

Essential Christianity: An Introduction to Historic Christian Systematic Theology

With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including God's
Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity

Lessons One and Two: An Overview of Systematic Theology
What is it; why is it important; and how can I explain it to others?

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Why This Course Is So Important

- Our Lord has given us his Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) to go into all the world and proclaim his Gospel which alone through the work of the Holy Spirit changes human hearts and minds bringing us into a relationship with the one true God.
- Not at all to minimize the importance of elections—which are so important every Christian should vote—but even if we put the best people in office and made the best laws in every level of government, while improvement would occur, we would still have much the same situation we have today, because all people are sinful and oriented away from God, and until human hearts and minds are changed, such disharmony will continue to exist.
- Our pastor is right on target in reminding us every Sunday to look for opportunities to tell people about Jesus.
- But what do we say?
- That is the subject of this course!

Historic Christian Systematic Theology

A Matching Task

The Six Main Bible Doctrines, Bible Text Bases, and Practical Applications

Bible Text Basis	Bible Doctrines	Practical Applications
<p>³...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴...was buried...was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵...appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living...(1 Corinthians 15:3-6)</p> <p>1</p>	<p>Theology (The Doctrine of God)</p> <p>A</p>	<p>A statement from the Bible that indicates continuity with loved ones in Christ together with God forever.</p> <p>a</p>
<p>⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8-10)</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Christology (The Doctrine of Christ)</p> <p>B</p>	<p>Since God is sovereign, we can have peace of mind and sleep well.</p> <p>b</p>

Historic Christian Systematic Theology

A Matching Task

The Six Main Bible Doctrines, Bible Text Bases, and Practical Applications

Instructions

1. Fold under the blue line with the three headings and tear off the top your sheet. Lay it on a flat surface. Then tear the three vertical columns. The letters and numbers on the cards are not in any particular sequence.
2. Fold and tear the Bible Doctrines cards and put them in their logical order under that heading.
3. Fold and tear the Bible Text Basis cards and match them under that heading with their corresponding Bible Doctrine card.
4. Fold and tear the Practical Application cards and match them under that heading with their corresponding Bible Doctrine and Bible Text Basis cards.

Historic Christian Systematic Theology

A Matching Task

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Instructions

5. After hearing the correct matches, make any corrections in your alignment and count the number of mismatches (the number of changes you need to make). The correct matches are:

Historic Christian Systematic Theology

A Matching Task

The Six Main Bible Doctrines, Bible Text Bases, and Practical Applications

Instructions

5. After hearing the correct matches, make any corrections in your alignment and count the number of mismatches (the number of changes you need to make). The correct matches are: A4b; F3d; B1e; C2f; E6c; D5a.
6. Take a 3x5 card and write a four digit number you'll remember in the upper right corner. Then write the number of mismatches in the center of the card. Turn the card over. Slide all the cards to the center table. Shuffle the cards.
7. At the end of the course, the cards will be returned, and mismatches will drop to 0 for each person. This is a way to measure one of the learning objectives of this course.

Introduction to Systematic Theology

What Is Systematic Theology?

1. The word, theology, like many words, is used in a narrower and in a broader sense.
 - a. Theology (in the narrower sense) refers to the study of God. The term, theology, derives from two Greek words.

Theology < θεός (*theos*) → God + λόγος (*logos*) → word, subject, message
 - b. Theology (in the broader sense) refers to the study of God and the other main related teachings about God and his plan of redemption revealed throughout the Bible.
2. Christian theology brings together all the teaching of God's Word, the Bible, and groups the Scriptures by subject categories. That part of theology called systematic theology, arranges the categories in a Biblical sequence, or system, that explains the logic of God's plan of redeeming his creation after Adam and Eve corrupted it with their disobedience.
3. Throughout the church, theologians have used different designations of the main categories of the subjects of Scripture. One is **creation, fall, redemption, and consummation**. This paradigm is an easy-to-remember and helpful means of understanding and explaining the main message of God's Word in an historical and theological, linear and logical, framework. And, there's another that fits well with and further explains it.

Introduction to Systematic Theology

What Is Systematic Theology?

4. Early church leaders discerned six main subjects, also called doctrines, themes, or loci, that occur throughout Scripture, which is God's special revelation of himself: who he is; what he is like; what he has done; what he is doing; and what he will do.
5. All six of the loci are referred to in the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans; in fact all six are even referred to in one chapter (8). The word, loci, is the plural of the Latin word, *locus*, meaning place, locale, or site of something, in this case all the Bible has to say about each of these six subjects.
6. Further, these six loci offer essential Biblical content that helps us understand and explain life today and vital aspects of the Biblical teaching about the creation, fall, redemption, and consummation of God's plan to restore his creation perfectly and permanently.
7. The church early on saw that these six loci can be arranged in a system, a logical order, that explains the rationale of the main parts of God's revelation in the Bible. Knowing these six loci help us understand and help us to help others understand God's plan of redeeming his creation in and through Jesus Christ. (Cf. 1 Peter 3:15) What are these six loci?

The Six Loci of Historic Christian Systematic Theology

1. **Theology:** What the Bible Reveals about God
2. **Anthropology:** What the Bible Reveals about Mankind
3. **Christology:** What the Bible Reveals about Jesus Christ
4. **Soteriology:** What the Bible Reveals about Salvation (This doctrine is also called **Pneumatology** and **The Application of Christ's Redemption**, What the Bible Reveals about the Holy Spirit, the key agent in applying Christ's redemption for our salvation)
5. **Ecclesiology:** What the Bible Reveals about the Church
6. **Eschatology:** What the Bible Reveals about the Last Things or The End Times

Now, let's take a closer look at what these key terms mean.

The Six Loci of Historic Christian Systematic Theology: Biblical Derivation and Meaning of the Greek Terms

1. **Theology** < θεός (*theos*) → God + λόγος (*logos*) → word, subject, message
2. **Anthropology** < ἄνθρωπος (*anthrōpos*) → mankind + *logos*
3. **Christology** < Χριστός (*Christos*) → Christ, the Anointed One + *logos*
4. **Soteriology** < σώζω (*sōzō*) → save, keep safe, preserve, rescue, make well + *logos*; cognate: σωτήρ (*sōtēr*) → Savior, redeemer, deliverer, preserver.
Pneumatology < πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) → Spirit (the Holy Spirit); wind, breath + *logos*. **The Application of Christ's Redemption**, specifically to individuals.
5. **Ecclesiology** < ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*) → assembly, congregation, church < ἐκ (*ek*) → from, out of, away from + καλέω (*kaleō*) → call, name, summon, invite → literally, (the ones) called out (by the Lord) + *logos*
6. **Eschatology** < ἔσχατον (*eschaton*) → last + *logos*: individual and cosmic end

The Integration of the Six Loci of Historic Christian Systematic Theology

The Logic of the System and a Summary of the Six Main Doctrines of the Bible

- 1. Theology:** Everything starts with God. Essential aspects of God include his triune being; that he is creator; owner; most holy, righteous, and just, such that nothing unholy ever enters his presence; steadfast love to the core of his being; and for his being completely perfect in every way.
- 2. Anthropology:** God created humans perfect, even to a limited extent in his image, but the first ones disobeyed God; this sin, which has resulted in cosmic disharmony, so corrupted themselves and their posterity that we cannot come into God's presence and have eternal life without his help. In love, God gave his law to teach his will, his plan of restoration, and to restrain sin to prevent chaos in the now sinful and evil world. What's his plan?
- 3. Christology:** Since God is love, he is unwilling to destroy sinful humans who bear his image, but to preserve his holiness, righteousness, and justice, he instituted his plan to have one perfect human being represent all others, fulfill all the law, and credit that righteousness to all people who believe in and follow him. To accomplish God's perfect will for human beings, that one righteous human also had to be divine; the only One who could fulfill all God's law is his only begotten Son, the Redeemer, Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ, who did so in his First Coming to earth in his life, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. The whole Bible focuses on Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus, and only Jesus (John 14:6), makes salvation, living forever in the presence of God, possible. How?
- 4. Soteriology:** This explanation of salvation explains how the Third Person of the triune God, the Holy Spirit, applies the redemption and salvation Christ has provided to all individuals who believe in and follow Jesus.
- 5. Ecclesiology:** This doctrine explains how God calls out, sets apart, brings together, and equips those whom he has redeemed in a new (i.e., renewed) covenant, the church, all those from every race and nation, to work together to most effectively bring to and implement the Good News of salvation throughout the whole world.
- 6. Eschatology:** When the time is right in God's sight, he will bring the present age to a conclusion and restore his original plan in a new (i. e., renewed) heaven and new (renewed) earth. How he has already begun to do so, is seen in what the Bible reveals about the Last Things, or The End Times, including what occurs when we die and what occurs at the end of history, when Christ Jesus returns in his Second Coming.

The Nicene Creed

- The historic Nicene Creed was constructed and approved by the first ecumenical, worldwide, council of the Western and Eastern parts of the church that met in Nicea (in Asia Minor, now eastern Turkey) in A.D. 325 to resolve important doctrinal issues that had arisen, first and foremost involving the divinity of Christ as being coeternal with the Father. Contrary to contemporary atheists and other skeptics, Jesus' divinity was upheld by over 300 of the bishop delegates signing the creed to only two who did not sign it; Jesus did not "win buy a squeaker!" The creed, which has withstood all the centuries since, and which should remain until the Lord returns, contains the most essential of the essential Christian doctrines, and this creed is the most widely used among churches throughout the world in their worship, study, and witness for the triune God. It is thus appropriate to include here as an advance organizer for our study of historic Christian systematic theology.
- Notice that all six of the loci are present, and in their essential logical systematic order. Notice also that the negative aspect of anthropology, human sin, is expressed in the most positive and uplifting manner, and is incorporated by implication in the section on Christ, e.g., "for us and for our salvation," and as a part of what Jesus took upon himself "for our sake...he suffered death."
- It is significant that the Nicene Creed was originally written in the first person plural. This wording is very important to maintain, especially in the West with its highly individualistic, even narcissistic, cultural characteristics. See more in the notes on the following slides.

The Nicene Creed

DISCUSS AND/OR REFLECT: *As we recite the original Nicene Creed, identify each of the six loci.*

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Nicene Creed

Some students and other readers may notice small, but very important, differences in this version of the Nicene Creed from what they have heard elsewhere, beginning with the first word, “We.” The original Nicene Creed was written in the first person plural. I prefer to use the original version, especially for accuracy and also in contemporary America and in other Western contexts, to counter the pervasive individualism in this part of the world that is conducive to much unbiblical thinking and acting, even to the extent of heresy.

Also, sadly, many Protestant congregations have substituted the word Christian for the original and very significant word, catholic (meaning universal, global < Greek, *κατά* [*kata*], throughout, + *ὅλος* [*holos*] all, whole, entire). Since the words catholic and Christian are not synonyms, for accuracy (not only to the original creed but most importantly to God’s Word, which throughout, from Genesis through Revelation, emphasizes God’s call to his people to carry his plan of redemption to every nation, tribe, people, and language), and to indicate the oneness and unity of the global church for which Jesus so fervently prayed (John 17), which is emphasized in the Bible and in the creed and is under such damaging attack today, I maintain, and strongly urge the worldwide church, to hold to the original word catholic.

Also, while the versions of the Nicene Creed that prevail today are essentially the same, certain phrases in one version are easier to understand than the corresponding phrase in others. Therefore, I’ve used the most readily understandable phrases to produce the above rendering, which is true to the original and contains the wording I’ve heard and read most recited in church congregations worldwide.

Using the Six Loci

1. Try to remember the technical terms. If you use them, explain their meaning.
 - a. As we've seen, the words contain very significant meaning in themselves, e.g., ecclesiology, meaning those who are called out (to be holy to and serve God who is most holy as well as all love). Think of the implications! *Cite some.*
 - b. Knowing the theological language can help in some conversations.
 - c. Consider this: Schools require students to know such multisyllabic terms as deoxyribonucleic acid (better known as DNA). Notice how many more syllables that term has than the technical terms of the six loci! Don't be afraid to learn, and help others learn, the language of the Christian community.
 - d. If learning the technical terms is hard at first, then use the more common words with the same meaning. Don't worry about those terms, it is most important to know what they mean and their logical order to explain God's plan of redemption to others. Keep studying God's Word and historic Christian systematic theology, and you'll grow in your knowledge and joy about your relationship with God, your place in God's plan, and in your ability to help others to do so as well. You'll even eventually feel comfortable with the technical terms.

Using the Six Loci to Teach and Witness

2. It is most important that you remember and at least use the common terms for the six loci. For example, offer to others such an explanation as the following, adding more as you do.
 - a. It all begins with our triune God who is all love as well as most holy and just. (Theology)
 - b. He created mankind perfect, even bearing his image, but humans chose to sin and thereby separated themselves from our most holy God, corrupting his perfect creation, and causing the death he warned them would occur if they disobeyed him. (Anthropology)
 - c. Yet, since God's justice is an aspect of his love, and he is unwilling to destroy the humans who bear his image, he implemented his plan to redeem his creation, including the crown of his creation, his image bearers, by sending his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who, being fully man as well as fully God, would perfectly fulfill God's commands, suffer and die in our place, and rise again to eternal life, foretelling our resurrection. (Christology)
 - d. God sent his Holy Spirit to enable humans to believe, obey, and be credited with Jesus' righteousness through their faith, and be saved for eternal life with God. (Soteriology)
 - e. The Spirit gathers those who believe in Jesus Christ to come together to support one another and be able to most effectively reach out to the whole world with the Good News of what Christ Jesus has done to enable everyone who will believe to be permitted into the presence of God who is most holy, just, and full of love. (Ecclesiology)
 - f. This phase of life will end, for all of us individually when we die, and for the present world when Jesus returns in his Second Coming. He will then conduct the final judgment and bring about the new heaven and the new earth for God and his believers. (Eschatology)

Preface

The Bible is God's revelation to human beings, in which he discloses the origin of his creation, and explains the reality in which we live, how it came to be, and what he has in mind for the future in and through his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. In its explanation of the meaning of what we are experiencing today, and what God is doing about it, the Bible reveals how the world was perfect when God first created it, next what caused the disharmony and unpleasantness in the world, and then what God has done and is doing to redeem, renew, and restore, his creation in order to bring about a new heaven and new earth for eternity when the time is right in his sight. Thus, God's Word offers great hope and joy.

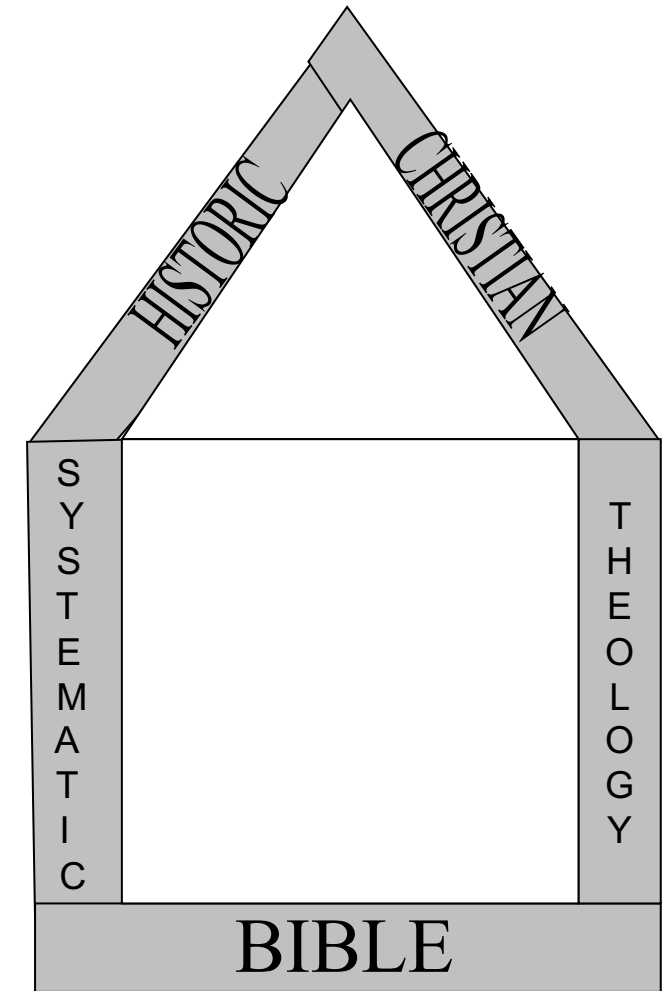
That Word is good news, yet at the same time, we notice right away that the Bible is a big book. Many people wonder where to start in reading it. Throughout the centuries several helpful guides for understanding the message of the Bible have been produced; one of the most helpful is called systematic theology. The term, systematic, refers to the logical framework of this helpful organized approach to learning, remembering, and acting on God's Word, as he has called us to do.

Preface Continued

1. These six loci are all based on, and summarize, the six main doctrines of the Bible in one locus, or place, for each. Their organization in this systematic order, provides a helpful means of learning, understanding, remembering, and easily explaining to others (in accord with Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Peter 3:15; Ephesians 4:12-16) the logic of God's progressive revelation, as he gradually and patiently discloses his plan of the redemption of his creation, largely in an overall chronological order, through the Bible.

Since God progressively unfolds and teaches his plan throughout Scripture when the times are right in his sight (e.g., Galatians 4:4; Ephesians 3:8-12), nowhere in the Bible is any doctrine taught in its entirety. Therefore, theologians have grouped the six main teachings of the Bible by subject, and systematic theology shows how the six loci are shown to be in a logical order.

This systematic order is an ancient one in church history, that has its origin in the Bible. It's rudimentary basis is seen in Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter eight itself containing references to all six. The church's outstanding theologians throughout the centuries have added Biblical explanations, implications, and applications to it, typically when the church has had to address and clarify its response to specific theological questions and issues that have arisen.



Preface Continued

2. The study of historic Christian systematic theology can be seen as a different and more in-depth kind of Bible study.
 - a. Most Christians understand that Bible study in groups with other believers in and followers of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ is vital for maturing in Christlikeness. Yet, to use an analogy, if one only studies Isaiah in the Fall, Luke in the Winter, Ephesians in the Spring, and Psalms in the Summer, in the best possible scenario, with the finest leadership, he or she will have an excellent understanding of a particular tree, but won't know where he or she is in the forest.
 - b. In historic systematic theology, the study is all that the Bible teaches about each of these six main loci in a logically organized manner. Throughout Scripture we see many texts where God reasons with his people and where a matter is explained, "For this reason...." (E.g., Genesis 2:24; Exodus 9:16; 2 Samuel 7:22 (NASB); Isaiah 1:18; Matthew 6:25 NASB); Luke 7:47 (NASB); John 6:65 (NASB); Romans 14:9; 1 Corinthians 11:30 (NASB); Galatians 3:9; Philippians 2:9 (NASB); Hebrews 2:16-18; 9:15. See also Leviticus 17:11.)

Preface Continued

2. The study of historic Christian systematic theology can be seen as a different and more in-depth kind of Bible study.
 - c. These six loci of systematic theology provide the most meaningful and helpful worldview that enables us to understand reality. The loci help us respond most effectively to the realities of life that impact us.
 - d. In 1 Peter 3:15 we are given the reason to be prepared to give an account of why we believe as we do. We need to be able to explain the rationale for our faith in Christ.
 - e. See also Hebrews 11:19, Abraham “reasoned.” The Greek verb is λογίζομαι (*logizomai*), meaning reckon, calculate, consider, but it is not solely intellectual; it involves emotion and feeling. It is the basis from which our English word, logic, is derived. In this course, we learn the logic of the loci and some very practical implications and applications.

Preface Continued

2. The study of historic Christian systematic theology can be seen as a different and more in-depth kind of Bible study.
 - f. The Bible itself speaks of the vital importance of knowing, teaching, and doing sound doctrine. For example Paul writes to Titus, “You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.” (Titus 2:1) “...in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, *with* purity in doctrine, dignified, ⁸sound *in* speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.” (Titus 2:7-8 NASB) “[An elder] must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” (Titus 1:9) Also, “...for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine ¹¹that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.” (1 Timothy 1:10-11) See also 1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 4:3; 2 John 1:10 (KJV).

Preface Continued

2. The study of Christian systematic theology can be seen as a different and more in-depth kind of Bible study.
 - g. In both teaching Christian theology and in our witness for Christ, we must keep in mind a very important understanding pertaining to communication across cultures, both the cross-cultural differences between church people and non-Christians in our own country, and the cross-cultural differences between the Biblical worldview and the non-Biblical worldview in other parts of the world. It is vitally important to remember that people who are non-Christians use many of the same words Christians do, but they mean something totally different with those words. As Dr. Steve Leston, President of the mission organization, To Every Tribe, has well written, “As trust is built, one of the main relational goals of a missionary [or any Christian witness] is to understand how a person thinks about God, spirituality, life, death, meaning, etc. The reason this is important is that across the world there are terms used in the Bible that are also used by other religions. Yet, those religions do not mean the same thing a Christian means when using these terms. For example, if I say, ‘God created the world,’ there are many people who would affirm that truth yet we would not be saying the same thing. There are many religions in the world that teach that there is a god who [made] the world, yet their god and our God are not the same God. If I do not understand this about a person I am talking to, then when I share truths about God they will use their definition of those terms, not the Bible’s definition. If this happens, what you have done without knowing it, is participated in syncretism. Syncretism is the combining of different religious beliefs into one. When this occurs, Christianity becomes reshaped and reformed into something that eventually becomes contrary to the Scriptures and the gospel.” *Ekballo* Special Edition, December 2017, pp. 12-13.

Preface Continued

3. The six loci are manifest across all Christian denominations, worldwide throughout the centuries, and in recent times in independent megachurches. The only differences occur within certain of the doctrines as churches have inserted their denominational distinctives. Sometimes churches combine some of the loci to make the shortest possible statement. In all churches that remain true to the Bible, these distinctive differences are seen to be included in what the apostle Paul refers to as “disputable matters” in Romans 14:1ff. and do not affect the essential beliefs required for salvation.
4. This understanding of the Bible makes it easier to preach to and teach others and for all of us to provide a true and substantive witness for Jesus Christ.

Preface Continued

5. When we examine the loci carefully, we see that they have strikingly practical implications and applications. A focused emphasis in this presentation will be to explain each doctrine and explore the practical dimensions of each of the loci.
6. This course has been developed as a stand-alone resource to aid in the teaching of the doctrines of historic Christian theology. I have referred to many outstanding theologians in the development of this program, but whereas systematic theology over the centuries has become quite complex with the technical jargon of theologians, I have tried to explain the key teachings in these six doctrines in common language so everyone can understand and serve God well in the high and holy calling he has given us.

Preface Continued

7. I've chosen the word "essential" to indicate not only the concept, basic, the very essence of what God is communicating in his Word, the Bible, but also the main points, what it is so vitally important for us to know, what we need to know to satisfy our deepest longings and live with and serve him most effectively. It also indicates how vital Christianity is.
8. I use the words "historic Christian systematic theology." The word historic is necessary to distinguish the time-tested teaching of the global church for thousands of years in contrast to some modern theologies that have arisen and falsely teach that the church has been wrong all this time. Careful study proves the consistency of the main doctrines of the church with the Bible, the infallible and inerrant Word of God. (Psalm 18:30; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Preface Continued

9. In addition to theology, I'm also asked to teach other subjects such as teaching methods and related topics pertaining to education in the church and in the home.
 - a. One of those related subjects, that it is important to teach, is how human beings learn. Human learning research has revealed many helpful insights that enable teachers and parents to teach God's Word more effectively.
 - 1) One of those helpful insights is that there are three domains of human learning that need to be nurtured in the process of helping God's people to become more Christ-like: cognition (information storage, retrieval and use), affect (feelings, emotions, attitudes, and motivations), and conation or behavior (applying and putting into practice the cognitive information and affect).
 - 2) Another insight from human learning research is that these domains are not discrete, separate, categories but exist on a continuum. As illustrated in a following slide, e.g., not all cognition is without affect; i.e., we tend to have some feelings about a lot of what we know. Affect requires some cognition in order to formulate feelings about it. Both cognition and affect influence our behavior; we tend to act on information, especially that about which we feel strongly.

Preface Continued

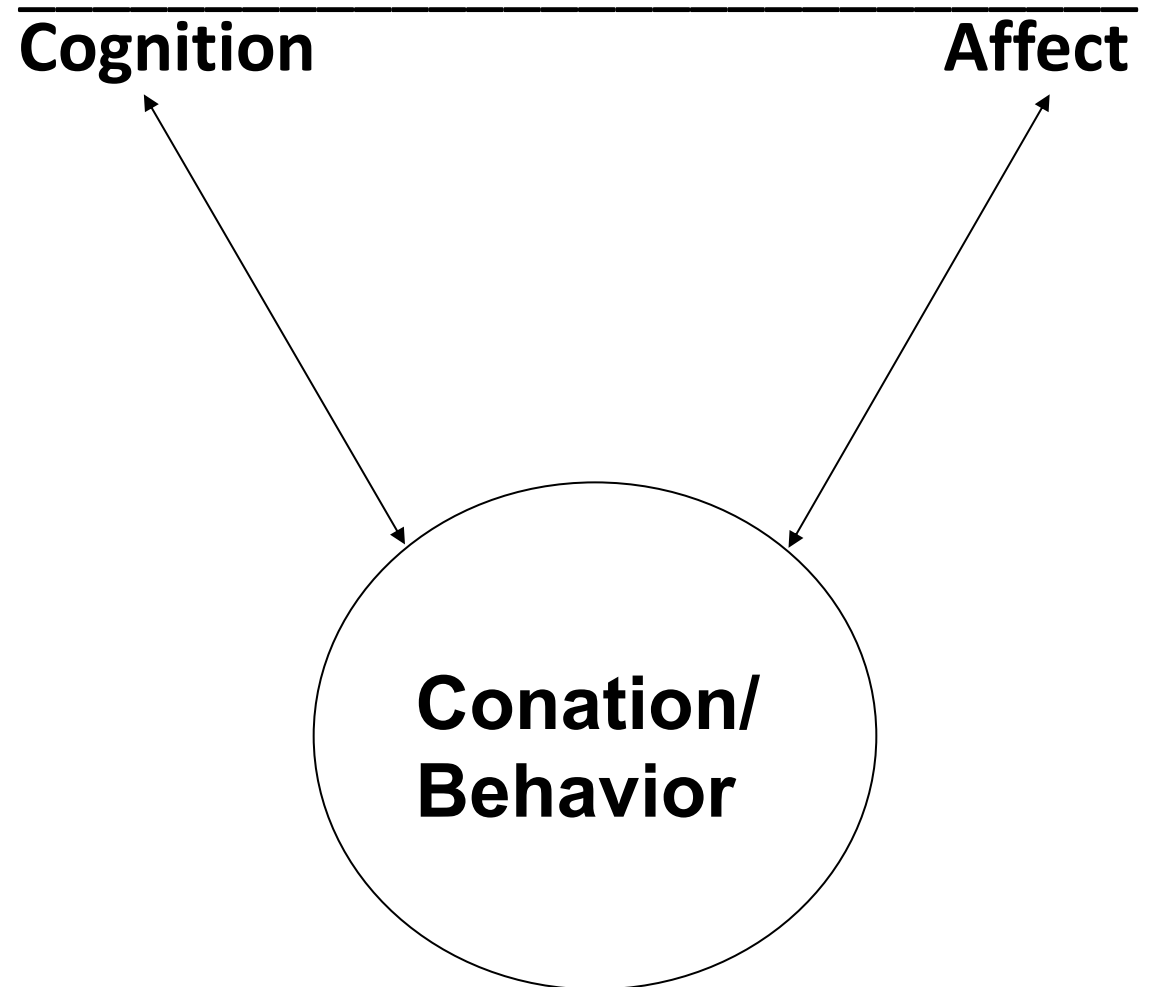
9. In addition to theology, I'm also asked to teach other subjects such as teaching methods and related topics pertaining to education in the church. Human learning research has revealed many helpful insights that enable teachers and parents to teach God's Word more effectively.
 - a. Cont'd.: The Bible engages all three human learning domains, and many verses contain references to all three in the same verse! See, e.g., where Jesus said, "The one who has my commands and is obeying them, that one is the one who is loving me. The one loving me shall be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him." (John 14:21; Greek, EDS translation. "He" in Greek and English is generic, including both male and female human beings.) We all should ask ourselves, "How much do I love Jesus?"
 - b. To teach God's Word most effectively, we need to engage all three domains, and doing so fosters the maturity in Christ-likeness that leads to the behavior change that brings us more into obedience to God and more effective witnesses for Christ Jesus.

Key Resources for Church Education

From Human Learning Research: The Three Domains of Human Learning

Jesus said, “They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” (John 14:21 NRSV)

FOR DISCUSSION OR INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION: Identify references to the three domains in what Jesus said.



Preface Continued

10. As can be envisioned, the timeframe we have to help others learn the six loci will vary, thus requiring decision-making as to how much to say at a given time. Use the following to help in that decision-making.
 - a. Do include all six of the loci and point out and explain their logical progression. Review them as a class at the beginning of each session.
 - b. Two additional PowerPoint (PPT) programs have been made for each of the loci. The larger one is an [overview](#) of that particular doctrine drawn from the original and unabridged version of [Essential Christianity: Historical Christian Systematic Theology](#), which the teacher should read. Ask the class to read at least the overview prior to class. An accompanying [abridged version of each overview, with yellow highlighting](#), is also available for use in the class sessions to maximize the amount of time the class has. Recall Jesus' teaching method; don't try to explain everything all at once.
 - c. I have taught these six loci in less than five minutes in one-to-one conversations; in 20-minute sermons; in mini-courses of less than a week; and in full-length courses. In whatever timeframe you are given, using this historic Christian systematic theology will enable those you are helping to have a firmer grasp of God's Word, its essential message and its logic, and help them explain it to others more effectively.

12. Notice that the discussion of the six loci is preceded by a section called “Prolegomena,” the plural of prolegomenon, which comes from the Greek word, προλέγω (*prolegō*), which literally means “to say beforehand.” Thus, prolegomena are the prefatory observations that serve to introduce a more extended and profound subject.

Since our examination and explanation of the six loci will all be based on what the Bible says about each one, the next logical question most people ask is, “How do we know the Bible is trustworthy and that it is what it claims to be, the Word of God?” Further, even if we don’t ask that question ourselves, other people will ask it of us, and God calls us to “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,…” (1 Peter 3:15)

So, in order to give the soundest and most helpful answer, we need to have a good handle on the reasons why we believe the Bible to be true and the authoritative Word of God. One more reason for studying the prolegomena: having a firm grasp of the reasons why we are persuaded that the Bible is God's Word, is that we are enabled to stand on the firm ground of God's Word, and thus we can more easily make our explanation and witness with "gentleness and respect" and doing so by "speaking the truth in love." (Ephesians 4:15)

Prolegomena

(< Greek, προλέγω [*prolegō*], to say beforehand; cf. prologue)

Why Do We Believe the Bible Is True and that It Is
God's Word?

Why Do We Believe the Bible is True and that It is God's Word? We Begin with an Introduction to Theology: Who Is God; What Is He Like; what Has He Done; and What Is He Doing?

Doctrine of God

- “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD.
⁹‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
¹⁰‘As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
¹¹so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.’” (Isaiah 55:8-11)
- “‘Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?’ ‘Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.” (Romans 11:33-36)

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- In order to understand the Bible, we need to carefully consider theology, the doctrine of God. All that we truly know about God has come from him.
- Throughout our thinking and talking about God, it is always necessary to remember that God is unlimited, and we are limited; he is infinitely greater than we are, and therefore we cannot know everything about him.

Why Do We Believe the Bible is True and that It is God's Word? We Begin with an Introduction to Theology: Who Is God; What Is He like; What Has He Done; and What Is He Doing?

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

- In fact theologians insist that with our limited understanding, what we know is only a type of what God is like. Christian theology distinguishes between archetypal theology and ectypal theology.
 - + Archetype = the original pattern or model on which what follows that is similar is based < (ἀρχή [*archē*] = prior, original, first + τύπος [*tupos*] = mold, form)
 - + Ectype = a reproduction, copy, representative example, or reflection of the original on which it is based < (ἐκ [*ek*] = out of, away from + *tupos*)

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

- Thus, archetypal theology consists of God’s essential and infinite knowledge of himself as he truly is and that is unable to be comprehended by any other being. Human sin further clouds and distorts any understanding of God.
- Since God cannot be fully known, he reveals as much of himself as human beings can understand. He lovingly accommodates himself to our finiteness and discloses aspects of his being by way of an ectype, an image or reflection of himself, as much as our finite and limited minds need and are able to know. He speaks in our language with words and figures including symbols about matters that transcend those words and figures. Thus, we must approach his Word with humility and the awareness that there is much more to and about God than meets the human eye.

Theology: Who is God; what is he like; what has he done; and what is he doing?

Doctrine of God

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Meaning and Practical Benefits

- Related aspects of archetypal and ectypal knowledge, such as special and general revelation and further explanations will be presented in the context of their topic.
- Nevertheless, what God has given us is understandable, true, and reliable. How we know that God’s Word is true is the next subject of the Prolegomena.

An Abbreviated Apologetic

1. Apologetics is the branch of theology that addresses the defense of the Bible and Christian theology. The word, apologetics, comes from the Greek word *ἀπολογία* (*apologia*), which means a verbal defense in reply.
2. One of the clearest Biblical uses of this word is in 1 Peter 3:15, where we are commanded (the verb sanctify is in the imperative mood):
“...but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense [*apologia*] to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence [respect].”
(NRSV)
3. Specifically, it provides a sound rationale for why we believe the Bible is the infallible and inerrant Word of God and is authoritative for Christianity.
4. Many sound reasons exist for believing the Bible as our highest authority. Due to the time constraints in this course, the following are sufficient to make the case.

How Do We Know?

- This is the starting point in our study of any subject, the most basic question.
- In philosophy it is called the epistemological question.
- Epistemology, part of the study of philosophy, comes from two Greek words:
 - * **πίστις** (*pistis*) = faith, belief, doctrine
 - +
* **λόγος** (*logos*) = word, message, proclamation
- We should always ask this question to the source of the information we are receiving. It is one way to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God.” (1 John 4:1)
- We should warmly invite and welcome others to ask us how we know what we are advocating and proclaiming.
- The Bible teaches that we must always be prepared to answer this question regarding our relationship with Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:15)

How Do We Know?

SPECIAL REVELATION	GENERAL REVELATION
<p>Psalm 19:7-11</p> <p>John 14:6</p> <p>2 Timothy 3:14-17</p> <p>God's disclosure that comes to us in His Word, the Bible, in the revelation of Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation; he is the way, the truth, and the life. The Bible is the standard of truth against which we measure, assess, and evaluate all else, including general revelation. If something we read or hear contradicts the Bible, we believe the Bible.</p>	<p>Psalm 19:1-6</p> <p>Romans 1:18-32</p> <p>God's disclosure of some aspects of his being, that all people on earth can observe, which disclosure is sufficient for coming to some knowledge of God, enough to render all without excuse for not believing in him. As important and useful as is general revelation, it is insufficient for salvation. General revelation includes true science, and it never contradicts special revelation. All truth comes from God, and God does not contradict himself.</p>

Why Do We Believe the Bible Is True and that It Is God's Word?

Reason

1. Jesus affirmed the Old Testament. (See also Proverbs 30:5-6; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Revelation 22:18-20.) For those who do not believe God's Word, evidence outside the Bible is needed, and plenty of it is available, some of which follows.
2. Eyewitnesses to Jesus' Resurrection and other events wrote the New Testament.

Support for the Reason

1. Matthew 5:17-18
2. Jesus' authority became apparent with his teaching, miracles, and especially his Resurrection. The apostle Paul testifies that over 500 eyewitnesses saw Jesus after his Resurrection and that many were still alive when he made that statement in 1 Corinthians 15:6, the implication being "Go talk to them; ask them what they saw." In that culture and small area, they were readily available for comment.

Why Do We Believe the Bible Is True and that It Is God's Word?

Reason

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Jesus' authority was established with his teaching, miracles, and especially his Resurrection. The apostle Paul testifies that over 500 eyewitnesses saw Jesus after his Resurrection and that many were still alive when he made that statement in 1 Corinthians 15:6 (ca. A. D. 55), the implication being "Go talk to them." In that culture and small area, they were readily available for comment.

The photo is a first century A.D. tomb in Israel. See Matthew 28:2.

Support for the Reason



Why Do We Believe the Bible Is True and that It Is God's Word?

Reason

3. Historical writings and archaeological findings confirm Scriptural statements. God acts in history.
- People who attended the Christ Church Holy Land Tours with me saw inscribed on the wall of the temple of Amun at Karnak (Thebes) in Upper Egypt the Egyptian view of the event described in 1 Kings 14:25-28 and 2 Chronicles 12:1-12. Here, Egypt's king, Shishak, gives an account of his defeat of King Rheboam and Israel. The Bible explains why: "because they ["Rheboam and all Israel"] had been unfaithful to the LORD." (12:1-2)
<https://youtu.be/sHPfXfS6G48>
 - Here is just one of many evidences disproving the assertion made in ignorance that nothing in the Bible is referred to elsewhere outside the Bible. Further, nothing in the Bible has ever been disproved by careful scientific research.

Place the cursor on the picture and click on the start button to view the video. Or click on the URL.

Support for the Reason



Why Do We Believe the Bible Is True and that It Is God's Word?

Reason

Another important truth for engaging individuals with the Gospel is seen in this video.

- Atheists and other critics of the Bible wrongly say there is nothing outside the Bible to corroborate what is in the Bible.
- Here is another of many phenomena. Of course the Bible doesn't need proof; it can stand on its own, but tell them about this ancient archaeological site or show them this video. (Place the cursor on the picture at the right and click on the start button. Or click on the URL: <https://youtu.be/ioLgNen0KQI>.)
- This well is in Sychar (modern Nablus) where Jesus met the Samaritan woman. (John 4:1-42. Note v. 11, "the well is deep.") See all the rope needed to lower the bucket.
- The time it took water poured from a cup to reach the water in the well was four seconds! (Hear the splash.)

Support for the Reason



Why Do We Believe the Bible Is True and that It Is God's Word?

Reason

4. The first Christians chose death rather than deny Jesus Christ, whom they saw after he rose from the dead. They, and multitudes of Christians throughout history have willingly, even gladly, given up their lives here on earth rather than recant their faith in Jesus. More in the 20th and 21st centuries have already been martyred for their faith in Christ than in the whole preceding 20 centuries together. Many still are dying for their faith; please remember to pray for them and their families. Many others are suffering in other ways due to their refusal to recant their faith in Christ.

Support for the Reason

4. So, why is this support for believing that the Bible is true and the Word of God? One of the charges leveled against the New Testament is that it is a myth written by dispirited disciples who fabricated their accounts in order to save face. The blood of the martyrs discredits that opinion. Normal healthy people do not willingly die, or suffer in other ways, as many are also doing, for what they know to be a myth.

Why Do We Believe the Bible Is True and that It Is God's Word?

Reason

5. When the Bible is properly interpreted, we observe that careful scientific research and other disciplines of inquiry are consistent with the Bible.

Support for the Reason

5. We must constantly discern the difference between science that has been done by people carefully following the established scientific method, and bogus "science" done by people with motives for personal gain, where they have ignored the scientific method and have produced worthless findings. Those empirical studies that have been carefully done, do not contradict but illustrate God's Word. For more on this subject, see ["Science: Distinguishing Between Sound and Flawed Science."](#)

The Scientific Method

- Careful science is one part of God's general revelation, **when it is well done** with thorough, painstaking, and precise adherence to the scientific method **that yields true results**.
- The scientific method typically involves five steps, sometimes more.
 1. State the problem.
 2. Review relevant research.
 3. Establish the research plan.
 4. Report the findings of following the plan.
 5. State the significance of the research: what the findings mean.
- The first four steps are the most objective, but basic human sinfulness (e.g., Romans 8:12-14), personal opinion, philosophically-shaped bias, and desire to please those funding the study, influences all four and especially the fifth step.
- Replication is a key way to validate scientific research. Comparison with the Bible is the surest way.
- Science illustrates the Bible; the Bible does not need science to prove its truth. The Bible can stand on its own. The Bible properly interpreted in accord with historic hermeneutical (*op cit.*) principles and careful empirical science do not conflict.

Why Do We Believe the Bible Is True and that It Is The Word of God?

For more on the subjects in this section on why the historic Christian church believes the Bible is true and that it is the inerrant, infallible, and trustworthy Word of God, click on the [Christian Theology](https://fromacorntoak12.com/) page of my general Website at <https://fromacorntoak12.com/>. Click on the link, [Prolegomena \(Reasons Why We Believe the Bible Is the Trustworthy Word of God\)](#) and then on the title of the essay in which you are interested, e.g., [Why the Bible is the Word of God: Jesus, Eyewitnesses, Archaeology](#), or [Why the Bible is the Word of God: Fulfilled Prophecies](#), or [Why the Bible is the Word of God: Bible and Science](#). On the [Christian Education](#) page, see [Science: Distinguishing Between Sound and Flawed Science](#). Use the Search bar on the home page for any subject you want to access.

Systematic Theology and Biblical Hermeneutics (Interpretation) (< Greek, ἑρμηνεύω [*hermēneuō*], “to interpret”)

Essential Prerequisite Premises for the Study of
the Bible

Essential Prerequisite Premises for the Study of the Bible

1. Be sure to vet the professors and other teachers of the theology you hear and the authors of what you read. They should meet the following criteria:
 - a. Before you even listen to them, inquire as to their authority and to whom they are accountable. In what church and denomination are they a member? In what seminary did they receive their degree, and in what seminary to they now teach?
 - 1) They should be a *member in good standing* in an *Bible-believing church*, where the *Gospel of Jesus Christ is faithfully taught*.
 - 2) The denomination of that church should be in the *main historic church tradition but have a conservative theology that holds closely to the Bible*. Ask from what seminary the teacher has graduated.
 - 3) If the teacher is a member of an independent church, not part of a denomination, ask what denomination has authorized him or her to teach.
 - a) What are his or her credentials, e.g., ordained pastor? Accredited theologian?
 - b) If a layperson, how long has he or she been a Christian; studied the Bible and with whom; and to whom is he or she accountable?
 - c) Ask if he or she agrees with all aspects of the historic Nicene Creed.

Essential Prerequisite Premises for the Study of the Bible

1. Be sure to vet the teachers of the theology you hear and read.
 - b. Vet with the Bible and prayer. Compare and contrast what you hear with what the Bible says, and ask God to guide you.
 - c. Vet by comparing and contrasting with historic Christian theology that comes from a trustworthy tradition, e.g., from Augustine, Luther.
 - d. Inquire about the instructor's previous teaching here and elsewhere: e.g., has he or she stirred up dissent and controversy?
 - 1) If so, what was the nature of the issue: were the students unwilling to accept the truth, or was the teacher teaching false doctrine?
 - 2) One clue to which is the case in the preceding question is to ask if this teacher's teaching regularly results in controversy or if the issue in the last place was unique.

Essential Prerequisite Premises for the Study of the Bible

2. Does the professor/teacher carefully explain the Biblical basis for all he or she teaches? He or she should be glad to take the time to show exactly how the Bible supports his or her theological position. **Do not be afraid to insist on a clear explanation of the Biblical support for his or her position.** If anyone gets upset, that is an indication that his or her position is weak and likely unsupportable. On the contrary **the teacher should be glad** you are asking and that he or she has the privilege of helping you learn.
3. Always remember that due to human sin, it is only the Holy Spirit who can give openness and faith to believe in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:3) and in his Word. Yet, we have many sound reasons for why the Bible is God's Word, and we are called to teach them (e.g., Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Peter 3:15) together with the Word; therefore, we can do so in love and without compulsion, for all people will be held accountable for so believing in Jesus Christ, to whom the whole Bible points and explains his Gospel.
4. In logic, the burden of proof lies with the skeptic, the unbeliever. Just because someone doesn't believe the Bible is God's Word, does not make it untrue. All we're called to do as Christians and teachers is to present the evidence and rationale for why it is more reasonable to believe the Bible is the true and only Word of God. The Holy Spirit will help us with this explanation and then do the rest. For the above reasons, and because all that follows is based and depends on the Bible, this section, the prolegomena, is necessary.

Essential Prerequisite Premises for the Study of the Bible

5. Remember to use the historic principles of hermeneutics (interpretation) that are common to most literature and those that apply specifically to the Bible.
 - a. For example, keep in mind that our historic Christian theology is a study of all the Bible teaches about specific subjects and that sometimes no one chapter or verse speaks about that subject, e.g., the doctrine of the Trinity. The word Trinity occurs nowhere in the Bible, but all true branches of the church believe in the concept of the Trinity. The word and its doctrinal explanation are the result of theologians over the centuries bringing several Biblical passages together to explain the rationale of this essential doctrine of God. The same is true for infant baptism and other doctrines, as will be explained in this course.
 - b. Read any one verse in its context. Find its meaning in the verses before and after it in its chapter, in the rest of the book, and the rest of the Bible.
 - c. Distinguish between principle and application of principle. Is a given subject the principle being taught in that chapter or an application of a principle?
 - d. Is a given word to be interpreted literally or figuratively?

Essential Christianity: So What Kind of a Religion Is it?

The Triune God: The Only Living God Is Spirit and Personal, Engages in Relationships

1. Christianity is formed by and based on the Bible, God's Word, which is his revelation of himself, his creation, and his plan of redemption.
2. Contrary to other religions, in his Word he discloses that he is a personal being who loves and interacts with the people he has created. He is not an impersonal "force," "the greatest idea," or any other man-made philosophical conception, such as Aristotle's "prime mover" or "unmoved mover."
3. God's interaction with people involves a revelation of his Word and his will as to how to have a relationship with him. Most people who believe in God want to have a relationship with this most wonderful of all beings.

Meaning and Practical Benefits

- God is a personal being. In Psalm 139:1, we read, "You know me:" The Hebrew word is יָדָע (*yādha'*) a covenant word meaning to know intimately, personally, relationally. God knows us intimately, even before our birth, and he interacts with individuals. (Psalm 139:1-18; Jeremiah 1:4-10)
- He communicates with his people, listening to what they say and genuinely changes circumstances according to their requests which accord with his perfect will. (Exodus 3; 1 John 3:21-22; 5:13-15; James 5:16)
- Jesus Christ said, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." (John 14:21)

Essential Christianity: So What Kind of a Religion Is it?

The Triune God: The Only Living God Is Spirit and Personal, Engages in Relationships

4. The same is true on the human plane. In order to have a relationship with someone, one has to know who that person is and what the person is like, including what that one likes to do and is doing. For example, a wise woman does not fall in love with, commit to, and marry a man until she knows who he is, what he is like, and what that person does and is planning to do. A wise man does the same before he begins to love and commit to a woman and marry her.
5. To know God, so as to have a relationship with him, including sensing his love for us and loving him in return, we must begin by reading, studying, and reflecting on his Word, and communing with him in prayer, in order to learn who he is. Thus, we begin with the subject of theology, followed by the other five loci of historic Christian systematic theology, all of which are connected with and follow logically, systematically, from the true, Biblical, understanding of who God is, what he is like, and what he has done, is doing, and planning to do in and through history.

Meaning and Practical Benefits

“O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD...For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.” (Psalm 139:1-4; 13-18)

Resources

The slides in this presentation have been selected from the original and unabridged version of the PowerPoint (PPT) program, [*Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including God’s Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—for Now and Eternity*](#), in order to fit into the typical time constraints of two class sessions. For further information about the subjects on the slides in this abridged PPT, see the additional slides on those subjects that are on the original and unabridged PPT, which is located on the [Christian Theology](#) page of my free and secure [general Website](#).

Each class session of this introductory course on historic Christian systematic theology provides two abbreviated versions of the original and unabridged PPT. The first is a larger overview of the doctrine for that day. The second is a condensed version, containing highlighted subjects that are the minimum to be addressed in classes that have time constraints. Ask the class to read the larger overview prior to the class meeting. Use the second PPT in the class. Provide opportunities for questions, comments, and discussion of any of the subjects in the larger overview, the shorter abridged version, and related subjects, especially contemporary implications and applications of the Biblical content.

Each of the PowerPoint presentations is written in an expanded sentence outline format in order to provide a stand-alone resource for teachers, students, and those who want to have the PPT for independent study or devotional use. The last session is for a review and discussion of matters the class wants to address.

Resources Continued

For an advance organizer, or overview of the whole course, see the following documents.

1. [“Essential Christianity: An Introductory Course on Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Applications, Class Sessions Schedule”](#)
2. [“Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology with a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions—An Introductory Course for the Church, Objectives and Lesson Plans”](#)