

3. All hypotheses, even those whose truth we have assumed for years must be tested for their coherence and viability on standard criteria of truth. If they are true, we need not fear reexamination. True doctrines will not be found self-contradictory, or unrelated to reality in the external or internal worlds of human experience. Sound interpretations of a disputed passage of Scripture will without self-contradiction account for all the relevant lines of evidence: the author's purpose, grammar, and word usage; the immediate biblical context; and the broader theological context. Fitting the external givens, the hypotheses should also fit the internal givens. That is, one should be able to live by it without disillusionment or inauthenticity.

4. After resolving preliminary or subordinate issues between alternatives that are live options, we seek to formulate the overall conclusion to the issue under inquiry. The most coherent and viable position is stated in a way faithful to the revealed truth and at the same time clear and significant for the present generation of Christians and the unreached people we serve.

5. The method applies the conclusion to the burning issues of life by determining worthy ends and values in life and service and, when possible, by suggesting more concrete ways in which to implement the conclusions as persons in families, churches, and nations.

In all of these excellent statements and proposals we still find lacking a specific procedure that spells out what one actually does when he "not only derives coherent doctrine from the entirety of written revelation, but also systematically relates them to each other in developing a comprehensive world view and way of life." How does one go about doing this? It seems that this is the great unanswered question of theological methodology!

8. The proposed contribution of the professor

If our task as students of the Word of God is to know, understand, teach, exemplify, and apply the teachings of Scripture; and if all Scripture is profitable; then theology as an imperfect attempt to develop increasingly more accurate approximations of God's perfect system of truth is essentially a process of system building.

We need to concern ourselves, not only with the teachings of individual Scriptures, and with individual doctrines of Scripture, but also with the way the various doctrines of Scripture fit with and relate to each other. This is nothing else than system building, which on a grand scale is what systematic theology at its highest levels is all about.

System building is not a luxury or a game to be engaged in only by the professionals at the top. It is not a toy for the privileged few, or an elitist activity reserved for the influencers of thought. It is a process in which all students of Scripture must be engaged. The question is therefore not whether but how.