**Maranatha Bible Church 2020**

**Equipping Hour: Systematic Theology**

**Week 1: Introduction to Systematic Theology and Theology Proper (The Doctrine of God)**

**Introduction**

**The purpose of this class**

The stated purpose of this class is to introduce the church to theology in general and to the operation of systematic theology specifically in order that it would lead to richer doxology. This class is going to pinpoint one of the systematics per year, this year being Theology Proper or the Doctrine of God. The purpose of this is to familiarize the church with the stated doctrine and show how the Bible describes or supports each doctrine.

**The hope/goal of this class**

The goal of this class is that each person would realize not only the value found in studying theology but come to realize that every person (Christian and non-Christian alike) is a theologian. The atheist acts according to their understanding of God as does the Muslim, Buddhist and any other religion. The difference with the Christian is that God has revealed Himself to us in His word. We are going to take our time going through this teaching series so that each of you can walk away with a deeper, richer and fuller understanding of who God is and what our responsibilities are towards Him.

When we study who God is and what He has done, we can come to a more complete understanding of Him which then corresponds to a holier and more sanctified life. We should ***never*** study theology for the purpose of studying theology. If our study of theology does not lead to doxology (praise) then we are certainly misplacing our priorities. As Paul says in Romans 11:33 “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!”

Another hope of this class is to introduce you to other theologians and their belief systems. I hope to be able to expose you to a variety of Christian thinkers who have sought to not only study and learn, but teach and apply what they have mined from the pages of Scripture. There is an obvious contrast in systematic theologies, when written by a pure academic, it most certainly lacks the attempt of the author to have even the most common of man to understand. When written by a pastor/theologian, the understanding and application is central in the mind of the man. I hope to give a mixture of both, to stretch you in your understanding and to exhort you in your living.

As we are most familiar with the writings and sermons of Dr. MacArthur, while I will be using his *Biblical Doctrines,* it will not be the main book for this class. For the main reason that it is good for all believers to allow other men of the faith to speak into their lives. Firstly, we do not want to live in an echo chamber where our own thoughts and beliefs are simply affirmed back to us. Secondly, we want to be challenged in our thinking by men who have differing opinions and applications within their doctrines. Thirdly, these men, while they may not hold to every point of Theology that we do, are still our beloved brothers in Christ and have all earned a place in the history of the church.

1. **What is systematic theology?** 
   1. Before looking specifically at systematic theology, *we need to define theology* and how it differs from what is commonly known as religion.
   2. What is theology?
      1. Simply put, it is the study or science of God.[[1]](#footnote-1)
         1. To study God, we must not just study *who God is*, but also, because He is an active God, His work in creation, redemption and His interaction with humanity.
      2. As Erickson further seeks a fuller definition to include the following “the discipline that strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith, based primarily on the Scriptures, placed in the context of the culture in general, worded in a contemporary idiom, and related to issues of life.”
         1. Erickson’s definition includes five key areas:
            1. Theology is biblical
            2. Theology is systematic
            3. Theology relates to issues of our general culture
            4. Theology must be contemporary as it uses language to explain timeless concepts and thoughts.
            5. Theology is practical
      3. Beeke defines theology as “narrower than religion or godliness, for theology is not the whole life devotion, but specifically the engagement of the mind with truth as the foundation of the religious life. Yet theology is quite broad, including an exposition of all the truths about God and his relationship to man as recorded in the Bible.”[[2]](#footnote-2)
      4. B.B. Warfield said “Theology and religion are parallel products of the same body of facts in diverse sphere; the one in the sphere of thought and the other in the sphere of life.”[[3]](#footnote-3)
         1. What these men are simply saying is that without proper theology, we will not be able to live properly before God. What we learn through theological studies should constantly be shaping our understanding of God and thus constantly correcting and forming our lives to Him.
   3. Now, with that in mind, *what is systematic theology?* 
      1. Systematic theology is one of the main branches of theology. It seeks to show what the whole Bible teaches about a given topic and its relation to other topics.
      2. Exegetical Theology[[4]](#footnote-4), what a particular part of the Bible teaches.
      3. Biblical Theology[[5]](#footnote-5), how is a particular doctrine of the Bible developed in relation to all of redemptive history.
      4. Historical Theology, how have the doctrines of Christianity been identified, formulated, elaborated, defended and applied during the long history of the church.
      5. Philosophical Theology, how does logic and reason help us to develop the doctrines taught in passages of Scripture into a logical perspective.
      6. Natural Theology, what can be known of God by human reason alone through the empirical study of the natural world.
      7. Apologetic and Polemical Theology, the engagement of false and hostile doctrines.
      8. Ethical Theology, what has God revealed in the whole Bible about the duties he requires of us.
      9. Dogmatic Theology, is the organization of Scripture with an emphasis on favored or selected church needs.
      10. Pastoral or Practical Theology, what God has revealed concerning the office and work of the pastors.
   4. Louis Berkhof wrote concerning systematic theology “it seeks to give a systematic presentation of all the doctrinal truths of the Christian religion.”[[6]](#footnote-6)
   5. There has always been push back regarding system theology. Most saying that God cannot be put into a *system*.
      1. Charles Spurgeon responds “Systematic Theology is to the Bible what science is to nature. To suppose that all the other works of God are orderly and systematic, and the greater the work the more perfect the system: and that the greatest of all His works, in which all His perfections are transcendently displayed, should have no plan or system, is altogether absurd.”[[7]](#footnote-7)
2. **How do all the branches of Theology work together for the Christian?** 
   1. For the pastor/teacher:

|  |
| --- |
| * + 1. The Christian Life: How are we to live now that we know? |
| * + 1. Practical Theology: How the pastor’s is going to teach according to the Scriptures |
| * + 1. Systematic Theology: What does the rest of the Bible say about this topic |
| * + 1. Biblical Theology: Tracing the author’s argument throughout the Bible |
| * + 1. Exegetical Theology: Dig into the passage you are teaching |
| * + 1. Hermeneutics: How are you going to interpret your passage? |
| * + 1. The Canon of Scripture: 66 inspired books |

1. *This is a very, very simplified list for those who teach*. There is still place for historical theology, learning how the church, throughout history, taught or believed about a certain passage.
2. Also, the teacher may have to defend or show fault in other doctrines, using apologetics and polemics as he is teaching.
   1. All these parts move together and as you are examining the Scriptures they certainly overlap in one’s study.
3. “We must constantly examine our hermeneutical, theological and apologetical presuppositions in light of exegetical data.”[[8]](#footnote-8)
4. “Theology without exegesis is like an illusive flame, it has neither heat nor light.”[[9]](#footnote-9)
   1. For the everyday Christian:
      1. This will be unpacked more in the next section, but one should desire to know what the church has believed throughout history and what the whole Bible teaches on a subject. This is invaluable for the believer.
      2. Ephesians 4:14-15 “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ…”
         1. There are no new heresies, just new men trying to fleece the flock of God by packaging their old heresies in new language.
5. **Why study / know systematic theology?**
   1. The reading, studying and knowing of systematic theology is not something that should be left up to the “religious elite.”
   2. According to Kevin DeYoung, there are six main reasons why[[10]](#footnote-10):
      1. The Bible’s interest in truth demands it.
         1. As Christians we should have a passion for truth, just as the Bible does. We are transformed by the truth and then are called to walk according to the truth.
         2. We need to know the truth *before* we can please God.
      2. Our view of Scripture demands it.
         1. All of Scripture is breathed out by God (2 Tim. 3:16). This means that everything in the Bible matters.
         2. It also means that everything in the Bible possesses a fundamental unity, coming as it does from the same author (Matt. 19:4-6; Hebrews 3:7; 2 Peter 1:21).
         3. Systematic theology seeks to make the comprehensive unity seen and savored.
      3. Realism about the human intellect demands it.
         1. One way or another, we will come to conclusions about the most important religious questions. ***Who was Jesus?***
         2. What is the human predicament? Is there a hell? How can we be saved? How should we treat each other? What does it mean to be a good person? Why is there something rather than nothing?
         3. As soon as we set out to answer these questions we are engaging in systematic theology. The human mind can’t help but synthesize and organize.
      4. The history of the church demands it.
         1. Why can’t we just let the Bible speak for itself? Because that’s not what we see in the Bible or in the early church.
            1. In Nehemiah 8:8, the leaders “read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”
            2. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul refers to the tradition they had received from him. God has always given his people teachers to not only read Scripture but to communicate and guard the truth of Scripture (2 Tim. 1:13-14).
      5. The unity of the church demands it.
         1. True unity is not possible apart from robust theological fidelity. Church unity requires doctrinal agreement: “There is one body and one Spirit-just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call-one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4-6).
         2. How can we contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) if we do not have a deep understanding of that faith?
      6. The duty of the church demands it.
         1. Why waste time on systematic theology when there are people who need to hear the gospel?!
            1. Because those people need to hear the true gospel. If we are to proclaim the message, we must know what that message is. We owe it each other, we owe it to other churches, and we owe it to the world to give a clear articulation of our faith.
            2. Clarity requires carefulness, carefulness requires precision, and precision requires systematic theology.
6. **The Doctrine of God (Theology Proper)** 
   1. “The knowledge of God is ultimately the sum of all other doctrines; there is no sense, there is no meaning or purpose, in any other doctrine apart from this central, all-inclusive, doctrine of God Himself. There is no point in considering the doctrine of salvation, nor the doctrine of sin, unless we have started with the doctrine of God.”[[11]](#footnote-11)
   2. How does the Bible introduce us to God?
      1. **Genesis 1-3** not only gives us an account of the beginning of all of mankind but also gives us an introduction to who God is. He is mentioned 32x’s in Gen. 1 alone. What can we learn about God from these first three chapters?
         1. God is…
            1. Always been…never created…never a time when He was not…independent of anything
            2. There is a God and He has spoken
         2. God creates
            1. God is the one who acts…
         3. God designs
            1. Physics, laws of nature, humans over animals…He is intentional
         4. God’s standards
            1. His standards are a reflection of who He is
         5. God’s authority
            1. Where and what Adam and Eve could eat
            2. He placed the waters and land where they would go
   3. Knowing the incomprehensible God
      1. “Because God in infinite and we are finite or limited, we can never fully understand God. In this sense, God is said to be incomprehensible.”[[12]](#footnote-12)
      2. It is for this reason that God would never have been known unless He reveled Himself.
         1. Romans 1:19 “because that which is known about God is evident within them; ***for God made it evident to them.***”
         2. Matthew 11:27 “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and ***no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.***”
         3. The knowability of God is not found in the world’s or man’s wisdom.
            1. 1 Corinthians 1:21 “For since in the wisdom of God ***the world through its wisdom did not come to know God***, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”
      3. His greatness is incomprehensible
         1. Psalm 145:3 “Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, And His greatness is unsearchable.”
      4. His understanding is incomprehensible
         1. Isaiah 40:28 “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.”
         2. Psalm 147:5 “Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.”
      5. Declarations of Scripture
         1. Job 11:7-9 “Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth And broader than the sea.”
   4. It is important to note that while God can never be known comprehensively or exhaustively, He can be known truly.[[13]](#footnote-13)
      1. God is knowable by what He has revealed to man:
         1. God’s revelation about Himself is true, accurate and trustworthy therefore He can be known truly and accurately
            1. When the Bible says that God is love (1 John 4:8); God is light (1 John 1:5); God is spirit (John 4:24); God is righteous (Rom. 3:26); these things are absolutely true.[[14]](#footnote-14)
            2. God can only reveal these things that are true about Himself.
            3. His own revelation about Himself can and should be trusted.
         2. Man was created to live with knowledge of God.
            1. Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

We can know God and that He spoke so we can understand.

The Bible never seeks to defend or prove the existence of God, it simply states that He is and always has been.

* + - * 1. 1 John 5:20 “And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding *so that we may know Him who is true*; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”
        2. Jeremiah 9:24 “but let him who boasts boast of this, *that he understands and knows Me,* that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.”
  1. There is general revelation and the need for special revelation to know God. This is of the utmost importance for the Christian to understand for all aspects of their life. How can one truly know God and what knowledge brings them to salvation?
  2. This is where we would have to answer several questions, *can man be saved apart from special revelation? Is seeing God’s creation and/or our own inner conscience enough for us to be born again? Can my intellect and reasoning bring me to a right knowledge of God?* 
     1. God is knowable because He made Himself knowable.
        1. General revelation: in my opinion, there is no better place to see the stark contrast between General and Special Revelation than **Psalm 19**.
           1. **Verses 1-6** speak of how we know God through nature
           2. **Verses 7-14** speak of how we know God through His word
        2. Not only do we have **Psalm 19**, Romans 1:18-20 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”
           1. Between **Psalm 19** and **Romans 1**, we see that God has revealed Himself in both creation and our conscience. That is why man will stand before God without excuse as God either condemns him or redeems him.
           2. As Strong points out “The existence of God is a first truth; in other words, the knowledge of God’s existence is a rational intuition. Logically, it precedes and conditions all observation and reasoning.

Chronologically, only reflection upon the phenomena of nature and of mind occasions its rise in consciousness.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

* + - 1. Part of General Revelation is man himself; as we were all created in the image of God. Human nature is imprinted with a representation of God.
         1. Even though man is fallen and in a sinful state, he still bears marks of being created in God’s image.
         2. As Calvin says regarding man “[he] is a rare example of God’s power, goodness, and wisdom, and contains within himself enough miracles to occupy our minds.”[[16]](#footnote-16)
    1. General revelation is not something that is potential, as if the person has to recognize it in order for it to *be* revelation.
       1. General revelation is actual, not potential, revelation. As Psalm 19:1 says…*the heavens declare…*The onerous is not on God to reveal Himself so that people will know, He has already.
       2. This is why people, all people, will stand before God without excuse. Nobody will be able to say that they did not know.
    2. God is knowable through the person and work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.
       1. Special revelation is revelation that identifies the source of wisdom, salvation and joy not as general, but being the actual Word of God.
       2. It is *special* because it is not granted to all mankind through natural means, but to select people through supernatural means who then, in turn, tell it to other people.[[17]](#footnote-17)
       3. Christ is the mediator of divine (special) revelation:
          1. Jesus said in Matt. 11:25-27 “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that *You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants*. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and *no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.*”
          2. Jesus and Peter in Matt. 16:15-17 “He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. “And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”
       4. Special Revelation only takes place through the Son according to the Father’s will, revelation is an act of divine sovereignty, in which the Father hides himself from some sinners but reveals to others, not according to their worthiness but according to his good pleasure.[[18]](#footnote-18)
          1. Matt. 13:11 “Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.”
       5. The Holy Spirit is the effective agent of Special Revelation in the Son.
          1. 2 Pet. 1:21 “…for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

1. The church and both Special and General Revelation.
   1. General Revelation is there to show that there is a divine being. This can be used by Muslims, RCC, LDS, SDA, Deists and anyone else who desires to show a *higher power*.
   2. This is not the God of the Bible, the Christian God. While *proofs* of God have their place, it is not in the salvation of souls. We do not seek to prove the Bible or prove that God exists with the hope that one would be saved.
   3. Remember back to Genesis 6:5 “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the *thoughts* of his heart was *only* *evil* *continually*.” Man cannot reason or logically think through a way to God. We are fallen, in every way.
   4. We must rely on the Spirit of God to use the Word of God to regenerate people from death to life. Jesus said “John 6:47 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.”

1. Erickson, M. (2013). *Christian Theology.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic .p.8 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Beeke, J (2019) *Reformed Systematic Theology* Vol. 1, Wheaton, IL, Crossway, pp. 40-41 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Warfield, B (1981) *The Idea of Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker, p. 57 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A component of both Biblical and Systematic Theology [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A component of Systematic Theology [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Berkhof, L (1979) *Introduction to Systematic Theology,* Grand Rapids, MI, Baker, pp. 58-59 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Charles Spurgeon, as quoted from *Biblical Doctrine*, John MacArthur (2017) Wheaton, IL, Crossway, p. 36 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Dr. George Zemek [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/why-should-we-study-systematic-theology/> 09/04/2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (2003) *Great Doctrines of the Bible* Vol. 1, Wheaton, IL, Crossway p. 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Wayne Grudem (1994) *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, p. 149 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Biblical Doctrine* pp. 146-147 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Dr. Matt Waymeyer [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A.H. Strong (1985) *Systematic Theology* Valley Forge, PA, Judson Press, p. 52 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. John Calvin *Institutes of Christian Religion* Book 1, Chapter 5, section 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. J. Beeke *Reformed Systematic Theology*, p. 264 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid. p. 267 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)