

# Systematic Theology

The word “doctrine” is derived from the Latin, *docere*, which means “to teach”, so “doctrine” is “teaching”: it is the ordered arrangement of important truths. According to the Gospels, our Lord placed very considerable emphasis on doctrine (Matthew 7:28; 22:33; Mark 4:1,2; Luke 4:31,32; John 7:16,17), as later the apostles did, both in their preaching and in their written ministries (Acts 2:42; 5:28; 17:19; 2 Timothy 3:10,11). Indeed, they were concerned that others coming after them, in the near and in the distant future, might give themselves to the formal teaching of sound doctrine: that is, doctrine firmly based upon the written, inerrant Word of God (1 Timothy 4:6,13,16; 5:17; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:5-9; 2:1,7).

Our word “theology” is derived from a Greek word, *theologia*, compounded of two words: *logos*, “a discourse”, and *theos*, “God”; but, historically, this word came to be used in a more comprehensive sense, to refer to a broad range of teaching or doctrine. “Systematic” (from the Latin, *systematicus*) simply refers to the truth set forth in an ordered, thematic and coherent way, so that it presents to others a self-consistent whole (as seen in Scripture, for example, in Romans 5:12-19; Ephesians 4:4-6; and 1 Timothy 3:15,16).

The course begins with the doctrine of Scripture, the revelation from God in Heaven, and it then branches out into areas of truth recognized in our Creeds and Confessions: the being, nature and perfections of God; the eternal decrees fulfilled in creation, providence and redemption; the covenant of works made with Adam, head and representative of mankind, and therefore made with all men in him; the fall of man into an estate of sin and misery; the covenant of grace, made within the Trinity before time, but graciously revealed immediately after sin entered the world; the revelation and administration of this remedial covenant under the Old and New Testaments; the person of the Redeemer, His general office as Mediator, along with His particular offices of prophet, priest and king, and His states of humiliation and exaltation; the Holy Spirit’s effectual application of redemption accomplished, in vocation, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification, along with the benefits flowing from these acts and works of God; the duty required of man with respect to the law and the gospel; the nature of the church, its stated ministry, spiritual government, regulated worship, evangelistic service, holy communion, and the outward and ordinary means of grace.

A special emphasis is given to Covenant Theology and to Reformed Worship.

## Topics taught in the three years

### 2018

Introduction to Systematic Theology

Doctrine of Scripture:

*Revelation (General and Special):*

Inspiration

Inerrancy

Preservation

Authority

Sufficiency

Perspicuity

*Doctrine of Scripture:*

Text Transmission

Development of Canon

Translation Philosophy

The Being of God

The Attributes of God

The Names of God

The Holy Trinity

The Eternal Decree of God

The Covenant of Grace

Providence

Theology of Creation

Creation of Angels and Men

Creation Views

The Origin and Nature of Man

The Covenant of Works

The Fall of Man

The Original Sin

The Misery of Man’s Sinful State

The Plan of Salvation

The Promise of a Saviour

### 2019

Covenant of Grace Revealed

Mediator of the Covenant

Person and Nature of Christ

Christ the Prophet

Christ the Priest

Christ the Sacrifice

Christ the Atonement

Particular Redemption

Christ the King

Sanctification and Anointing of Christ

Humiliation of Christ

Exaltation of Christ

Application of Redemption in Effectual Calling

*Benefits of Effectual Calling:*

Justification

Adoption

Sanctification

Saving Faith

Repentance

Good Works

Perseverance of the Saints

Assurance

### 2020

The Law of God

The Gospel of God

Christian Liberty

Religious Worship and Sabbath

Oaths and Vows

|                      |                          |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Civil Magistracy     | Government of the Church | Judgment                 |
| Marriage and Divorce | Church Discipline        | Hell                     |
| The Church           | Death                    | Heaven                   |
| Communion of Saints  | Second Coming            | New Heaven and New Earth |
| Sacraments           | Resurrection             | Eternal Life             |

## Content of Some Lectures:

### *The Trinity (2 lectures):*

Observing that there is a profound mystery about God which only Special Revelation can explain to men, the great truth was presented that to know God, as He is revealed, is salvation, blessedness and eternal life. Then, turning to the subject in hand, certain important terms were considered: “the Godhead” (the divine nature in its unity); “Persons” (eternal distinctions within God’s Being, each related to the others and each with personal characteristics); and “Substance” (essentially, that which is beneath everything else – the divine, mysterious essence, each of the Persons being of “one and the same substance” (Athanasius). Then three steps were taken in approaching the doctrine: first, there is “There is Hint of Plurality in God”; second, “This Plurality in God is a Trinity”; and third, “The Blessed Trinity is revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” The teaching of both Old and New Testaments were carefully examined.

### *Providence (1):*

The lecture began with the observation that the word “providence” originally meant “foresight.” It came to mean “timely care” and “preparation.” It therefore contains the idea of foreseeing things and making due and wise preparation. The term itself appears just once in our Authorised Version, in Tertullus’s flattering address to Felix, the Roman Governor. Tertullus stated, “Very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence.” (Acts 24:2). Here, the reference is clearly to the Governor’s ‘administration’. In a theological context, the word means God’s administration or government of all things.

Providence connects to the doctrine of Creation. Creation is calling everything into existence: providence is controlling and regulating everything created.

Proceeding, we took account of *the God of Providence*. It is because He is *God* that He has the right to keep and order the whole universe (Job 12:7-10; Acts 17:28). He is eminently qualified to undertake this role: He is most holy (Ps. 145:17), most wise (Isa. 28:29), most powerful (Ps. 66:7), most good (Ps. 33:5), and most faithful (Lam. 3:22,23). And this is the One who is ever present (Acts 17:27) and active (Jn. 5:17) in this world, a truth denied by atheists, of course, and also by deists who teach that God created the world, set it in motion, and then withdrew from it, allowing natural laws to take over (Dan. 4:34,35; Eph. 1:11). Inevitably, since He is God and not man, there is a mystery in His works, and therefore we are not always able to discern His purposes and reasons (Job 33:13; Ps. 36:6). Nevertheless, it is to our comfort and peace to believe in the God of providence (Ps. 57:1,2).

Then attention was given to *the Work of Providence*. This was seen to be two-fold: Preservation and Government. With respect to the former, God causes the whole creation to continue (Neh. 9:5; Col. 1:16,17; Heb. 1:3) and without His maintaining of it, everything would quickly fall apart and utterly perish (Ps. 104:24-29; Acts 17:25,28). Included in this particular work of providence is not only the granting of creatures His support, but also the granting of them necessary provision (Ps. 145:15,16) and protection (Ps. 47:9). The other work of Providence is Government. God rules and directs everything and everyone. “The Lord reigneth.” (Ps. 93:1) “His kingdom ruleth over all.” (Ps. 103:19) From all eternity, He has determined what shall be (Acts 15:18) and throughout time He sovereignly fulfils His will and purpose (Eph. 1:11).

Finally, we considered *the Domain of Providence*. God’s providence is over all creatures (Matt. 10:29,31) and their actions (Prov. 16:9). However, there is a special providence concerned with God’s people (2 Chron. 16:9; Ps. 46:1-3), and the lecture concluded with emphasis upon this, which alone can bring peace and joy to our hearts (Ps. 146:5,10).

## **Providence (2):**

The lecture began with a quotation from Dr. John Dick's *Lectures on Theology*, "Providence...is...the action or conduct of God towards the universe, which he upholds by his power, and regulates by his wisdom." This was followed by the stating of some basic principles: (1) God is in control of everything, ruling even in the midst of apparent disorder (Ps. 29:10; Eccl. 3:17); (2) His eternal will is the rule of whatever He does (Ps. 135:6; Eph. 1:11); (3) Providence reaches to everyone, everywhere (Isa. 40:26; Job 23:13,14); (4) Since the Fall this administration has been Mediatorial, God's Son being appointed to universal dominion (Ps. 2:6-8; Prov. 8:15; Isa. 6:1-3 cf. Jn. 12:40); (5) Although perplexing at times, faith assures us of a good issue (2 Kgs. 4:23; Ps. 73:1,17); (6) Ever efficacious, God accomplishes everything He sets out to do (Job 23:13; Ps. 33:11); and (7) The end of the divine rule is the revelation and acknowledgment of God's glory (Isa. 66:1; Rom. 11:36; Rev. 15:3).

After this, consideration was given to some of the objections raised to this doctrine. *The first* concerns the Fall - Adam's Fall from a state of innocence into a state of sin and misery. It is true, of course, that God could have willed to prevent the Fall (cf. Gen. 20:6) but He evidently willed to permit it (cf. 78:29). In no way does this imply His approval of what happened, sin ever being most hateful to Him (Jer. 44:4); but He determined that Adam would not be the Saviour of the race but His beloved Son to whom the honour and glory would ever be given (Rev. 5:11-13). *The second* concerns the consequent sin in the world. This He also wills to allow (Ps. 81:12; Acts 14:16), but such is His sovereignty that, in His wisdom, He brings out of this evil a greater good (Gen. 45:5; 50:20) and ultimately prepares for the coming of His Son to save men from their sins (Matt. 1:21). *The third* concerns the problem of suffering, which He sovereignly authorises and sanctions. Although this is true (Job 1:21; Isa. 45:7; 1 Thess. 3:3), God takes no delight in it (Lam. 3:32,33). Rather, He turns it to His own glory (Jn. 9:3; 11:4; 21:19) and to the spiritual good of men and women (Ps. 119:67; Hos. 5:15; James 5:13).

Divine sovereignty must be recognised and acknowledged. It is no small comfort to know that "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." (Rev. 19:6)

## **Plan of Salvation:**

Scripture reveals that there was a plan of salvation (2 Tim. 1:9), and it is variously described as: purpose (Eph. 3:11); counsel (Zech.6:13 – between the Lord Jehovah and the One called 'the Branch'); mercy (Mic.7:20); secret (Ps. 25:14); promise (Titus 1:2); oath (Lk. 1:73); and testament (Heb. 9:15). The plan was certainly covenantal in nature, an arrangement in which there were parties, conditions and promises (Isa. 40:14; 49:8; Zech. 9:11). This had been considered in some detail in an earlier lecture.

Now there were three important features to this 'covenant'. It was:

1) *Divine*: God is responsible for this covenant: hence, He repeatedly refers to it as 'my covenant.' This was 'the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory' (1 Cor. 2:7). It arose from within Him, "according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph.1:9) and His attributes or perfections were all involved in making this arrangement (Eph. 3:10; 2 Tim.1:9.). "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord..." (Ps. 3:8). "All things are of God..." that "all things" may be "to him" (Rom. 8:36; 2 Cor. 5:18).

2) *Eternal*: Proof of this may be seen in various scriptures: "The eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11); "His own purpose and grace given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9) "The everlasting (or eternal) covenant" (Heb. 13:20). Consider further that the Parties of the covenant are eternal (Deut. 33:27; Jn. 1:1,2); the love responsible for it is eternal (Ps. 103:17; Jer. 31:3); the election of sinners to be blessed through it is eternal (Eph. 1:4); the Son of God's appointment to do the work was eternal (1 Pet. 1:19,20); the promise made of life was eternal (Titus 1:2); and the preparations for our glory was eternal (Lk. 22:29).

3) *Gracious*: Grace was conspicuous in the covenant, because God stood in no need of a people (Acts 17:24,25); He was willing to favour estranged sinners (2 Cor. 5:19); He elected some of these to be saved (Rom:5,6); He appointed the Son Jesus Christ to be their Surety and Saviour (Heb. 7:22); He determined to make known His Gospel to them (Acts 20:24); He settled on 'faith' or 'trust' as the means of blessing (Eph. 2:8); and, without merit, as a free gift He determined to bestow on men eternal life (Rom. 6:23).

### ***The Person and Natures of Christ (2 lectures):***

The truth stated in these lectures was that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Matt. 16:16; 27:42, 54; Mk. 1:1,11; 9:7; Lk. 1:31-35; Jn. 1:18,49; 3:16; 9:35; 20:31), the Second Person of the Trinity (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; cf. Gal. 4:4-6; Eph. 2:18; 1 Jn. 5:7; Rev. 1:4,5), being very God, of one substance and equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit, in power and glory (Jn. 10:30; Acts 5:3,4. Isa. 9:6; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; 1 Jn. 5:20), did, in the fulness of time, take unto Himself man's nature (Jn. 1:14; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:6; 1 Tim. 3:16), and so continues one person for ever, in two distinct natures, divine and human (Rom. 1:3, 4; Col. 2:9; Heb. 7:24).

As to our Lord's divinity, we considered Hebrews 1, where seven quotations are given from the Old Testament, from the Book of Psalms, proving Christ to be absolutely and fully divine: namely, Psalm 2:7 (The Eternal Decree); Psalm 89:26,27, 2 Sam 7:14 (The Ancient Prophecy); Psalm 97:7 (The Wonderful Advent); Psalm 104:4 (The Earthly Ministry); Psalm 45:6,7 (The Spiritual Kingdom); Psalm 102:25-27 (The Glorious Return); and Psalm 110:1 (The Ultimate Victory).

As for His humanity, we turned to Hebrew 2, and found there teaching concerning this, which also showed its necessity: (vv. 6-9 cf. Ps. 8:4-6) - Biblical Testimony; (v. 10) - The Glory of God; (v. 11a) - Substitutionary Atonement; (vv. 11b, 12) - A Close Relationship; (vv. 14,15) - Deliverance from Evil; (vv.16,17) - The Bestowal of God; and (v. 18) - Real Sympathy and Understanding.

The Mediator had to be God:

- I. to fulfil His mission (Isa. 43:11);
- II. to reconcile the parties (Job 9:33);
- III. to support and sustain under extreme suffering (Heb. 9:16);
- IV. to merit grace and glory (Acts 20:28);
- V. to overcome and subdue our enemies (1 Cor. 15:55-57; 1 Jn. 3:8);
- VI. to quicken the elect (Jn. 5:25); and
- VII. to receive the glory and praise (Rev. 7:9,10).

The Mediator had to be man:

- I. to represent elect men (1 Cor.15:45);
- II. to obey the law, in all its precepts (Gal. 4:4);
- III. to suffer and to die on our behalf (1 Cor. 15:3,4);
- IV. to bring man to God (Job 9:33);
- V. to magnify grace (1 Kgs. 8:27);
- VI. to deliver a fatal wound to Satan (Gen. 3:15); and
- VII. to give comfort to believers in heaven (Jn. 14:1-3).