

Systematic Theology I: Prolegomena

Syllabus: Course #411 – 2 credits (Beeke)

I. Course Description

The first half of this course is a study in the basic areas preliminary to systematic theology, including the definition, nature, history, methods, and sources of systematic theology as well as theological encyclopedia and the spirit of Reformed theology. The second half covers the doctrine of revelation, with special emphasis on the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture.

II. Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Define prolegomena and other terms that relate to the foundations of systematic theology.
2. Explicate the spirit of *Reformed* theology from its historical, polemical, practical, and ecclesiastical perspectives.
3. Explain the historical development and solidification of systematic theology.
4. Understand how systematic theology interfaces with the entire field of theological encyclopedia and each of its major disciplines.
5. Grasp why Reformed systematic theology is necessary.
6. Do systematic theology yourself through a formal, structured process.
7. Expound the biblical idea of revelation.
8. Detail the value and limitations of general revelation.
9. Clarify the various modes of special revelation.
10. Defend the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture through Scripture's self-attestation.
11. Distinguish various conceptions of inerrancy and be able to interface biblical inerrancy with various phenomena which often challenge inerrantists to soften their position.
12. Demonstrate the importance of the authority of Scripture.
13. Make plain how the doctrines of revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, and the authority of Scripture bear practical ramifications for our personal, familial, ecclesiastical, and societal lives.

III. Course Outline (for a detailed outline, see attached)

I. Introduction

II. Theology: The Study of God

A. The Nature of Theology

1. Defining introductory terms

a. Religion

b. Theology

c. Doctrine

d. Dogma

2. The spirit of Reformed theology

- a. Historical perspective
 - b. Polemical perspective
 - c. Practical perspective
 - d. Ecclesiastical perspective
- 3. Theological encyclopedia
 - a. Historical rise of systematic theology
 - b. The solidification of systematic theology
 - c. The division of theology
- B. Reformed Systematic Theology
 - 1. Its necessary task
 - 2. Its possibility
 - 3. Its method
 - 4. Its process
 - 5. Its distribution
 - 6. Its sources
 - 7. Its limitation
 - 8. Its ongoing need
- III. Understanding Revelation
 - A. The Biblical Idea of Revelation
 - 1. Defining revelation as divine disclosure
 - 2. Presuppositions of revelation
 - 3. Historical distinctions in revelation
 - B. The Biblical Fleshing Out of Revelation
 - 1. General revelation
 - a. The witness of its loci
 - b. The debate over its efficacy
 - c. The implications of its testimony
 - 2. Special revelation
 - a. Its necessity
 - b. Its nature
 - c. Its modes
 - d. Its outworking in contemporary debate
 - e. Scripture as revelation
- IV. Understanding Scripture
 - A. Inspiration: The Preservation of God's Word
 - 1. Defining inspiration
 - 2. Scripture's self-witness
 - 3. Theories of inspiration
 - 4. Formulating a biblical doctrine of inspiration
 - B. Inerrancy: The Dependability of God's Word
 - 1. Its legitimacy
 - 2. Its issue
 - 3. Its conceptions
 - 4. Its importance
 - 5. Its interfacing with phenomena
 - 6. Its balanced, formulated definition
 - C. Authority: The Power of God's Word
 - 1. Issues involved in clarifying definition
 - 2. Religious authority
 - 3. The objective/subjective merger
- V. Practical Conclusions

IV. Course Assignments

A. Reading

(Note: 1= reading requirement for first part of course, entitled "Theology: The Study of God"; 2=reading requirement for second part of course, "Revelation: The Knowledge of God.")

Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 1: Prolegomena*. (1: chapters 1-8; 2: chapters 9-17).

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. (2: Book 1, chapters 1-10, i.e., pp. 35-99 in Battles's translation)

Young, E.J. *Thy Word is Truth*. (2)

You should also be familiar with the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 1; *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q. 1-5; *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. 1-3; *Belgic Confession*, Articles 1-7.

Please hand in a note on the day of the final exam, stating what per cent of the reading assignments you have completed. 90-100% will add 3% to your grade; 75-89% will leave your grade unchanged; 50-74% will reduce your grade by 5%; less than 50% will reduce your grade by 10%.

B. Writing

1. One book review of any title listed on the bibliography provided, excluding reading assignment titles. Review should be 6-10 pages in length, roughly divided between summary and assessment. (33% of grade)

OR

2. A 10-20 page paper on any topic included under the scope of course material. (50% of grade)

C. Exams

Two Exams will be given of 60 minutes each: the first, a mid-term exam on "Theology: The Study of God" [**October 24**]; the second, on "Revelation: The Knowledge of God" as a non-cumulative final exam [on **December 11**]. If you choose to do a book review (IV-B-1 above), each exam will be worth 1/3 of your grade. If you choose to do a paper, (IV-B-2), each exam will count as 1/4 of your grade.

lectures/prolegomena syllabus