

Systematic theology as system building should be attempted with critical self-awareness and devotion, in dependence on the Holy Spirit's illuminating ministry. And it should be done with the best of our abilities and efforts, the use of the best tools at our disposal, and in constant submission to the truth of Scripture.

Kinds of Reasoning

As we theologize, we find ourselves engaged in the process of reasoning. Lest we do this in an unconscious, non-critical manner, we must ask which kinds of reasoning we employ and which kinds of reasoning we should employ (since we are interested not simply in description but prescription). This raises the previous question of what kinds of reasoning there are, and what is involved in each of them.

In the literature on theological methodology we have considered, three basic kinds of reasoning have been mentioned and discussed: induction, deduction, and retrodution or adduction. In passing, it should be mentioned that all reasoning has a basic formula: reason, therefore conclusion.

Induction may be defined in terms of either of its form or its force. As to its form, induction is of two basic kinds: generalization and hypothesis.

A generalization is a general statement about all or most of the members of a class of persons or objects. Particular statements about the individual members of the class are the reasons; the generalization is the conclusion.

Is generalization used in theology? Do we ever collect all relevant scripture reference, and then make general statements that take into account the affirmations common to all or most of the references? The answer is a positive one; and an example of a generalization is collecting the Scriptures that refer to Jesus Christ as having divine characteristics and prerogatives, doing divine works, being called divine names, and receiving worship; and making a general statement about His deity.

A hypothesis is an attempted explanation of a fact or set of facts. Statements about the facts are the reasons; the hypothesis is the conclusion.

Is hypothesis used in theology? Do we ever analyze certain doctrinal positions by hypothesizing what kinds of confirmation we would expect to find in Scripture if those positions were correct? The answer is again positive; and an example of a hypothesis is analyzing the claim that the terms "soul" and "spirit" represent two distinct parts or entities in human beings, and that various aspects or powers of human nature are connected with these parts of human nature; hypothesizing that uses of "soul" will consistently be associated with certain aspects and powers, and uses of "spirit" with certain other aspects and powers; and actually examining the uses of these two terms in Scripture by means of the method of agreement and difference to see whether the hypothesis can be confirmed.