

What is Systematic Theology?

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SELECTIONS FROM "OUTLINES OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY: DESIGNED FOR THE USE  
OF THEOLOGICAL STUDENTS BY AUGUSTUS HOPKINS STRONG"

**IV. Necessity.** —The necessity of theology has its grounds.

(a) In the organizing instinct of the human mind. This organizing principle is a part of our constitution. The mind cannot endure confusion or apparent contradiction in known facts. The tendency to harmonize and unify its knowledge appears as soon as the mind becomes reflective ; just in proportion to its endowments and culture docs the impulse to systematize and formulate increase. This is true of all departments of human inquiry, but it is peculiarly true of our knowledge of God. Since the truth with regard to God is the most important of all, theology meets the deepest want of man's rational nature. Theology is a rational necessity. If all existing theological systems were destroyed to-day, new systems would rise to-morrow. So inevitable is the operation of this law, that those who most decry theology show nevertheless that they have made a theology for themselves, and often one sufficiently 'meagre and blundering. Hostility to theology, where it does not originate in mistaken fears for the corruption of God's truth or in a naturally illogical structure of mind, often proceeds from a license of speculation which cannot brook the restraints of a complete Scriptural system.

c) In the importance to the preacher of definite and just views of Christian doctrine. His chief intellectual qualification must be the power clearly and comprehensively to conceive, and accurately and powerfully to express, the truth. He can be the agent of the Holy Spirit in converting and sanctifying men, only as he can wield " the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God " ( Eph. 6 : 17), or, in other language, only as he can impress truth upon the minds and consciences of his hearers. Nothing more certainly nullifies his efforts than

confusion and inconsistency in his statements of doctrine. His object is to replace obscure and erroneous conceptions among his hearers by those which are correct and vivid. He cannot do this without knowing the facts with regard to God in their relations — knowing them, in short, as parts of a system. With this truth he is put in trust. To mutilate it or misrepresent it, is not only sin against the Revealer of it,—it may prove the ruin of men's souls. The best safeguard against such mutilation or misrepresentation, is the diligent study of the several doctrines of the faith in their relations to one another, and especially to the central theme of theology, the person and work of Jesus Christ.

(e) The Scriptures the final standard of appeal. Science and Scripture throw light upon each other. The same divine Spirit who gave both revelations is still present, enabling the believer to interpret the one by the other and thus progressively to come to the knowledge of the truth. Because of our finiteness and sin, the total record in Scripture of God's past communications is a more trustworthy source of theology than are our conclusions from nature or our private impressions of the teaching of the Spirit. Theology therefore looks to the Scripture itself as its chief source of material and its final standard of appeal.

#### JOHN 5:31-39

31 If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. 32 There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. 33 Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. 34 But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved. 35 He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. 36 But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. 37 And the Father himself, which hath

sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. 38 And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. 39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

## 2 PETER 1:16-21

16 For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. 18 And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. 19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: 20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. 21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.