Theological Method Paper

Assignment 1-1 for ST5534 Systematic Theology 1

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The method or “process” of doing theology presented by Erickson is given to us in a 10-step format. The steps describe how we should be going about searching for answers while investigating a specific doctrine. Erickson brings up an interesting point prior to going into his process by making sure he explains to the reader “Theology is an art as well as a science, so that it cannot follow a rigid structure.”[[1]](#footnote-1) While these 10 steps I will be describing and comparing to Wayne Grudem’s method in Systematic Theology are important I thought it best to outline that these are not the only ways one may go about studying as long as they follow a “comparable logical order of development” as Erickson says.

Erickson’s exact steps can be found in his book on pages 53-65 but I will put each step into my own words. First we must gather any relevant trusted material we can get on a certain subject including Bible passages. The next step should be taking our trusted material we have collected and putting it together to work as a whole unit instead of separate entities. After putting resources together we should then sit back and analyze what is going on by asking the question “what does this really mean?” Once we have gone through the previous 3 steps we should then look at historical theology of a doctrine, which means taking into consideration any earlier theological views that may help us come to a conclusion. Next step would be looking into or consulting other cultures on a specific doctrine to see how they may view it and help us not to put our own perspective into the meaning on accident. We then want to dive into the history of what was going on culturally in whatever passages or doctrines we are looking into so we can understand who was being spoken to and what it may of meant to the people of that time period. Next we should be looking for illumination from other sources that can possibly give us knowledge such as science which can offer good insight into areas that the Bible may talk little about but always being careful to run any extrabiblical findings through the filter we have which is the Bible as our main resource. Then we can express this truth we have just studied into contemporary easy to understand expressions. The second from last step is to pick a motif that will be your main focal point such as the sovereignty of God or the salvation of grace through faith and use this as your help when approaching theology but be careful not to let this hinder your studies or determine an interpretation of a passage. The last and final point is to have a strategy on organizing the importance of different lessons and topics we have learned from our study.

The next thing we should look at is how Wayne Grudem would describe his process on theology, which comes in the form of 6 steps that include studying with prayer, studying with humility, studying with reason, studying with help from others, studying by collecting all relevant passages of scripture and last Grudem says we should study with rejoicing and praise.[[2]](#footnote-2) Grudem and Erickson both have great methods when it comes to how we as believers in Christ should study theology and they have many strengths. Erickson’s 10-step process comes as very detail oriented and hits this checklist that is very useful when studying scripture such as being very analytical and gathering different resources together. Grudem on the other hand starts off with focusing on prayer and a common danger that comes with studying deep into systematic theology. The two processes also have their faults such as Erickson’s process you can be sucked in to the process and forget the heart behind it and with Grudem I feel like I am not given as many in depth steps on how to study theology. I would say that I appreciate them both very much because of Grudem’s focus on prayer and making sure your heart is in the right place, which is a great way to start any study. I feel that Erickson’s method adds to Grudems because it gives steps to check off and at least from my point of view it has more of a well-rounded search. My theological conclusions would look different with each method because using Erickson’s method I feel as though I would have more external sources as well as Biblical sources. Grudems method I feel like I would have less external sources and mainly be relying on the Bible as well as a few pastors from my church for theological conclusions.

I believe that each of these methods I have outlined will benefit me as I continue to learn about systematic theology. Taking a mix of humility and prayer along with Erickson’s clear cut steps will definitely give a full tool belt of resources when it comes to drawing conclusions on what different doctrines might be saying. I have been a long time fan of Wayne Grudem’s Systematic Theology book and I am very excited to continue learning more from Erickson’s Christian Theology as well as combing the two resources for more in depth studies.

1. Christian Theology 3rd Edition, Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)