



SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, 2ND EDITION

BY WAYNE GRUDEM

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I remember exactly where I was when I was first exposed to Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*. It was 1994, in my first semester of seminary, sitting in a class entitled ST611: God, Man, & Sin. The instructor handed out xeroxed copies (google it) of a yet-to-be-published textbook to be read for the course. The instructor was Wayne Grudem, and the textbook was *Systematic Theology (ST)*.

No one could have anticipated the influence of that first edition, published a few months later. The book has sold some 750,000 copies, unprecedented for a theology text of that scope. Its arrival a quarter-century ago preceded, and no doubt helped precipitate, a resurgence in Reformed theology in the U.S. and beyond. Since its publication, perhaps no book has done more to increase theological literacy among English-speaking evangelicals (to say nothing of its influence among Korean, Portuguese, Arabic, Russian, Romanian, Spanish, French, Mandarin, Amharic, German, and Italian readers!).

Given this broad influence and Grudem's status as a veteran theologian and elder statesman of evangelicalism, the 2nd edition of this text arrived in 2020 with much anticipation. It does not disappoint. The new edition retains the characteristic clarity and warmth of the 1st, with additions and updates that will prompt many long-time users of *ST* to spring for the new volume.

What's New

Most of the book's changes represent additional material, adding up to around 200 extra pages. Some of the added material is brand new content, while in a few places, Grudem changed his position from the 1st edition.

Here's a sampling of some of the most significant changes.

- Grudem substantially rewrote his chapter on the clarity of Scripture (ch. 6), giving much more attention to the requirements for understanding Scripture (time, effort, the use of means, etc.). He also addresses major objections to this doctrine from liberalism, post-modern hermeneutics, and Roman Catholicism. The result is a much more robust, satisfying treatment of this important doctrine.
- In the chapter on creation (ch. 15), Grudem changed his position on the age of the earth. In the 1st edition, he was neutral on the question, but he now favors an old earth/old universe view (as with most evangelical theologians, he continues to affirm that both old earth and young earth positions are consistent with a high view of Scripture). This chapter also contains a much more lengthy critique of both neo-Darwinism in general and theistic evolution in particular (drawing at length from the book *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*, which Grudem co-edited in 2017).

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- In 1994, the so-called “new perspective on Paul” (NPP) was still relegated mainly to academic circles. Its influence has spread widely since then, and in this 2nd edition, Grudem includes a critique of the NPP and its implications for the doctrine of justification.
- The new edition addresses more recent objections to the penal substitutionary view of the atonement in chapter 27.
- The chapter on church government (ch. 47) discusses at much greater length than before the question of whether women can serve as elders, treating additional Scriptural texts and addressing further objections to the complementarian position.
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able updates. He changed all the Scripture references from the RSV to the ESV (which wasn't published until 2001). Contemporary worship songs were added to the end of each chapter, joining the traditional hymns from the 1st edition. And pastors especially will appreciate the updated bibliographies for each chapter.

Responding to a Controversy

Readers familiar with recent Trinitarian debates concerning the relationship between the Father and Son will be particularly interested in changes to Grudem's chapter on the Trinity (ch. 14).

- A substantive doctrinal change here is his embrace of the eternal generation of the Son, based to a large extent on Grudem's changed understanding of the meaning of the term *monogenēs* from "only, unique, one and only" (as in the standard Greek lexicon and most modern English versions: ESV, RSV, CSB, NET, NIV, NLT) to "only begotten" (KJV, NASB). This change has been welcomed by some of Grudem's critics, who contended that the rejection of eternal generation denied him a key basis for formulating the Father-Son relationship with both its equality of essence and differentiated relations. (*Note: The recently adopted SGC Statement of Faith followed historic orthodoxy on this point, which affirmed eternal generation not simply on the basis of monogenēs, but also a number of texts—e.g., John 5, Hebrews 1—that support the doctrine without using the term.*)
- Grudem's new edition also addresses objections to his position on the Son's eternal submission to the Father (variously abbreviated ESS, ERAS, EFS). At issue here is the question of just how the three Persons of the Godhead are to be distinguished. How do we speak of differences between the Father-Son-Spirit while preserving their equality in nature and attributes? Not all will be persuaded by Grudem's formulations (e.g., the use of the language of "roles" to differentiate the Persons of the Trinity), but his responses here at least help to clarify some of the confusion (and, at times, misrepresentations) surrounding this debate. Hopefully, they will also dispel concerns about positions some attribute to Grudem, which he himself would deny.

A Classic Made Better

Massive changes have occurred on the evangelical landscape since the original publication of Grudem's *ST*. New theological deviations have appeared, while older ones have reemerged in new garb and blossomed. Cultural upheavals from 9/11 to COVID-19 have transformed life as we know it. What is true of every age seems especially urgent for our own: how does God's Word speak to our modern moment? Upon what ground can we find solid footing when all around us is shifting? It seems the need for the truth and power of God's Word has never in our lifetimes been more acutely felt.

This is what systematic theology is *for*—to give a contemporary articulation of the Christian faith, one suited for its time, answering questions raised by modern concerns. For the past quarter-century, few books have served this purpose more effectively, for a wider range of Christians, than Grudem's *ST*. This new edition promises to continue and extend that tradition of Biblically saturated, clearly written, practically applied, and devotionally rich theology. From the Christian wanting reliable answers to doctrinal questions, to the student ready to delve seriously into theology for the first time, to the pastor wanting a go-to reference work, Grudem's text remains, in my view, the first choice.

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