works and people sit subservient under the Scripture.

So what role do creeds, confessions, church councils, systematic theologies, commentaries, study Bibles, and other works play? Well, Carl Trueman, in his book “Crisis of Confidence,” deals with this very issue. So if you're wanting a 250-page book on creeds and confessions and what role they play as it relates to the Scripture, a subservient one, “Crisis of Confidence” is a helpful introduction to that. But here's what Carl Trueman writes. He says, “Tradition is not the issue. It is how one defines that tradition and how one understands the way it connects to Scripture that are really the points at issue.” So theological tradition—or just simply tradition—is a collected body of Christian teachings that spans from the first century to today. So when we talk about

theological tradition or Christian tradition, all we are saying is a collected body of teaching from the Christian church going all the way back to the first century. That's what we mean by tradition.

All right, so we left off before we took a little break there, talking about creeds, confessions, and church councils, and all other theological works, understanding that they are authorities, but they sit subservient to Scripture. So it is okay. And throughout church history, it is well known and stated that creeds and confessions, etc., they do have a limited authority underneath the Bible. And we understand this, right? If you were to come up to me and ask me a question after Institutes, or if you were to go up and ask Pastor Tom a question after Institutes, which one of us has more authority? It's not going to hurt my feelings, right? Pastor Tom has more authority in the sense that he's been a believer for longer, he's been a ministry for several decades, and those things. We recognize that. But we also recognize his response or explanation about the Scripture sits subservient to it, right? He isn't the final authority at all. But he is an authority, and so are the creeds and confessions and those things. So how are we to view that tradition? Understanding the right place for these historical documents. Well, there's an article by Justin Taylor titled, "Sola, Scripture, Three Views in Church History on the Relationship Between Tradition and Scripture." It's a short article. It's worth your time. Look that up. Read it this week.

So there are basically three ways to understand tradition. Tradition zero, tradition one, tradition two. We're going to look at those. So tradition one (zero) says that private or personal interpretation of Scripture is all that matters, and one should never check their interpretive conclusions against any other resources or traditions in church history. This tradition suggests that no other theological works matter in one sense, and that 2,000 years of Christian interpretation shouldn't be consulted or considered. This is also sometimes called *nuda* or naked Scripture. You've also probably seen this come across social media or maybe people talking about it. This is the "No creed, but the Bible" position. Tradition zero is rampant, by the way, and we reject this form of tradition. But you see this in seeker-sensitive churches, health, wealth, and prosperity churches, the emergent church some 15 years ago. Some of you men will remember that. And even some of the "young, restless, and reformed" movement. This tradition is all about the CEO-type pastor, the personality-driven pastor, the personality-driven church. They thrive on tradition zero because only what they say matters. Only what they say matters. Private and

personal interpretation. They study the Scripture. Their conclusions are taught. They are never questioned. And no other source from church history is ever consulted to check their interpretation. That's tradition zero. No creed but the Bible.

Let's next consider tradition two. Tradition two. Now, this is best articulated by the Roman Catholic Church. And we don't have time to get into all the details and the intricacies there. But their view is that Scripture and only their interpretation of Scripture and only their church's tradition are all in equal authority. So Scripture, their interpretation of the Scripture, and their tradition, it's all equally authoritative. And as you know, and you understand church history, that equality soon gets reversed because then the interpretation of Scripture and the tradition begins to oversee what Scripture actually says. So Scripture plays that subservient role in tradition two. Again, this is Roman Catholic theology.

But there is a better and a biblical way to sort out Scripture alone and tradition, and that is tradition one. Tradition one, this is the camp that we want to be in. We don't want to simply interpret Scripture and never check it with anything else. We also don't want to interpret Scripture and then have our view or the church's view supersede the Scripture. So we want to fall in tradition one. So tradition one argues that Scripture alone is the ultimate and final authority, sola scriptura, but church tradition serves a subordinate ministerial checks and balances role. Let me say that again. Church tradition serves a subordinate ministerial checks and balances role. So what this category teaches is that you do your personal Bible study, you do all of the exegetical work, then, and we talked about this in the evaluation process of our Bible study for every Christian, then you check your conclusions with 2,000 years of church history. That means checking your conclusions with the people of your church, maybe the leaders of your church, and also any other commentary or theological work from 2,000 years of church history. This is the evaluation step. Those things don't drive your interpretation, but you use them to evaluate your conclusions.

This is just wise Bible study. You compare your conclusions with church history. You don't want to—and we've probably already all been there at one point or another—but you don't want to have an interpretive conclusion or a systematic truth proposition that isn't found anywhere in church history. And men, that's the beauty of 2,000 years of church history. You know, a lot of

people give the church fathers, those men from the second and fourth century, they give them a really hard time because they got some things really, really, really wrong. Well, you have to understand where they were coming from. The New Testament documents, it took several decades for those documents to circulate the ancient world. So, not only at times did they only have maybe a partial New Testament, but secondly, they had like 100 years of church history to work with, and they couldn't get all of that on their phone. You see? So, we have all of the Scripture, old and New Testament, and we can get access to that anywhere, anytime, men. What a time to live.

In addition to that, we have 2,000 years of church history that we can go on Google and just PDF, Google search, whatever we want, and we can basically get it. Or Russ will get it for you down in the bookstore, okay? No pressure, Russ. This is wise Bible study. And if we come to conclusions that no one in church history has ever landed on, the chances are that we are probably wrong. But this is the beauty of church history, because we can check our conclusions.

George Mueller, a Reformation scholar, he helpfully writes—and track with me through this quote—he writes, “Sola Scriptura was never meant as a denial of the usefulness of the Christian tradition, as a subordinate norm in theology, and as a significant point of reference for doctrinal formulas and argumentation. The Reformers and the Protestant Orthodox defined Scripture as the absolute, therefore, prior norm, but allowing the theological tradition, particularly the earlier tradition of the Church Fathers and ecumenical councils, to have a derivative but important [this is key], secondary role in the doctrinal statements.”

So again, I mean, we all hear about Reformation theology, right? The Reformers, the Reformers, John Calvin, John Calvin, Martin Luther, we love those guys. And we do. But the Reformers held, including those men, to sola scriptura, but they also used Church history as evaluation. And we can't be scared of doing this. If you're reading a systematic theology from the 11th century, and you happen to be talking about that with someone, that's good and right, because that's an evaluative checks and balance, right? No one is saying that you are wholeheartedly agreeing to that particular systematic theology, right? That's okay. That's good.

So, Carl Trueman, again, in his book, “Crisis and Confidence,” he writes, “ This is not to demand capitulation before church tradition or a rejection of the notion of Scripture alone, rather, it is to

suggest an attitude of humility toward the church's past that simply looks both at the good that the ancient creeds have done, and at the fact that they seem to make better sense of the testimony of Scripture than any of the alternatives.” Now, that's helpful. Here's how Pastor Tom summarizes all three positions in his book that's coming out next June, or this June, rather, called “The Pastor in Systematic Theology.” He says, “The Catholic Church says, it only matters what we say it means. [That's tradition two.] Many evangelicals say, or at least imply, it only matters what I say it means. [Tradition zero.] The ministerial use of historic interpretation says it matters what fellow believers have said it means for 2,000 years.” That's tradition one.

Well, one more theologian just to cement this in your mind, Robert Lethem. In his systematic theology, he says, “Tradition, viewed as the past teaching of the church in its confessions, creeds, and representative theologians, effectively represents the sum total of the accumulated biblical exegesis of the Christian church.” Now, listen to what he says. “It is not on a par with Scripture, some of it may even mislead us, but we neglect it at our peril and use it to our great advantage.” That is excellent. And that's what, men, that's what Christians have been doing for centuries.

If you go back and read Augustine, Augustine was all about Scripture alone. He was all about it. But he was also about checking his theological conclusions with whatever writings existed at that time to see whether or not he got it right. And then Augustine goes on to say that whatever he found in the church theological tradition that contradicted Scripture, he threw it away. And that's how we need to use church history. Tradition one, that's the camp we want to be in.

So another presupposition that we can consider tonight is that non-scriptural or extra biblical terminology can be used to describe scriptural concepts. We have to be comfortable with this reality. It is perfectly acceptable within Christendom to use extra biblical words to define biblical concepts. In other words, it's completely appropriate. I would even say mandatory to use terminology that isn't found in the Bible to describe theological realities that are in the Bible. Francis Turretin, again, writing a three-volume systematic, he says, “It is not lawful to form any doctrines not in Scripture, yet it is lawful sometimes to use words which are not found there if they are such as will enable us either to explain divine things or to avoid errors.” That's so helpful. Turretin is saying that Christians, councils, synods, etc. throughout church history have adopted and set apart the best available words to describe biblical concepts.

Let me ask you men, can any of us here provide a better word than the Trinity? Tertullian first used that word in the second century. It's amazing. It has stood the test of time for 1800 years. Can any of us provide better terminology for the doctrine of inseparable operations? Which says that God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all work together inseparably? Can any of us provide a better expression than the *communicatio idiomatum*? Which is Latin for the communication of properties between the full deity of Christ and the full humanity of Christ. That hurts my head thinking about trying to come up with other words than that.

But again, if the extra biblical words don't actually describe what the Bible teaches, reject it. Reject it. But it's helpful to be able to use language and to use terminology to be able to define these concepts, right? If we all sit around after Institutes tonight and someone brings up the Trinity, every one of us in here knows what we're talking about, right? And we can just go to that category, and we can think through it and theologize about it. These words are helpful. So even though they aren't found in Scripture, the concept is, and that's more important. We want to try to be able to use human language to get the concept right. Another presupposition.

Reading and citing various Christian traditions is acceptable and doesn't entail wholehearted agreement to every aspect of that tradition's theology. The good systematic theologies and the well-rounded theologians interact with various Christian traditions that agree with the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. So once there is agreement on the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, it is completely acceptable to maybe go outside your theological tradition and examine other theologies. I mean, if you go down to our bookstore here on campus, you will find that. You will find a variety of systematic theologies from different camps. Right? If you are to get biblical doctrine by MacArthur or "Reformed Systematic Theology" by Beeke, you're going to see significant differences at certain categories of systematic theology. They all hold to the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith but will differ greatly in areas like ecclesiology and eschatology. Get both of them if you can. Read both of them. Digest both of them. It's completely acceptable to do that.

Interact with the Princetonian theologians of the 19th and early 20th centuries. That's my favorite church period, church age. The 1800s, and the guys from Princeton. They are staunch Presbyterians, however. But they were committed to the authority of Scripture. They were

committed to the local church. They were committed to missions. Interact with the people from the Great Awakening here in America during the 18th century. High view of God, high view of Scripture, and the church.

I quoted from John Gill earlier, read John Gill's writings. He's a Particular Baptist from the 17th century. I mean, if you interact with John Calvin and Martin Luther, you are interacting with a reformed tradition that we disagree with on certain points, and that's okay. You can interact with the Puritans, the Reformers, the medieval theologians. Read all of the creeds. Read all of the confessions. Interact with the church fathers. Go back to the primary sources. Interact with those men.

My point is simply this. In Institutes, and even just studying systematic theology in general, we will bring in quotes from different traditions within Christianity, and that doesn't mean that we, or even you, if you quote those men, adhere to every aspect of that tradition, and that's okay. That's what theologizing is. That's what investigating categories of systematic theology does for your own heart and soul. It shapes and forms your theological beliefs and convictions, hopefully shaping your life. It's good that we do that.

Next, a fifth presupposition. Citing various Christian theologians is acceptable and doesn't entail wholehearted agreement to every aspect of their theology. Again, this is the same point, just worded differently here in this presupposition. If I quote John Calvin, I'm not trying to baptize babies every weekend. In fact, the book of the month for May all the way to August, the sort of summer reading book, is Calvin's Institutes. You need to buy it, along with the other ten books that I've mentioned that you buy. So, we differ with Calvin, but we want to digest his Institutes. If I quote the Puritans, that doesn't mean I've embraced all tenets of covenant theology. If I quote Joel Beeke, that doesn't mean I embrace every aspect of his four-volume systematic theology. I mean, he's preached here twice, so we are okay with Joel Beeke, even though we have some slight differences. That's theologizing. That's doing systematic theology. That's one of the reasons it's so fun. I mean, not only are you plumbing the depths of God and getting to know Him personally, but you're interacting with 2,000 years of church history to see what good, faithful, and godly men have concluded about the Scripture.

Next, no matter how far we drill down into the sacred text of Scripture, we will never exhaust the depth and knowledge of the triune God. Never. We are sinful, finite, human beings who live in a fallen, sinful world, and it is impossible on this side of heaven and eternity to know everything and especially to be right about everything. Job, he comes to the conclusion that the things of God are too wonderful for him. Job 42, Psalm 139:6 says that God's knowledge is too lofty to obtain. Ecclesiastes tells us that man cannot fathom the work of God. Isaiah 40 tells us that God cannot be searched out. Isaiah 55 tells us that God's thoughts and ways are higher than man's. And the Apostle Paul, and you know this from Romans 11, verses 33 through 36, "The depths and the riches of both the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and unfathomable his ways! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who became his counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. For it is to Him be the glory forever."

We will never get to the depth of God, and that's okay. Gerald Bray, he writes, "The good theologian must know how to recognize the boundaries of our understanding and must remind curious souls not to stray beyond the limits that God has imposed on our learning. God reveals only a part of his being and plan for us until we are ready to enter into the fullness of eternal life. When that happens, we shall see Him face to face and be able to understand it all."

A last presupposition that I didn't put up here, but I'll just tell you it. It is acceptable to disagree on non-essential matters of Christian theology. We've already touched on that, and that is okay. That is acceptable. The core doctrines, the fundamental doctrines of the gospel are key. We must embrace, champion, and defend them, but we also know that there are second and third tier doctrines that don't rank as high as the fundamentals of Christianity.

Now we've been talking about systematic theology. Let's begin to make a biblical case for systematic theology. Now I think as we work through a biblical case for systematic theology, this theological discipline will become more concrete in your mind. Now again, the Christian Church has been doing this for centuries, but why do we do systematic theology? Is there biblical warrant to do this? Well, yes. So let's work through a case for systematic theology. Let's begin by looking at the character of God.

The first argument for systematic theology is that God himself is a God of order, a God of organization, and a God of structure. Put in the negative, God is not a God of chaos, disruption, or disorganization. The classic text on this is 1 Corinthians 14 verse 33. The text says, “For God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.” God is not a God of confusion. Now, confusion has the idea of disorder, unruliness. The context of 1 Corinthians 14, as you know, is about spiritual gifts, that you must use them orderly and properly. But that, of course, can be applied to the character of God. He is a God of order, of organization. So systematics is just that. It's organizing a discourse about an organized God.

Another argument is the inspired canon of Scripture. God has given us a canon of Scripture, a body of work, a body of revelation. The writing of the prophets in the Old Testament, the writing of the apostles in the New Testament. Over 1400 years, God used over 40 authors across three continents using three languages to give us the Scripture. My argument here is that the infinite omniscient God has given in the Scriptures a particular and organized set of words that are to be read, study, and passed on to the next generation. Systematic theology helps us do this. God determined who the authors would be, where they would write, what they would write, how it would be distributed, what length it would be, what genre they would write, the organization of that content, and the depth of the detail, or even the brevity of their detail, and their unique and particular focus. You read the Book of Galatians. It's very different than the Book of Hebrews. Galatians is focused on justification by faith alone. Hebrews is focused on Christ as your great high priest. And we could go through each and every book. But God has ordered and structured the canon of Scripture in such a way to reflect his character and as an argument for us to do systematics.

A third biblical argument is the biblical confessions of faith. So we've talked a lot about church history and creeds and confessions. We also need to understand that there are biblical confessions of faith. In other words, there were short brief statements in both the Old and the New Testament that Christians would confess. For example, you know this one. In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6:4, “Here, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.” Virtually all Old Testament scholars recognize this powerful statement from God as a Hebrew confession. The Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Yahweh is one. That's what the nation of Israel would confess. That's what they held to.

A second confession that we find is in the New Testament. Jesus is Lord. Romans 10:9 and verse 10, it says that “if you confess with your mouth, Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Right? We know that foundational text in Romans 10. Right? Paul unfolds the doctrine of election in Romans 9, that it is God who saves, and then he gets to Romans 10, and he talks about man's responsibility to believe, and in order to be saved, you have to confess Jesus Christ as Lord. Those are biblical confessions. Confess means to profess allegiance and to do so publicly. Most, if not all, New Testament scholars note that this was probably an early Christian confession. You confess Jesus Christ as Lord, then you were baptized. It's amazing to look back at the history of that confession.

But Jesus is Lord. When the Greek translation of the Old Testament translates the Hebrew name of God, Yahweh, it translates it Kurios, which is Lord. Therefore men, when you confess Jesus as Lord, you are powerfully stating that Jesus Christ is God. That's the confession. John Murray, he writes, “This lordship presupposes the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ and consists in his investiture with universal dominion.” So when you confess Jesus as Lord, you are confessing his life, his death and his resurrection. Men, we have to hold to both of those confessions, right? Yahweh is one, and Jesus is Lord.

Another argument for systematic theology is the ministry of Christ and the Gospels, the ministry of Christ and the Gospels. Turn to Luke 24. Now, not only was Christ the greatest expository preacher to have ever lived, He was also the greatest systematic theologian. The heart of Christ's ministry, of course, as you know, wasn't primarily about miracles, but it was his teaching and preaching. And from his birth until his death, he regularly participated in synagogue worship of the true God. But when his teaching ministry began at the age of 30, he was unwaveringly committed to expository preaching in the synagogues. Luke 4 describes and gives a template of his expository preaching. We're looking at Luke 24, but Luke 4 is a template for expository preaching. And Luke 24, where I want you to be now, is a case for systematic theology. So Christ used both disciplines. We should as well.

Luke 24 describes a couple of events after the resurrection. You are familiar with his meeting the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. These men were trying to understand what had just happened over the weekend, with Christ's death, and so on. Jesus says to them in verse 25, “O

foolish men, and slow of heart, to believe in all that the prophets have spoken, was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?" Now here it is. Notice verse 27. "Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, he explained to them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures." So Christ takes the Old Testament Scripture, and he pulls together the specific passages to talk about his crucifixion and death and resurrection and explains it to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Now of course he probably explained the events that had happened the week before during Passion Week, but he goes back to the Old Testament and he collects most likely verses from Isaiah, several verses in Isaiah, several verses from the Psalms, other passages, Zechariah, you know them, you're familiar with those Messianic texts, but he grabs all of those and says, well, that's me, those were all about me. So he does systematic theology.

Another argument is the apostolic witness and tradition. Another way of saying this would be the ministry of the apostles. Turn to 1 Timothy, and we're going to run through these references quick, and you'll see the point as we look through the text. A careful reading of the New Testament, particularly the pastoral epistles, reveals that the apostles both understood that there was a certain body of doctrine they were commissioned by Christ through the Spirit to either teach, preach, or write down. Look at 1 Timothy 4:6. Again, quickly, we're going to move through these. Paul writing, "And pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Jesus Christ, constantly nourished on the words of the faith, and of the sound doctrine which you have been following." So, Paul is referring to a certain body of teaching that Timothy has been following. Now, of course, this is the Old Testament Scripture. We know that from 1 Timothy 5. But what Paul is also saying here is that there is a body of doctrine that is circulating under the authority of the apostles. The apostles teach that doctrine, and then they write that doctrine down in the first century. That's our new time.

Now, go over to 1 Timothy 6:2 and 3. "Teach and preach these principles. If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing." Now, there's a lot going on in this text. But this text tells us that we are to teach the truth. We are to explain the truth. We are to preach the truth. And there's a body of doctrine that Timothy, or rather that Paul is arguing for, that must be taught and must be preached. Look down at verse 20.

“Oh, Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you.” Well, Paul's not talking about possessions. He's not talking about a garment. He's not talking about food or supplies. Guard the doctrine, that body of belief. Guard what has been entrusted to you.

Turn over to 2 Timothy. 2 Timothy, a few pages over. In chapter 1, verses 13 and 14, Paul again instructs Timothy, “Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me.” Verse 14, “Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us the treasure which has been entrusted to you.” He's not talking about an actual treasure chest. Paul is telling Timothy to guard the treasure, guard the doctrine, guard the teaching, guard that body of truth. Matthew Henry says that these verses speak about the main principles of Christianity that must be collected and brought together. Paul tells Timothy, look, the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith, guard those with your life. And there's more text in the pastoral epistles that talk about those realities.

Another argument we could consider is the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Now in Acts 15, the apostles and other early church leaders are gathered together to issue a statement regarding the Old Testament law and what the Gentiles were required to keep. See, what had happened was the Judaizers had come on the scene, and they were teaching that you can be saved by faith in Christ and getting circumcised. So the Judaizers came along and said, look, salvation by faith alone and Christ alone, not good enough. It's faith alone, Christ alone, circumcision alone. It's basically what they argue for. So the apostles and the early church leaders, they gathered together in Acts 15 tells us, verses 6 and 7. It tells us they come together to look into this matter. It tells us they have a debate about the matter. They had an investigation. They concluded that circumcision was of no power and that salvation was by grace and faith alone. Now, what did they stake their conclusions on? I mean, was it a great conversation they had? I'm sure it was. I would have loved to have been there that day. That would have been amazing. But they all got together, and they had one body of doctrine, the Old Testament. They went there. Then they had an apostolic body of doctrine that was forming and coming into existence as the apostles preached. And they used that to be able to conclude that salvation is in Christ alone. They did systematic theology.

Another argument we could look at is the Apostle Paul's ministry. Turn to Romans 3, and we'll just scan our eyes across Romans 3, but you're familiar with Romans 3. Romans 1, the Apostle Paul indicts the Jews or the Gentiles. Romans 2, he indicts the Gentiles. So when you look at

Romans 1 and Romans 2, the goal in those chapters is for Paul to indict all of humanity. So he does that, a logical argument on natural theology is actually what he does. But then when he gets to Romans 3, he sort of shifts modes here. He moves from natural theology to systematic theology. Just take your eyes down across verses 10 through 18 of Romans 3. So he indicts the Jews, chapter 1. He indicts the Gentiles, chapter 2. Now in chapter 3, he's going to do systematic theology, verses 10 through 18. He cites seven Old Testament passages to make his point. What's the point? All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So, I mean, Paul, he has no problem operating as a systematic theologian. That's what he does here.

Another argument is the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 1. Turn to Hebrews 1. Now, I included this one here. Some people think Paul wrote Hebrews, but if he did not, we've got another example of another New Testament author doing systematic theology. So turn to Hebrews 1 real quick. Now, Hebrews, as I mentioned earlier, it focuses on the superiority of Christ, that he is a great high priest. That's the focus, 13 chapters of that. But in chapter 1, the writer begins to describe the exaltation of Christ. This is post-resurrection and ascension. He talks about the exaltation of Christ. And he goes on to describe that Christ as high priest, he is not standing, but he's seated because his work is done. He has accomplished redemption for those whom the father has elected. But before he gets into that argument, follow with me here. In Hebrews 1, verses 5 through 14, he strings together seven Old Testament quotes to prove the sonship and deity of Jesus Christ. His primary audience is Jews. So, for the writer of Hebrews to get the point across to the Jewish audience in the first century, he goes to the Jewish Scripture, and he says, look, here are seven Old Testament passages that tell us about the deity of Christ. He does systematic theology.

Another argument is the analogy of faith. What is the analogy of faith? Let me give you this expression. Scripture interprets Scripture. In other words, all of Scripture helps interpret individual passages of Scripture. For example, 1 John 3:6, it says, and listen to this, "No one who abides in Christ sins." Now, if you take that verse by itself, and you don't assess the context and the rest of Scripture, what conclusion could you come to? Well, if I'm a Christian, I should never do what? I should be sinless. But the analogy of faith, Scripture interpreting Scripture, knows that you must let the context speak. 1 John 3, and then you must let the whole of Scripture speak. I mean, Paul in Roman 7, he's a believer writing there, and you can see the wrestling and the

struggling and the grappling with sin, the flesh, right? “The things that I hate, I do,” right? So the analogy of faith is another reason why we need to do systematic theology. We need to be able to let all of Scripture speak to an issue.

So those are the arguments for systematic theology. Let's just survey quickly the historical precedent for systematic theology. Now, we do systematic theology because there is biblical warrant to do so. But we also do systematic theology because this is what Christians have always done. The rise in theologizing occurred in church history because the early Christians were being persecuted for their faith and they needed to understand the doctrines that they were willing to die for. In addition, several doctrinal heresies arose throughout church history, so Christians began to theologize the totality of Scripture to establish a system of beliefs. This is crucial. They wanted to know what they believed and then refute that what contradicted. Now, they weren't navel gazing, but Christians had begun to die for their faith, so they wanted to write down from the Scriptures what they believed and why they believed it.

Now, there's a lot of routes that we could go to take a look at the historical precedent for systematic theology, but you can start just looking at different historic church periods. You can look through the New Testament Church, particularly the Book of Acts. We just looked at that. You look at the Church Fathers, those men from the second and fifth centuries. You'll see people writing about Christology. You'll see people systematizing the categories of the Christian faith. You get to the fourth century, and men like Athanasius wrote about the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ. You see Augustine writing about Christian doctrine, the Cappadocian fathers, and so forth. You get to the medieval age, and you've got men writing systematic theologies. You get to the reformers.

I mean, what a time for the Reformation and the printing press. That's why we have so many of their works available to us today. Men like Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, Ulrich Zwingli, and so on. You get to the Puritans. Anybody ever been to Banner of Truth's website? Yeah, if you haven't, go there. They've got Puritan works, Reformation heritage. You can find their works. The scholastics during the 17th century, the Princetonian theologians in the 19th century, the moderns, of course. I mean, again, we have so much content available to us.

So you could look through historic church periods. You could also consider historic church documents. Look at the creeds. See why the creeds were written. A majority of the creeds were written in response to heretical and false teaching. Look at the confessions, the confessions particularly after the time of the Reformation. Again, we don't have time to go through all of these, but you can find these easily, and they're widely accessible. Many confessions were written in response to the Reformation. They had broke off from the Catholic Church and needed to systematize what they believed, and that's exactly what the confessions are. Many that we could talk about. The most notable ones, the ones that you're probably most familiar with, would be the Westminster Confession of Faith and the 1689 coming from the Baptist perspective. Worth your time investigating those. Now, let's end our time tonight by just considering the primary reasons to apply systematic theology. I'm not exactly sure where I heard him say this, but Mike Riccardi in recent weeks, maybe in recent months, has said, he said that theology that is not applied is theology that has been aborted. In other words, systematic theology isn't systematic theology if you don't apply it to your own life. Now, there's a lot we could say about that. I get this. It's late. I understand. There's a lot we could say.

But let me just focus on one particular point, and you can review the others at some point this week. The primary reasons to apply systematic theology. First, it helps in organizing or helps in your organizing, knowing, and teaching all of Scripture. Men, it doesn't matter if you have the gift of teaching or not. You must know the Scripture. You must organize the Scripture, and you must teach the Scripture. Scripture commands us men to teach our wives and our children. That's Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 6. That's not a suggestion. Those are clear-cut requirements for men. We are to train our wives. We are to train our children. Even the grandparents are to teach their grandchildren and the people they are associated with. Read 2 Timothy 3. Who played a major role in Timothy's life? His grandmother and mother. We all have the duty and responsibility to know the word ourselves and pass it on to the people the Lord has entrusted to us.

Men, think about the people in your life. Think about your family, your connections, the people that you know best or that you are associated with. In the Lord's providence, he has put those eternal souls in your life. And he has given us his revealed word in systematic form, at least in terms of what we are studying over the next three years. And we are to pass that on to those

whom we are deeply and intimately connected with. Getting them to corporate worship on Sundays is the start, but then shepherd them during the week. Don't let Sunday mornings be the only time your family or you personally engage in the ordinary means of grace. Make it a daily priority. Systematic theology helps.

It also helps in organizing and structuring the local church, refuting doctrine that contradicts, it regulates our corporate worship. It also helps in experiencing and practicing the Christian faith. We've touched on this enough tonight. Just two more for us. It also helps in connecting us with prior generations of believers. And then lastly, it helps in our knowing, understanding, and living for the glory of the triune God.

Men, remember back in Exodus, where we began our time tonight. Pharaoh, he said, who is the Lord that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? And then he goes on to say, I do not know the Lord. Let that not be true of us. We want to know the Lord, and we want to know our God, and we want to obey all that he has revealed in his precious, holy word. Let's pray together.

God, we're grateful for our time tonight. We're grateful that you have given us your word, and you have given us your word with such clarity that we are able to take it and categorize it in the discipline of systematic theology. And to do that, God, not only to know you, but to live for you and your glory.

Thank you for these men being here tonight and their willingness to put in the hard work to be here, to read, and to study your word. I pray that you would bless us and our time and our endeavors. And we ask all these things, in Christ's name, Amen.