

Session 4: Overview of Systematic Theology

Systematic Theology: The study (logos) of the Divine (Theos) organized in self-consistent, comprehensive categories that correspond to God's revelation of Himself.

Session 1: Revelation, Reason, God (Berkhof 1-8); Session 2: Creation and Man (Berkhof 9-13)

Session 3: Christ and Redemption (Berkhof 14-22); Session 4: Church, Mission, Eschatology (Berkhof 23-30)



I. Salvation

- A. Christ's Faithfulness - The faithfulness of Jesus resulted in His atoning murder on the cross. The death of the righteous, sinless Christ liberated the cosmos for the glorious revelation of the sons of God. God raised Jesus bodily from the dead, thereby, defeating our final enemy, death. Jesus' ascension provides for our union with Him in heavenly rule.
- B. Community Faithfulness - The salvation available in Christ through union with Him in the Church is certified in baptism and renewed in communion. Salvation is not only an individual relationship with a person and the Triune God, but also a corporate relationship of Christ and the Church. Salvation is ordinarily realized by each person in the bounds of the covenantally objective people of God, requiring corporate worship, prayer, sacraments, and service.
- C. Believer's Faithfulness - God, according to His own purposes, determines whom to enlighten spiritually among spiritually dead persons with His Spirit, resulting in a response of faith. Faith in Jesus applies His righteousness in life and death to believers through union with Him in His body, resulting in justification, adoption, and glorification. The faithfulness of believers is a response to the work of Jesus through the Holy Spirit renewing a believer's life. Followers of Christ are called to live in obedience to the Law of God (i.e., the moral precepts of Scripture). Obedience to the moral claims of Scripture before faith or after faith are not the basis of salvation, but the result of union with Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Conscious dependence on the Spirit of God is the means of a life of faith, obedience, and holiness. The glory of God is man fully alive and the glory of man is seeing the Father, through the Son, and in the life of the Holy Spirit (Irenaeus).
- D. God determines the earthly life of all creatures and has permitted carnal death since the fall of Adam. Those united to Christ in His death and resurrection shall all be raised to life and immortality. Yet, the bodily death of those in Christ before the day of resurrection results in the separation of body and soul. The souls of those in Him are immediately received into His presence while their bodies rest in death until the final day of life in the resurrection.

II. Church

- A. Catholic (kata holos - "according to the whole") - The Church includes all those from all times and in all places who are united to Christ. It is the duty of believers to show unity, love, and appreciation for the Church universal. The catholic church is presently manifest in diverse congregations on the earth.
- B. Multi-ethnic - The Church is to be composed of every kind of person, ethnic group, and in all locations in which humanity dwells. All humanity descended from one man, Adam, and thus all humanity may be united in the final Adam, Jesus Christ. There is no basis in the Christian faith for the inherent superiority of one race or ethnic group over another.
- C. Leadership - Christ is the head of the Church and according to His Word, the form of local congregational government is a plurality of qualified men exercising leadership according to the Word. The office designated for ruling and shepherding the church is the office of elder or presbyter, some of whom are ordained as ministers or pastors. Under the general oversight of the elders, the deacons manage the financial, physical, social, and benevolent functions of the church.
- D. Great Commission - The Church has been given the command to disciple all the ethnically and genetically diverse peoples in the world. The mission of the Church is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. This includes translating the Word of God in every language of the world, preaching and teaching all that the Word of God demands in every place, and establishing congregations in every place for the worship of the true God and the salvation of all kinds of people.

III. Word, Sacrament, and Discipline

- A. Preaching - The instructional proclamation of the truth from Scripture in the power of the Spirit is required of the Church through properly ordained messengers (ministers, pastors, teachers, elders,

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evangelists, etc.). The gospel of Jesus must be proclaimed continually in the Church and to the world in order to fulfill Christ's mission for the Church.

- B. Sacraments - Though there are many sacramental glimpses of Christ's goodness and grace, the Church has been given two proper sacraments for the signs and seals of Christ's work: baptism and the covenant meal of bread and wine. Baptism inducts a person into the Church and a formal relationship with Christ through the rite of applying water in the name of the Triune God. It represents all of the ways God reaches out to cleanse and receive sinful people into union with Himself. It is properly administered to covenant children (i.e., a child of at least one believing parent). The covenant meal of the Lord's Supper is a Eucharistic thanksgiving and rite of Christ's presence which requires eating bread and drinking wine with the people of God in Christ's promised presence, in remembrance of Christ's work. It is properly given to all the baptized, not under discipline. It is a sign of the completion of Christ's work on the First Day of the Week.
- C. Discipline - The Church is responsible to distinguish between the faithful to Christ and the unfaithful. Baptism is the first distinction between the world and the Church. While informal discipline takes place in the life of the Church's ordinary means of grace (such as preaching, teaching, communion, etc.), formal discipline is a process to call sinners to repentance for overt disobedience. The ordered, careful process of this discipline of individuals which may result in the official removal of them from a congregation is required for the peace and purity of the Church.

IV. Eschatology

- A. Christ replaced Adam and so after His redemptive work was complete, He ascended to reign over heaven and earth, all of reality. He empowers the Church to proclaim His gospel to all nations and establish His Church in every place.
- B. He has brought about historic, temporal judgments, such as the end of the old covenant era in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (70 A.D.).
- C. Christ will return and judge all, dead or alive, raising all to eternal bodily life or eternal bodily death.
- D. Christ will consummate His work in this era with a renewal of this creation for the resurrected saints.
- E. This resurrection consummation is only the beginning of the glorious eternal plan of the Triune God for His redeemed people. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Quotes from Berkhof:

It is best to say that the atonement is rooted in the love and justice of God: love offered sinners a way of escape, and justice demanded that the requirements of the law should be met, John 3:16; Rom. 3:24-26

It is customary to distinguish a twofold obedience of Christ. His active obedience consists in all that He did to observe the law in behalf of sinners, as a condition for obtaining eternal life; and His passive obedience in all that He suffered in paying the penalty of sin and discharging the debt of His people.

Reformed Churches on the other hand believe in a limited atonement. ... Christ not merely made salvation possible but really saves to the uttermost every one of those for whom he laid down His life, Luke 19:10; Rom. 5:10; II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:7.

Regeneration, as the implanting of the new life, precedes internal calling, and internal calling precedes regeneration in the broader sense, or the new birth. ... Lydia, Acts 16:14, "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God, heard us (external call): whose heart the Lord opened (regeneration in the restricted sense) to give heed to the things which were spoken by Paul (internal call)."

Justification may be defined as that legal act of God by which He declares the sinner righteous on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is not an act or process of renewal, such as regeneration, conversion, or sanctification, and does not affect the condition but the-state of the sinner. It differs from sanctification in several particulars. Justification takes place outside of the sinner in the tribunal of God, removes the guilt of sin, and is an act which is complete at once and for all time; while sanctification takes place in man, removes the pollution of sin, and is a continuous and lifelong process. Sanctification may be defined as that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit by which, He purifies the sinner, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works.