Building Systematic Theology

Study Guide

TECHNICAL TERMS IN THEOLOGY

THIRD MILLENNIUM

M I N I S T R I E S

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STUDY GUIDE

CONTENTS

How to use this lesson and study guide

- **Before you watch the lesson**
  - o **Preparation** — Complete any recommended readings.
  - o **Schedule breaks** — Review the outline and the time codes to determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions in the outline.

- **While you are watching the lesson**
  - o **Notes** — Use the Notes section to follow the lesson and to take additional notes. Many of the main ideas are already summarized in the notes, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
  - o **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.

- **After you watch the lesson**
  - o **Review Questions** — Questions on the basic content of the lesson. Answer review questions in the space provided. Review questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
  - o **Application Questions —** Questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Outline

Notes

I.   Introduction

Systematic theologians build their theology with special vocabulary. They have created their own ways of communicating with each other through technical terms.

II.   Orientation

A.   Definition

We define theological technical terms as "words and phrases with specialized meanings in theology."

Technical terms distinguish one thing from another.

Technical terms are convenient ways of abbreviating complex subjects in a word or phrase.

B.   Terms and Concepts

1.   Language in General

The relationship between words and ideas is complex.

a.   Many Terms, One Concept

b.   One Term, Many Concepts

2.   Language of Scripture

Just as many terms can signify the same concept in normal language, many terms can also signify the same concept in biblical language. And just as one term can signify many concepts in ordinary language, one term can signify many concepts in the bible as well.

a.   Many Terms, One Concept

Biblical terms signifying the concept of Christian Living:

- Sanctification
- Faithfulness
- Obedience
- Walking in the Spirit
- Conformity to Christ
- Transformation

The names for Jesus in Scripture:

- Christ
- Lord
- Savior
- God
- The Word
- The Last Adam
- The Son of God
- The Son of David
- The King
- The Firstborn over all Creation
- The Mediator

b.   One Term, Many Concepts

Justification

- Declaration of righteousness that takes place when Christians first believe in Christ and his righteousness is imputed to them.

- Proof or vindication of righteousness

Sanctification

- Initial sanctification new believers receive at justification when they are made righteous and definitively joined to Christ.

- progressive holiness

- holiness without salvation

C.   Need

Theologians need technical terms to create a coherent system of theology that embraces all of Scripture. Because the connections between biblical terms and biblical concepts are so manifold, many theological discussions would be too ambiguous or too cumbersome to conduct without special ways of discussing the issues.

1.   Many Terms, One Concept

Biblical writers often refer to the same basic concept with many different expressions. So, systematicians form technical terms to clarify what they mean.

Ecclesiology:

- Israel of God

- Temple of God

- Body of Christ

2.   One Term, Many Concepts

Systematic theologians also form technical terms to avoid the confusion that's created by the fact that a single word or phrase can mean many different things in Scripture. Systematicians develop very specific, and often artificially narrow, definitions for technical terms.

D.   Place

Technical terms form the basic building blocks of a systematic theology.

Technical terms:

Propositions:

Doctrinal Statements:

III.   Formation

Technical terms in systematics are formed in a number of ways.

A.   Biblical Terms

Using biblical terminology as technical vocabulary for theology is not as straightforward as it may seem.

1.   Emphasizing One Term

Biblical writers often use more than one expression to refer to the same idea.

2.   Emphasizing One Meaning

Systematicians emphasize one meaning of a biblical term over others.

3.   Creating New Meanings

Systematicians use biblical terms in ways these terms are never used in the Bible.

Covenant of Grace

"Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by the covenant of works, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ…." WCF chapter 7, section 3

B.   Extra-Biblical Language

Systematicians also derive their terminology from sources outside of Scripture.

1.   Common Terminology

The simplest way Systematicians draw from extra-biblical terminology as they explain the teachings of Scripture is by adopting the vocabulary of their cultures.

Trinity:

The word Trinity first appeared around AD 180 when Theophilus of Antioch used the Greek term *trias* to describe the three-ness of the Godhead. It was simply a word coined from the common word for three.

2.   Philosophical Terminology

Systematic theologians also create new meanings for extra-biblical terminology used in non-Christian religious and philosophical discussions.

So long as systematicians maintain Scripture as their final supreme judge, extra-biblical religious and philosophical expressions can be very helpful.

3.   Combined Terminology

Systematicians also combine biblical and extra-biblical terms in order to form their theological technical terms.

- Definitive sanctification:

- Progressive sanctification:

IV.   Values and Dangers

It is important not to overestimate or underestimate how the technical language of systematic theology helps us build Christian theology. A balanced outlook will be both positive and negative because technical terms present significant advantages and disadvantages.

A.   Christian Living

Christian living is the process of personal sanctification that must take place on at least three different levels:

- Conceptual (orthodoxy):

- Behavioral (orthopraxis):

- Emotional (orthopathos):

1. Enhancement

Technical terms serve as simple references for complex biblical teachings.

2. Hindrance

Knowing the special vocabulary of systematics can lead to spiritual pride.

B. Interaction in Community

Interaction in community is a major resource for building Christian theology because it helps us focus on the help that the body of Christ offers us.

- Christian Heritage:

- Present Community:

- Private Judgment:

1.   Enhancement

When Christians know and are able to use the special expressions that have been developed by Systematicians, they can communicate much more effectively with each other.

2.   Hindrance

Many special expressions in systematic theology are archaic and do not communicate well today.

C.   Exegesis

Exegesis (interpretation) is vital to building Christian theology because it is our most direct access to God's special revelation in Scripture.

- Literary analysis (picture):

- Historical analysis (window):

- Thematic analysis (mirror):

When systematic theologians remember that they exercise terminological freedom and seek only conceptual conformity to Scripture, they can learn from all kinds of passages.

Sound systematic theologians always seek conceptual conformity to Scripture.

1.   Enhancement

When systematic theologians turn to the Scriptures for information on a given topic, they must be careful not to be overly restrictive by looking just for certain words. Instead, they must explore passages that have relevant concepts within them.

2.   Hindrance

One of the most common ways technical terms hinder exegesis is what we might call "overgeneralization". When students learn special terminologies in systematics and find them very helpful, they often begin to read their technical definitions into every place expressions appear in Scripture.

V.   Conclusion

Review Questions

1.   Briefly explain what theological technical terms are, and how they are used.

2.   Explain how terms and concepts relate to each other in general language and in Scriptural language.

3.   Explain why systematic theologians need technical terms in systematic theology.

4.   Explain how technical terms serve as the basic building blocks of systematic theology.

5.   How does an understanding of technical terms help us in building systematic theology?

6.   Explain the three ways in which systematic theologians form technical terms from Scripture.

7.   Explain the three ways in which systematic theologians form technical terms from extra-biblical language.

8.   Why is it important to understand how theological technical terms are created?

9.   Describe how the special language of systematic theology can both enhance and hinder Christian living.

10.   Describe how technical terms can both enhance and hinder interaction in community.

11.   Describe how technical terms can both enhance and hinder the exegesis of
        Scripture.

12.   Given the potential hindrances created by theological technical terms, why is it
        still important to use them?

Application Questions

1. Give at least one example each of how non-theological technical terms can both help and hinder communication in everyday life.

2. How can the principles "many terms can describe one concept" and "one concept can describe many terms" help you in your understanding and interpretation of Scripture?

3. What does the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) imply about our use of extra-biblical language?

4. How can the use of biblical and extra-biblical language aide our understanding of Scripture?

5. How can you, as student of theology, guard against the sin of pride?

6. How can terminological freedom and conceptual conformity to Scripture enhance your ability to match passages of Scripture to particular topics?

7. Explain the values and dangers of the term "trinity" as it relates to Christian living, interaction in community, or exegesis.