



Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine

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The Christian church has a long tradition of systematic theology, that is, of studying biblical teaching on centrally important doctrines such as the Word of God, redemption, and Jesus Christ. Wayne Grudem's bestselling *Systematic Theology* has several distinctive features:

A strong emphasis on the scriptural basis for each doctrine

Clear writing, with technical terms kept to a minimum

A contemporary approach, treating subjects of special interest to the church today

A friendly tone, appealing to the emotions and the spirit as well as the intellect

Frequent application to life

Resources for worship within each chapter

Bibliographies in each chapter that cross-reference subjects to a wide range of other systematic theologies.

Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine Details

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From Reader Review Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine for online ebook

benebean says

disclaimer: this isn't really a real "review" of this book. What I wrote was more like notes on first reactions to the text since a friend of mine had recently/was going through the book around the same time. It really was never meant as a well-crafted expression of my view(s) on the book, nor does it reflect a studious approach on my part in carefully endeavoring to fully understand every argument before offering a well thought out conclusion. So if you end up reading this, take it with a grain of salt ;), it's quite possible I misunderstood/missed explanations given in the book-- I was likely doing several different tasks at the same time as listening to this tome.

So far, I haven't come across any conclusions that I disagree with, but there have been more than a couple proof texts that the author uses (particularly in prayer, and miracles) that I believe are clearly used incorrectly and thus serve to devalue his conclusions. It really makes me nervous about other proof texts he used that I may not have been very familiar with-- not knowing if he used them incorrectly. But all in all I still think the book is very informative and worth going through.

hmm, his logic seems rather flawed in a lot of places... it's not that I can prove him wrong, but I don't think he has adequate support for the points that he makes. He's using a lot of, well because the Bible doesn't say that A is true, it means that A is false. which is a clear logical fallacy.

I don't understand why he thinks that the angels were definitely created in the seven days of creation. I mean they certainly could have been, but I'm unaware of scripture that specifies that they definitely were created during the seven days described at the beginning of Genesis.

He's attached to this notion that heaven is a part of our physical universe-- which I just don't think is supported in scripture. Could it be true? yes. Is it definitely so? no. He seems to think that just because there're things happening all around us that we can't see, it means everything that happens is part of our space time continuum. Could this be true? yes. Is it necessarily true? No. I happen to speculate (there isn't scriptural proof either way that I know of) that it's more accurate to say, we are a part of God's world, rather than God and all spiritual beings are a part of ours. I suppose the only support that comes to mind for this is when God says our world is as dust on his scales.

Also, I'm irritated that he uses one of the most highly debated texts and even more controversial interpretations of the texts, as his proof. Saying heaven is physical because New jerusalem comes down out of the sky is not at all good support-- because it is one of the most heatedly debated items that New Jerusalem is physical. Could it be? Yes. Is there reason to believe it may not be? Considering that it says in the same passage that the twelve apostles are the foundation for new Jerusalem, YES. Is this a good proof text, NO!

Dottie Parish says

Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem illuminates the basic doctrines of Christianity. This reference book has seven major sections with chapters in each section. The information is rich, scholarly and detailed, but

written in a style easy for a lay person to understand. I read all the way through it!

Grudem ends each chapter with the words to a hymn on the subject of the chapter. In picking hymns to relate to the Christian doctrines he “realized that the great hymns of the church throughout history have a doctrinal richness and breadth that is still unequalled.”

This is a marvelous reference book for every Christian.

Daniel says

Since this book is written by a Particular Baptist-Charismatic, it is not a Reformed systematic theology. It is, however, a systematic theology written from a perspective that is friendly to Reformed theology. For that reason alone, it is not a book that modern Reformed theologians and clergy can safely ignore. If I was to be crudely reductionist in summarising my views on the book, I would suggest that the first 75% is very good, while the remaining 25% is perhaps not so good. This statement would need to be unpacked a little in order for you to understand what I am getting at.

The author's positions on theology proper, Christology, Trinitarianism, and soteriology are generally orthodox and very clearly presented. The only exception to this general point (at least, the only one which I came across) was his tentative rejection of the Westminster Confession's teaching on divine impassibility. This position is problematic, because if God can suffer then God cannot be immutable.

Dr Grudem's views on church government, baptism, worship, charismatic gifts, and the millennium are probably what has earned him most criticism from his Reformed readership. I actually thought he came fairly close to Presbyterianism in his chapter on ecclesiology, and his work is useful for refuting prelacy in one congregation, i.e. single elder rule.

The chapter on baptism was fairly weak both in argumentation and in his understanding of the Reformed position, and he only interacts with Louis Berkhof and Michael Green (the latter is an Evangelical Anglican author). It is interesting to note that earlier in the book he claims that Christians can expect to see their children who die in infancy in heaven owing to the special promises of God to the children of believers. I find it odd that we can expect to see our children in heaven, because God has promised to be a God unto us and our children after us, but we are forbidden from regarding them as members of the visible church!

The two chapters on charismatic gifts are probably the most controversial in the book, though it is not necessarily a bad thing for Reformed people to read these as Dr Grudem does overturn some weak cessationist arguments. It is also helpful to have a sober defence of this position if only to spare us from resorting to crude caricatures of all charismatics.

I will finish the review by focusing on the book's major strengths:

- 1) It is very well-written and clearly organised. Despite its length, the book generally does not feel bloated.
- 2) It has a devotional tone, which is usually missing from works of systematic theology.
- 3) Dr Grudem comes across as humble and is respectful to others.
- 4) The bibliographies at the end of each chapter are helpful.
- 5) It helps you to keep up-to-date with trends in broad evangelicalism.

6) It would make a good text-book for theology students, though it would need to be supplemented with more overtly Reformed reading material.

In short, the book was a valiant effort and will endure as a major work of systematic theology.

Jackie says

Well, it took me almost a year, but I finally finished reading this. After reflecting on it, I'm reminded of a man I interviewed who had earned a Master of Divinity. He warned others considering pursuing a similar degree that you don't go into serious theological study without being prepared to change your mind about things you've long believed about doctrine after weighing all the scriptural evidence. I remembered being surprised when he told me this was the most difficult part of earning his degree besides learning the original Hebrew and Greek.

I started reading this book under the assumption that my belief structure was largely sound, but prepared to maybe pull a few small thorns out of the paw of my mind. Talk about a rude awakening. My discomfort began at Chapter 16 on God's Providence, and that discomfort transitioned to full-out pain with Chapter 32: Election and Reprobation, which led me to many sleepless nights and a few weeks of waking misery. I'm still working through many of the implications of those chapters. Ripping out the roots of bad doctrine pulls up all the other bad theology attached to them, and it is a painful process. Other chapters were sort of bitter medicine, which left a bad taste in my mouth at first, but made me feel healthier over all for having consumed them. Others were pure joy, particularly the chapters on Prayer and Worship.

Those are my initial thoughts upon finishing this massive text. I may add more later on, but for now, I'll leave behind a quote that is fitting for reading a book like this: "The truth shall set you free, but first it will piss you off."

Dkovlak says

This is an excellent book. It is extremely long and very detailed. Mr. Grudem does an excellent job of spelling out each viewpoint for each topic. This book is a tremendous resource for all serious Christians. Almost any question you can think of is addressed by this book from a Christian viewpoint.

Tim says

Widely praised in the insular evangelicalism tainted by a taste of modern Reformed thought, Grudem's Systematic Theology is a perfect evangelical circle-jerk, unafraid to be unaware of any currents of modern or historical thought. Relying mostly on evangelical systematics of the last 150 years, and, of course, on his own bent vision of Scripture, Grudem nevertheless assumes his work is timeless and objective.

Grudem defines systematic theology as any study that answers the question, "What does the whole Bible teach us today?" about any given topic." (21) This definition purposely abandons history and philosophy, redefining systematics as a subset of Biblical theology. But it certainly lacks no arrogance as it strides forward to grasp the Scripture and put it to the author's own use.

Systematic theology thus boils down to a sorting of relevant Biblical passages. Grudem's work is, of course,

naive in what it ignores about the cultural placement of the reader and it is plain stupid in what it ignores about historical theology and the development of doctrine. Because he ignores church history, Scripture becomes God's one fixed action in history (Does it even replace Jesus?). He tries to claim that Scripture alone, not "conservative evangelical tradition," (he should add Reformed in between conservative and evangelical) is his norm, but that is an unreflective claim. It is obvious from his index that the thinkers he is interacting with are in a small circle of modern Anglo-American evangelicals (aside from well wishes to Calvin and a few other continental reformed types from before the 18th c. His reading also includes a couple of Catholic and Arminian straw men).

Systematic theology involves the reflection of the church in a particular age on the content of revelation and the previous history of the church's thought. It can be confident in its declaration, but also must be humble before the one who it attempts to speak about, treating God and his actions with awe. Theology is both scriptural and cultural, but the ultimate measure and center of the message is Jesus Christ, the incarnate word. The theology of today, interacts and is shaped by the theology of yesterday (that is the historical aspect here), but must be written fresh in every generation. Grudem's lack of any historical concern or awareness of his own placement in culture allows him to speak with assurance that is just not warranted.

Grudem's work is also often praised for being devotional, but that aspect does not derive from the text itself, but is added on in discrete devotional sections. Other theologians, including Barth, von Balthasar, and Bloesch, have led me to worship. Grudem, with his underlying polemical focus on the insipid quarrels of a corner of evangelicalism, only raises my ire. His division of theology and ethics, one about knowing and believing, the other about doing, entirely ignores the pastoral place of theology in the church's history (see Ellen Charry) and entirely separates the mind from the will. It also only further encourages the pronounced evangelical tendency to separate knowledge and faith from everyday life.

Evangelicals, every believer, need to know and do theology well. But Grudem does not encourage thought, he provides his own "timeless" answers. Overall, this is a horrible work that encourages intellectual arrogance and laziness, as well as historical amnesia. Its popularity is a blight upon evangelicalism and I cannot say enough bad things about it.

Travis says

Over the past couple of years, I made it a goal of mine to read through Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology. Grudem's work is one of the standard systematic theology books used in Bible colleges and seminaries around the world. I read Millard Erickson's book in my theology classes in seminary, and thus wanted to take a look at Grudem's work. Over the next few paragraphs, I will mention just a few impressions of the work that I have. I will not attempt a thorough review, as to review a 1,200 page work is not a task I relish.

Positives

The first thing that I will applaud in Grudem's work is the way in which he made his book accessible for readers of all different levels. While some of the concepts are necessarily difficult to mentally wade through, Grudem did extremely well in making this book readable. I do not remember many times in which I felt I had to reread a paragraph or sentence simply because the prose was difficult. Yes, sometimes the logic was difficult, but never the language. Grudem does not revel in using bigger words than his readers can easily digest.

Another positive of the book is its devotional nature. At the end of each chapter, Grudem offers questions for reflection, Scripture to memorize, and even an applicable hymn for the topic being discussed. This

demonstrates for us that Grudem does not consider theology something to be reserved for sterile academia. On the contrary, Grudem helps us to see that to embrace theology should necessarily include a deep life of worship of the Creator.

I must also say, though it sounds self-promoting, that I enjoyed reading a work that I could so readily agree with. As the author took us through doctrine after doctrine, I found myself so regularly thinking, "Yes, that is exactly what I think." Of course this is not every concept on every page, but for the most part, I found myself easily able to point back to Grudem and to say to people that this is a good place to see why my doctrine is what it is.

Negatives

In any work of this size, it is impossible to agree with every concept or argument. There are some doctrines or definitions given where I believed that Grudem may have shot wide of the mark. This is a difficult thing to write, however, as I assume Grudem to be much brighter than me, and thus he is probably right while I need the correction. Without getting into the issues, Grudem's definition of the New Testament gift of prophecy and his handling of cessationism vs. continuationism is an example where I do not quite find myself lining up with the author's assessment. I will say, however, that reading Grudem here has made me commit to review my position on the topic and examine my own understanding.

Perhaps the strangest criticism of this book is that some chapters feel too short. Yes, this book is already enormous. Many people will never open its covers for the simple fact of the intimidating mass of the tome. However, some of the latter chapters of the book feel like cursory overviews. This is the downfall of a single volume systematic theology. The point is, however, that many who look to this book for a defining answer on difficult issues such as eschatology will only find a starting point with Grudem, but will have to look to other, more focused works to find a conclusion. No, this criticism is not fair when we consider the book's purpose, but it is still something that a reader may sense as he or she works through the volume.

Recommendation

I would recommend that Christians of all walks of life take a shot at working through Grudem's Systematic Theology. Yes, the book is huge. But, if you will give yourself to simply one chapter per week, in 57 weeks, just over 1 year, you will have worked through deep thinking on some of the most glorious things that a person can consider. I have no personal hesitation at all in calling Christians to look to Grudem's work as a great starting place for understanding the things of the faith.

Amy says

Wow. Grudem defines "Systematic Theology" as what the bible tells us today about any given topic.....and I have to say that after reading this massive text, I feel much more apt to be able to read and understand scripture and apply it to my life. The one major thing that sticks out in this book is the extensive bibliographies at the end of each chapter. Grudem doesn't just leave you hanging with his opinion, he shows you other texts where you can explore other opinions. This book should be required reading for Christians who are ready to move past reading the bible by itself, but want to learn more about biblical doctrine. (However, I should mention...one should always be immersed in scripture because no other book will grow your faith more than actual biblical text)

In short, my faith is different and better after reading this book. It will be on my bookshelf until I go to meet the Lord my God myself.

Now reading for a second time..... Started 01/16/2011

Mason says

This is my third time through systematic. Grudem does such a great job with this. Will be a long time classic.

Nick Gibson says

A useful and clear "first systematic theology" that is unafraid to take a position and equally unafraid to present the opposition. My agreement with Grudem's choices waxes and wanes, but my confidence that reading it was worth the time does not.

Kelly says

One of the most helpful books I have ever read. A comprehensive systematic theology from a mostly reformed perspective that is an excellent and well-organized introduction to Biblical Christian beliefs and theology. I appreciated that Grudem as an author was upfront about his position on every topic he covered - he did not feign to be unbiased, instead clearly stating his own position and then providing ample bibliographies in each section from other authors with alternate viewpoints for the reader to follow up with as desired. As a writer, Grudem is clear and straightforward, providing just enough academic content (usually through footnotes) to assist the reader in understanding the topics he covers in the book.

Jeff Shelnutt says

Systematic theologies are not easy to rate. There are a number of factors to consider, especially when approaching a work the size and scope of Grudem's. Plus, there are all sorts of personal criteria that come into play, the least of which is not one's own theological positions. So, I'll try to break down this review into a few categories and comment on the appeal of each to me.

Readability. This is where I consider Grudem to shine the brightest. Theological, like philosophical works, are notorious for their excessive verbiage and inaccessibility to the non-scholar. But this work was seemingly written with the layman in mind. The author takes pains to simply define his terms. He avoids technical words unless he explains their practical application to the topic at hand. And he follows an easily understood pattern: the biblical basis for the subject, his own interpretation of these texts, alternate views of the subject, and a defense of his position.

Applicability. Theory, no matter how biblically sound, is nothing more than an entertaining intellectual exercise if there is no real-life application to follow. I appreciate how Grudem points out why a particular doctrine is important and how one's doctrinal position has ramifications for his life and ministry. An added

bonus are the personal application questions at the end of each chapter, and an applicable hymn drawn from the rich annals of the historic orthodox Christian faith.

Theologically. What one thinks of Grudem's theology is inevitably subjective. That is, it depends on how one views the Bible. I am a conservative, evangelical Christian, so I found the majority of this work very satisfying. Grudem's approach is built upon the premise that the Bible (Old and New Testament) is the infallible Word of God and should be interpreted as God's direct and complete communication to man.

I felt he dealt with the following subjects in a thorough and biblical manner: Atonement, Conversion (Faith and Repentance), Justification (Right Legal Standing Before God), The Church (Its Nature, Its Marks, and Its Purposes) and Worship. Also, his two chapters on spiritual gifts take a much needed balanced approach to a deeply divisive issue within the ranks of evangelicalism.

This work does assume a reformed theological position. Though I don't agree with all of Grudem's interpretations of the various biblical texts relating to election and reprobation, I will concede that he presents his arguments in a pleasantly non-confrontational manner.

Time Investment. This work definitely calls for a commitment of time. Not only is it long, but the chapters should be read and reflected upon to receive the greatest benefit. Also, if one is not familiar with the extensive biblical references, it would behoove the reader to take the extra time to look these up as he goes along.

This work is subtitled "An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine." If this is your first dip into the systematic theological waters, it is a bit of an understatement. "An Introductory Immersion" might be a better description!

John says

Grudem's Systematic Theology is the "go-to" Systematic Theology in a large part of the American church today, including my little corner. I finally got through it myself, after delaying for years.

The book is very well organized, as others have said. Grudem is a clear writer, and the book is very accessible to the average layman. In fact, the book is organized well to be used in adult Sunday School curriculum, as my church is doing. The title is "An Introduction to..." so keep that in mind. The book covers a very wide range of topics, but does not do so in great depth in many places.

It is easy to understand why this has become the de-facto Systematics today. Grudem has a relatively high view of Scripture, is wishy-washy on six-day creation, has a strong emphasis on justification by faith, and is open-minded to the intrigue of Pentecostalism--but in a very conservative way. What wouldn't the contemporary Reformed church like about any of that?

Much of this is good. Grudem is at his best defending the authority and inerrancy of Scripture--perhaps the most important of doctrines. Yet this isn't enough, as it is clear that zeitgeist of "Scientism" has an undue influence in his reading of Genesis.

Most of the central Reformed doctrines are well articulated and well defended. My favorite and most impressive part of the book is his demolition of the paedobaptist view in chapter 49. I've never read such a

convincing and concise destruction of the argument for infant baptism. Yet in the next chapter on the Lord's Supper, he doesn't even ask the most basic of questions--what elements ought we partake in? Grape juice or wine? For a theologian like Grudem, who seems very thorough in so many other things, to overlook the juice vs. wine discussion is a huge oversight.

Grudem is solid on ecclesiology, pointing out that the Bible says far less about it than we like to think. So there is a lot of room for negotiation here, yet the Bible does seem to emphasize some specific things that should point us to a plurality of elders ruling the local church with the support of the full congregation.

The chapter on eschatology was by far the most disappointing chapter in the book. For a systematic theologian to basically rule out preterist readings of the New Testament, and then use the very texts that ought to be read preteristically as the arguments against preterism is simply bad scholarship. As a postmillennialist myself, I found his three arguments for postmillennialism just laughable. Grudem would do well to read a little more widely on preterism and postmillennialism.

All in all, the book is about what you would expect. It is mostly solid, though very introductory. Some good, a few great parts, a few bad parts, and one really bad chapter.

Ryan says

Whether Grudem's attempt at constructing a Systematic Theology is useful to you or not depends entirely on what you're looking for.

If you're looking for a primer on theology, or even a contribution to the conversation on theology, then avoid this book like the plague. Grudem's Systematic is unabashedly biased, historically shallow, lacking in nuance, narrow in scope, and sparing in dialogue. Even in areas where you might happen to agree with Grudem, you'll still likely be frustrated by his reductionistic simplicity - especially in the way he "charitably" presents opposing positions - and his dogmatic approach.

If you largely agree with Grudem, reading this book will likely only give you a false confidence in the rightness of your beliefs. If you largely disagree with Grudem, his arguments are sufficiently feeble that you will likely not change your mind.

When taken as billed, an introduction to Biblical doctrine, Grudem's Systematic Theology cannot be denigrated enough. It is a tragic waste of paper, and will likely cause more harm than good. Millard Erickson's Systematic Theology comes from a similar theological perspective but is superior in nearly every possible way. Stanley Grenz is another example. In my opinion, his highly ecumenical approach makes him the best of the three, but your mileage may vary.

However, Grudem's saving grace is that his book serves as a fairly good primer to the neo-Reformed movement. If you've ever found yourself wondering what's up with all these people who call themselves Calvinists even though they don't baptize infants, this book will give you a good introduction to what Grudem and his cohorts believe. It is for this reason that I give the book two stars, rather than one.

G Walker says

Ehhh... At one level, I get the hype... at another level, I have HUGE concerns. I am not sure really all what should or shouldn't be said about this work. Out the outset, Grudem is commendable on several levels. He is a first rate communicator. He is a great compiler and organizer. He's not afraid to take on controversial issues or draw unpopular conclusions. When it comes to logic, or at least structured theology, he is good and clearly communicates "tightly wound" argumentation without mentally exhausting his readers. He has a very high view of scripture. All of this volume good. YET... He is a scary guy. His sway in the evangelical world is alarming. This makes him powerful and this particular work (which has sold millions in various forms) a significant milestone in contemporary evangelicalism. It is one of - hands down - the best selling systematic theologies of all time, in the US and abroad. It has endorsements from all camps, baptists, presbyterians, charismatics, etc. Again, a widely praised, referenced, quoted, endorsed and recommended book.

My concerns mostly arise because of his non-historical views on key issues. His view of the Trinity is deficient, even if one grants a concession of a strictly western take on that issue. His Christology is deficient, especially in regards to his lack of adherence to counsels and creeds regarding the eternal procession of the Son (and YES, it does matter!). His view of gender(s) is deeply effected by his Trinitarianism... or maybe his Trinitarianism is too controlled by his view of genders. While I would agree with a lot of his final conclusions on gender, especially as it related to eclessiology, he does swing too far to the right and his theological *method* is defective. And yes, method matters - NOT just the conclusion. He is a (historical) premillennialist. Again, a view very much in vogue today - BUT a view that was condemned (several times) in the ecumenical counsels (Historical Theology DOES matter!) as well as by several creeds and confessions, within his own reformed tradition. He is a "wooden" Calvinist... He has a hard to swallow take on original sin - even if you only consider the western conservative/reformed traditions. And he is - for all intents and purposes - a strict determinist. His doctrine of Divine Sovereignty is almost Moslem-esque. Not the end of the world... I have had the opportunity to talk with and engage him over the years, he is personally very pastoral - but his disciples often are not - and turn his model of determinism into a form of science or thought experiment... Theology should comport with reality... it should be pastoral and drive us to meet people where they are at and help them walk with God. It may be my concern here isn't with Grudem as much as it is with his text in the hands of immature believers who claim to be his theological heirs. His view of congregationalism is interesting at best but truthfully, I find it when actually applied to produce more chaos and division (at a catholic level) than the alleged unity (locally) it is striving to produce. He's a baptist ;) Okay, not the end of the world, but, this much I will say - baptist theology is an aberration... and it needs be noted, that all versions of historic Christianity (Protestant, Roman or Orthodox), condemned all forms of baptist theology (not just Anabaptist! - they aren't the same) until a couple hundred years ago. Overall though... this is the text for the trendy, hipster, neo/pop-calvinist... And, in the end, I do get why. It is a handsome, well organized, well written book that has God and his workings in the world all figured out. Must be nice to be able to fit all that into a single volume.
