

Systematic Theology – Prolegomena - 2

Theological method

Intro: why are there so many doctrinal divisions and diversities in the Christian church today?

Several reasons, but one of them is theological method. How people do theology – what sources they use, what weight they give to each source, and how accurately and fairly they use each source.

Sources of Theology

1) Scripture

A. The Bible is the infallible Word of God. By infallible we mean it never guides us wrongly.

B. Scripture is the only rule of faith and practice. If the Bible asserts a thing to be true, I believe it (even if I don't understand it). *Beware of confusing what the Bible says with my interpretation of what the Bible says.*

C. Human reason, knowledge and experience must be subject to the teaching of Scripture.

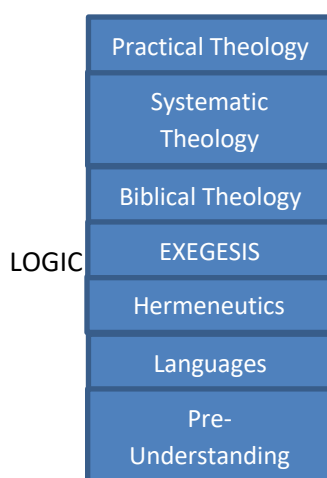
D. There is no additional revelation beyond what is recorded in Scripture.

Theology finds its ultimate authority and primary source in Scripture.

We do employ other tools/sources. There's more than Scripture that affects our theology, but Scripture is the ultimate authority.

2. Theology must be based upon the careful exegesis of relevant Scriptures rather than the listing of many obscure passages. Don't proof-text, hijack, read into silences, or insert theological ideas. Don't confuse possibility with probability. What you must do is show me (1) that you have rightly understood those passages, and (2) that they bear on the subject as you say they do. *I.e.*, many people's theological is not Biblical, but proof-texted. This is where hermeneutics and exegetical skills come into play.

True theology is built on exegesis:



When comparing Scripture with Scripture:

- 1) **A passage that can only mean one thing should interpret passages that can mean multiple things.** John 1:1 vs arguments about begetting.
- 2) **A didactic passage take priority over a historical passage.** Plurality of elders
- 3) **A deliberate passage takes precedence over an incidental passage.** Household baptism;
- 4) **An ambiguous passage is not sufficient to settle a debate.**

2) Didactic passages must interpret historical passages. That is, a passage that is teaching about a matter has more force than a passage that is simply narrating an event. Historical passages tell us what happened, but what was is not always what ought to have been, and even if it ought to have been then, it's not necessarily what ought to be now. Even if the historical precedent is unvarying, it still doesn't provide an adequate ground for saying that this is what **MUST** be. Example– plurality of elders.

3) Deliberate passages interpret incidental passages. A deliberate passage aims to answer the question that we are asking; an incidental passage is actually talking about something else, but contains info that may be somewhat relevant. It touches on a topic tangentially. Passages that deal with a passage “by the way” need to be taken into account, but must not take priority over passages that deliberately intend to teach what is being discussed.