

A SYSTEMATIC STUDY OF THE BIBLE AND THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST

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The approach of understanding what the whole Bible teaches on any given subject, in my opinion, spurred what we know as the Restoration Movement in America and abroad. In the *Harbinger* of 1836, Alexander Campbell produced “the central attributes of the proposed reformations for which we contend.” The very first of those attributes was a more intimate acquaintance with the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, which is Systematic Theology! It was that mindset that began the restoration of the New Testament church by those people in the world that hold God’s message as the only creed by which they live. This approach to understanding God’s inspired message has influenced the very foundational principles that the churches of Christ hold dear. A few of these basic tenets will be noticed.

At its base, there is a fundamental question in any theology. Who is God? The only way for a finite mind to grasp who the person of God is, is to understand His nature. God Himself said, “For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8). To understand who He is we must first and foremost know He is a just Being and wholly righteous. Because God is just and righteous, it is impossible for Him to overlook any sin; in fact, all sin has to be punished according to His standards (Rom. 6:23). However, His justice is not the only part of His nature that has been demonstrated to mankind. God is also love (1 Jn. 4:8), because of that great fact, He wants “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).

Systematic Theology shaped these beliefs, which are in opposition to other faiths that have not been founded in an organized approach. For example, it appears that Calvinists do not believe in God’s justness or His love for mankind. That conclusion is reached because statements such as, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him,” seem to be ignored (Ezek. 18:20). If a systematic approach was taken, and the entirety of a given topic studied, it would become clear that God does not punish the innocent. Therefore, doctrines such as total hereditary depravity would be dismissed as a false teaching.

Another Biblical doctrine that should be studied using a systematic approach is the one regarding worship of God. A common belief in the denominational world is that Christians are bound by the teachings of the Old Testament in certain religious observances. Often, those members will use Old Testament passages to support “church” teachings, instead of using them to identify the nature of God and his unfolding plan for man. For instance, one may support the use of instrumental music in worship by noting what the Psalmist said, “Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery *and* an instrument of ten strings” (Psa. 33:2).

In a systematic approach to worship, one should ask the question, “Does worship consist of what was written or simply because of the choices made under the present circumstances. By approaching the subject in a systematic way, it is discovered that God never instituted the instrument in His worship even during the days of the Old Law. Amos warned those that had become lazy in their dedication to God and used as an example those “that chant to the sound of the viol, *and* invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David” (Amos 6:5). In fact, it was David who introduced instrumental music in worship to God and not God Himself (1 Chron. 15:16). When passages such as these are

studied alongside those found in the New Testament (Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16), there should be greater clarity about what God has commanded concerning His worship.

This technique of study combines those previously mentioned passages with the doctrine of the silence of the Scriptures (Heb. 7:14), in an effort to know what the Holy Spirit has left for us to glean from the pages of God's Word. When God's teachings are accepted in their entirety, His creation can become what He wants them to be in every aspect of life.

There are sundry beliefs in the religious world regarding the study of Eschatology, or end times. Most denominations in the world hold to some form of Premillennialism, the belief that Christ will reign from David's literal throne from literal Jerusalem for one thousand years upon His second appearance to earth. That belief is founded, for the most part, in the twentieth chapter of Revelation. John's visions of the old serpent and the victorious saints have been misunderstood and misapplied because of a lack of a systematic study of the Bible. When the fullness of God's Word is considered, teachings such as this will be disregarded as untrue. Because Peter spoke about the ultimate destruction of the entire physical world when Christ returns (2 Pet. 3:10), because the departed spirits of men return to God for safekeeping (Ecc. 12:7), and because the purpose of the Lord's return is to take the faithful back to heaven and to remain there forever (1 Thess. 4:17), we know that Premillennialism cannot be accurate. The churches of Christ believe, according to the Bible, that man will never live on the earth after the Second Coming of Christ.

Without a systematic approach to Bible study, it becomes easy to misunderstand what God has provided for us to learn. Because of this type of study of God, the churches of Christ differ in their foundational beliefs from those in the denominational world.