WHO WOULD WANT TO BE A THEOLOGIAN?

Many people react negatively to the word theology, believing that it involves dry, fruitless arguments about minute points of doctrine. They prefer to focus on the basic truths of Scripture and may even declare, “No creed but Christ.”

But as Dr. R.C. Sproul argues, everyone is a theologian. This is because any time we think about a teaching of the Bible and strive to understand it, we are engaging in theology. Therefore, it is important that we put the Bible’s varied teachings together in a systematic fashion using proper, time-tested methods of interpretation so as to arrive at a theology that is consistent and founded on truth.

That is precisely what Dr. Sproul does in *Everyone’s a Theologian*. This book is anything but a dry discussion of minute points of doctrine. Instead, Dr. Sproul, again demonstrating his trademark ability to make complex subjects easily understandable, surveys the basic truths of the Christian faith, reminding us once more of what God is like and of what He has done for His people in this world and the next.

WHAT ARE THE BIBLE’S MAJOR TOPICS?

The Bible is a large book that was written over fifteen hundred years by numerous men. It is composed of varied types of literature, from history to poetry to prophecies to letters to apocalyptic writings. Much of what it contains seems strange and vastly different from what we know and experience today. All of this can make it difficult to discern the Bible’s most basic themes and topics. But through the discipline of systematic theology, we can arrange and understand the Bible’s multi-faceted writings in a topical fashion. *Everyone’s Theologian*, then, is an introduction to the Bible’s major teachings.

In the book, Dr. Sproul begins by defining theology and considering its purpose. He then moves on to discuss the source of all theology, the Bible, which is God’s special revelation. In subsequent sections, Dr. Sproul looks at such topics as theology proper (the study of God), anthropology (the study of man), Christology (the study of Christ), pneumatology (the study of the Holy Spirit), soteriology (the study of salvation), ecclesiology (the study of the church), and eschatology (the study of the end times). Each section features seven to eight short, readable chapters that consider various aspects of the subset of theology that is in view.

Readers will come away from this book with a solid grasp of the basic truths of Scripture and a clearer view of how the Bible’s varied topics fit together into a beautiful whole.
“Have you ever wanted Christian theology made simple? R.C. Sproul has the gift of making things simple without dumbing them down. Like a father teaching his child to swim, he can bring us into waters too deep for us to touch bottom, but he won’t let us drown. So I invite you to jump into this pool of the knowledge of God. Whether you want to learn more about what makes the Bible different, who God is, why Christ died, how the Holy Spirit works in a person’s soul, or what happens on judgment day, in these pages you will find clear answers from a wise teacher.”

—Joel R. Beeke
President and Professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan

“A young man once told me that one night he dreamed he saw an army of theologians coming over the horizon toward him. At the front, leading the charge, was R.C. Sproul. Read this book and you will understand the dream. For here is theology rooted in Scripture, nourished by the best of the church’s theologians, and expounded with the clarity and simplicity that is the hallmark of a master theologian-communicator.

“Do you need to be a theologian to read this book? Of course. But that’s the point of the title: you are—the real question is whether you are a good one or not! So, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest Everyone’s a Theologian. By the time you are finished you will almost certainly be a healthier and happier one.”

—Sinclair B. Ferguson
Professor of Systematic Theology
Redeemer Seminary, Dallas
“R.C. Sproul is a consummate teacher, especially skilled at explaining difficult theological concepts in uncomplicated terms. Here, he tackles every major category of systematic theology in a succinct, lucid, even-handed fashion. This is a tremendously valuable resource for everyone from the newest believer to the most seasoned pastor. It is quite true that we are all theologians. Dr. Sproul helps us all be better theologians.”

—John MacArthur
Pastor, Grace Community Church
President, The Master’s College and Seminary
Sun Valley, California

“R.C. Sproul has written a brief, comprehensive summary of systematic theology that I intend to recommend to my classes for years to come. It is biblically faithful, solidly Reformed, grounded in the two-thousand-year-old Christian tradition, and up to date on questions crucial to the minds of people in our secularized culture. He writes with his typical clarity and economy of words. As always, he holds the reader’s attention. For a long time I have recommended to students Berkhof’s Summary of Christian Doctrine as a reliable and succinct source of Reformed systematic theology. It is still very useful, but I suspect I shall now be recommending Sproul’s Everyone’s a Theologian more than anything else in this category. Trinity, predestination, creation, sin, the extent of the atonement, justification, speaking in tongues, angels and demons, heaven and hell: all of these, and many another topic, are fairly and responsibly set forth in a way that honors the Word of God written, and will edify those who are open to its truth.”

—Douglas F. Kelly
Professor of Systematic Theology
Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina
EVERYONE’S A THEOLOGIAN

An Introduction to Systematic Theology
To my family,
who has been so loving and supportive
through the years of my ministry
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Part One

INTRODUCTION
Chapter 1

WHAT IS THEOLOGY?

Several years ago, a well-known Christian school invited me to address the faculty and administration on this question: “What is a Christian college or university?” Upon my arrival, the dean gave me a tour of the campus. During the tour, I noticed this inscription on a set of office doors: “Department of Religion.” When it came time to address the faculty that evening, I mentioned the inscription I had seen, and I asked whether the department had always been called by that name. An older faculty member replied that years ago the department had been called the “Department of Theology.” No one could tell me why the department name had been changed.

“Religion” or “theology”—what difference does it make? In the academic world, the study of religion has traditionally come under the broader context of either sociology or anthropology, because religion has to do with the worship practices of human beings in particular environments. Theology, by contrast, is the study of God. There is a big difference between studying human apprehensions of religion and studying the nature and character of God Himself. The first is purely natural in its orientation. The second is supernatural, dealing with what lies above and beyond the things of this world.

After explaining this in my lecture to the faculty, I added that a true Christian college or university is committed to the premise that the ultimate truth is the truth of God, and that He is the foundation and
source of all other truth. Everything we learn—economics, philosophy, biology, mathematics—has to be understood in light of the overarch-
ing reality of the character of God. That is why, in the Middle Ages, theology was called “the queen of the sciences” and philosophy “her handmaiden.” Today the queen has been deposed from her throne and, in many cases, driven into exile, and a supplanter now reigns. We have replaced theology with religion.

THEOLOGY DEFINED

In this volume, we are concerned with theology, specifically with sys-
tematic theology, which is an orderly, coherent study of the principal doctrines of the Christian faith. In this chapter, I will give a brief intro-
duction to the science of systematic theology and some basic definitions.

The word theology shares a suffix, -ology, with the names of many disciplines and sciences, such as biology, physiology, and anthropology. The suffix comes from the Greek word logos, which we find in the opening of John's gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The Greek word logos means “word” or “idea,” or, as one philosopher translated it, “logic” (it is also the term from which we get the English word logic). So when we study biology, we are looking at the word or logic of life. Anthropology is the word or logic about humans, anthrōpos being the Greek word for man. The primary part of the word theology comes from the Greek theos, which means “god,” so theology is the word or logic of God Himself.

Theology is a very broad term. It refers not only to God but to all that God has revealed to us in sacred Scripture. Included in the discipline of theology is the study of Christ, which we call “Christology.” It also includes the study of the Holy Spirit, which we call “pneumatology,” the study of sin, which is called “hamartiology,” and the study of future things, which we call “eschatology.” These are subdivisions of theology. Theologians also speak of “theology proper,” which has specific reference to the study of God Himself.

Many are comfortable with the word theology but cringe when they
hear the qualifying term systematic. This is because we live in a time of widespread aversion to certain kinds of systems. We respect inanimate systems—computer systems, fire alarm systems, and electrical circuitry systems—because we understand their importance for society. However, when it comes to systems of thought or to understanding life and the world in a coherent manner, people are uncomfortable. Part of the reason for that has to do with one of the most influential philosophies to emerge in Western history—existentialism.

**THE INFLUENCE OF PHILOSOPHY**

Existentialism is a philosophy of existence. It presupposes that there is no such thing as essential truth; rather, there is distinctive existence—not essence, but existence. By definition, existentialism abhors a generic system of reality. It is an anti-system that holds to truths but not to truth and to purposes but not to purpose. Existentialists do not believe that reality can be understood in an orderly fashion because they see the world as ultimately chaotic and without meaning or purpose. One simply confronts life as it happens; there is no overarching viewpoint to make sense of it all, because ultimately life does not make sense.

Existentialism has had a tremendous impact in Western culture along with its offspring, relativism and pluralism. The relativist says, “There is no absolute truth except the absolute truth that there is absolutely no absolute truth. All truth is relative. What is true for one may be false for another.” There is no effort to bring opposing views into harmony (something a system would seek to do) because, according to relativists, there is no possibility of a systematic understanding of truth.

Such philosophy has also had a strong impact on theology, even in the seminaries. Systematic theology is rapidly becoming a forgotten discipline, not only because of the impact of existential thought and of relativism and pluralism, but also because some people misunderstand systematic theology as an attempt to force the Bible into a philosophical system. Some have attempted to force the Bible into a philosophical system, as was the case with René Descartes and his rationalism and with
John Locke and his empiricism. Those who make such attempts do not hear the Word of God or seek to understand it on its own terms; rather, they seek to bring a preconceived system to bear on the Scriptures.

In Greek mythology, a bandit named Procrustes attacked people and cut off their legs to fit them into the dimensions of an iron bed rather than simply enlarging the bed. Attempts to force Scripture into a preconceived system of thought are similarly misguided, and the result has been an aversion to systematic theology. However, systematic theology does not attempt to force Scripture into a philosophy or system, but instead it seeks to draw out the teachings of Scripture and understand them in an orderly, topical way.

ASSUMPTIONS OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Systematic theology is based on certain assumptions. The first assumption is that God has revealed Himself not only in nature but also through the writings of the prophets and the Apostles, and that the Bible is the Word of God. It is theology par excellence. It is the full logos of the theos.

The second assumption is that when God reveals Himself, He does so according to His own character and nature. Scripture tells us that God created an orderly cosmos. He is not the author of confusion because He is never confused. He thinks clearly and speaks in an intelligible way that is meant to be understood.

A third assumption is that God’s revelation in Scripture manifests those qualities. There is a unity to the Word of God despite the diversity of its authors. The Word of God was written over many centuries by many authors, and it covers a variety of topics, but within that diversity is unity. All the information found in Scripture—future things, the atonement, the incarnation, the judgment of God, the mercy of God, the wrath of God—have their unity in God Himself, so that when God speaks and reveals Himself, there is a unity in that content, a coherence.

God’s revelation is also consistent. It has been said that consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, but if that were true, we would have
to say that God has a small mind, because in His being and character, He is utterly consistent. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).

These assumptions guide the systematic theologian as he goes about his task of considering the whole scope of Scripture and inquiring how it all fits together. At many seminaries, the systematic theology department is separate from the New Testament department and the Old Testament department. This is because the systematic theologian has a different focus than the Old Testament professor and the New Testament professor. Biblical scholars focus on how God has revealed Himself at various points over time, while the systematician takes that information, puts it all together, and shows how it fits into a meaningful whole. This is a daunting task, to be sure, and I am convinced that no one has ever done it perfectly.

As I engage in systematic theology, I never cease to be amazed by the specific, intricate coherence of the scope of divine revelation. Systematic theologians understand that each point in theology addresses every other point. When God speaks, every detail He utters has an impact on every other detail. That is why our ongoing task is to see how all the pieces fit together into an organic, meaningful, and consistent whole. That is what we will be doing in this volume.