

## Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine

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Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. By Wayne A. Grudem. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 1264 pp. \$39.95.

Wayne Grudem's systematic theology is very complete, well reasoned, yet clear and readable, and handsomely printed. Very biblically based (as the title suggests), it is not dry, but engaging, challenging and personal. It is abreast of the latest writings and well-fitted for seminary classes, but can be read easily by lay persons. Grudem has a gift for simplifying, explaining and illustrating theological truths.

Grudem's methodology comes from John Frame's definition that "Systematic theology is any study that answers the question, 'What does the whole Bible teach us today?' about any given topic." In keeping with this definition, each of Grudem's fifty-seven chapters carries a question or two in the subtitle. Examples are: Chapter 21, The Creation of Man. Why did God create us? How did God make us like himself? How can we please him in everyday living? Chapter 22, Man as Male and Female. Why did God create two sexes? Can men and women be equal and yet have different roles? Chapter 23, The Essential Nature of Man. What does Scripture mean by "soul" and "spirit"? Are they the same thing? Grudem exegetes pertinent Bible passages to craft his theological answers.

The book has seven parts: 1. Word of God, 2. God, 3. Man, 4. Christ and the Holy Spirit, 5. Application of Redemption, 6. Church, 7. Future. Any grouping is difficult. Part Four, for example, has four chapters on Christ, and only one on the Holy Spirit. Part Five contains thirteen chapters, including the Baptism and Filling of the Holy Spirit, while Part Six has two additional chapters on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the parts fit together well enough.

A unique feature of this theology is Grudem's stated purpose of not interacting with liberal theology. He states, "I write as an evangelical and for evangelicals. This does not mean that those in the liberal tradition have nothing valuable to say; it simply means that differences with them almost always boil down to differences over the nature of the Bible and its authority" (p. 17). This is a refreshing, positive feature. Grudem focuses on what the Bible says, not the denials or denunciations of the critics. He defends the truth, but from the strength of ascertaining what Scripture says and means. Grudem's work is scholarly, aware of diverse views, yet cogently argued to present positive truth.

Each chapter is well organized and follows the outline format of a textbook. Each chapter also has a section of "Questions for Personal Application," containing thoughtfully composed questions for personal reflection and/or discussion. Some chapters have a list of "Special Terms" that could serve as a reminder to students of what might appear on an exam. Each chapter also has a bibliographical list that divides standard evangelical works into sections-Anglican, Arminian, Baptist, Dispensational, Lutheran, Reformed, Renewal and Roman Catholic (Traditional and Post-Vatican II). There is also a complete bibliography at the end of the book.

The above groupings are generally clear, but sometimes blurred. The Baptist section frequently lists the works of Gill, Boyce, Strong, Mullins, Carl Henry, Erickson and Lewis/Demarest. Carl Henry, a

Baptist, is not widely known for covering Baptist theology. However, Henry Thiessen, clearly a Baptist theologian, who died as President of Los Angeles Baptist Theological Seminary, is listed in the Dispensational section. This points up the difficulty of categorizing some theologians. Still, the listed dates and pertinent pages of each theology facilitate further reading.

Each chapter suggests a passage of Scripture to memorize and prints several verses of a hymn appropriate to the lesson-something used by Grudem in his seminary classes. Charts and diagrams are rare, but appear more often than in other theologies. Eight charts illustrate church polity; five God and creation, four each the trinity, the Christological controversies, and eschatology. Two are on justification, one presents Spirit baptism and another sanctification. A three-page chart shows the gradual formation of the Apostles' Creed. Five appendices are found, including forty pages of historic confessions-from the Apostles' Creed to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

There are four indices-authors, sixty hymns, Scriptures discussed in some detail, and subjects. Each is superbly done. Grudem cites his own writings more than any others, followed by L. Berkhof, D. A. Carson, Calvin, John Murray, Erickson, A. Hoekema and Pinnock. Nearly 700 authors are indexed, but such neo-orthodox thinkers as Niebuhr and Tillich are missing, as are Emery Bancroft and Elmer Towns, who as Baptists each wrote extensive evangelical theologies.

Grudem's theology supports biblical inerrancy, the trinity, five-point Calvinism, premillennial eschatology, a posttribulation rapture, all spiritual gifts (except apostleship) for today, a loose definition of the church that includes Old Testament Israel, and baptism by immersion for professing believers only. He ably presents a complementarian view of man and woman.

Several weaknesses emerge. Grudem's definition of the church as all true believers for all time is disappointing. His arguments against Chafer and Erickson seem very weak, and he ignores Jesus' prediction of a church that is still future. He alludes to "the many New Testament verses that understand the church as the `new Israel,'" when, in fact, there are none, and he gives none (p. 861). Grudem assumes uniformitarian geology and an earth 4.5 billion years old. He treats the young earth view poorly and raises straw men-that God must have created fossils and scattered them around to give an appearance of age. Who responsibly holds that view? No names are given.

Various logical fallacies are seen. Grudem categorically states that, "If God only answered the prayers of sinless people, then no one in the whole Bible except Jesus would have had his or her prayers answered" (p. 385), apparently forgetting Adam and Eve before the fall. Also, it would be better to say that Eve's desire to usurp Adam's authority and the conflict in their relationship were results of sin, rather than "that God is introducing" the conflict and sinful rebellion into their relationship (p. 464).

Again, Grudem says it is "quite possible" that the animal kingdom was "subject to death from the moment of creation" (p. 292). But the most natural interpretation of Romans 8:19-23, not mentioned in Grudem's excursus, is that God subjected the creation to decay upon the sin of Adam, not before. It also seems erroneous to equate the eating of a piece of fruit with the death of the plant. In heaven we will eat of the tree of life, but it does not die, just as Adam and Eve could eat of it and other trees in the garden without death coming to the trees.

On biblical grounds, Grudem disagrees with Murray Harris's resurrection view, but strangely fails to cite any of Norman Geisler's works on the subject, even in the chapter bibliography that includes almost twenty other works on the topic. In the section on soul sleep (pp. 819-821), I feel it is an oversight to refute Catholic writers on purgatory but to ignore Seventh-day Adventists who are vocal

proponents of soul sleep. Grudem's section on eternal punishment is excellent, but his suggestion that believers will one day receive an outwardly bright appearance appropriate for their reign with Christ and status as image bearers and servants of Christ is at least novel.

Grudem's definitions are clear and precise. For example, "Prayer is personal communication with God" (p. 376). His work is very original. I appreciate his six excellent reasons for fasting (pp. 390-391), and the great section on God's wisdom as applied to us. Fine personal applications accompany discussion of each of God's communicable attributes.

In the arena of textual criticism Grudem expresses his denial of the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20 (p. 365), and he refers to the minority readings as the "earliest and best manuscripts" (p. 384). Yet, strangely enough, when teaching that angels help us today, he says the Byzantine reading of Luke 22:43 has "substantial ancient attestation," where an angel strengthens Christ in Gethsemane (p. 406). But, when facing much stronger evidence for "and fasting" in Mark 9:29, he ignores it (p. 432). On John 1:18, Grudem avoids the RSV's "the only Son," and replaces it with his own translation, "the only begotten God," claiming that theos is better attested than huios.

In spite of the above criticisms, I highly recommend Grudem's theology. It will teach you, challenge you, expand your thinking, and warm your heart. Theologian, pastor and lay person alike will benefit greatly from this finely crafted work. It comes from the heart and mind of one of the church's finest servants and most careful and able scholars.

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