“Systematic theology seeks to offer an ordered presentation of what the Bible teaches about God.” The Bible is God’s revelation and thus the first place where man ought to look for the facts about God and his existence. This may sound circular when you start pointing to the fact that we believe the Bible and the existence of God because the Bible reveals this to man.

However, there is no choice beyond this. Man is finite and fallen and in God’s world—in his creation, he has sufficiently revealed himself. However in God’s graciousness to fallen man he has revealed himself “savingly” through the Bible. This is the distinction that is made in systematic theology between natural and special revelation; both are unified by the one and only most wise God who reveals himself sufficiently, authoritatively, clearly, and necessarily in both.

Systematic theology is man’s way of logically grasping or apprehending the whole counsel of God as given by God because he is created in God’s image; of taking God’s truths and systematizing them. The facts of God and who he is revealed in the Scriptures are the foundation stones for doing any Systematic theology, or for speaking of God. God comes to man in revelation, not man to God. Man makes only idols and god in his own image.
The true God is revealed and taught to man—- the truths of Scripture, through systematic theology which gives us a systematic presentation of God’s revelation to man.

What systematic theology is not: Systematic theology is not merely the science of religion although orthodox scholars have spoken of the discipline this way. The mere science of religion could be done much like a sociologist measures a culture.

We could observe empirically how man relates and thinks about God but this is the wrong idea for knowing God; this is man’s mistake in truly knowing God. When orthodox scholars refer to systematic theology as the science of religion, they are speaking of the true religion, revealed by the true God of Holy Scripture.

“Our theology should be God centered because our life should be God centered.” Our theology must never begin with man. We begin and end with the revelation which God has chosen to reveal through his word to man. Systematic theology can teach this to men in an ordered way to better grasp and understand.

We receive God’s revelation of himself with arms extended in a stance of humility, not what man conjures in his mind as being God’s revelation.
Dr. B. B. Warfield of the “Princeton School” and Dr. Bavinck and Dr. Kuyper of the “Dutch School” regarding the relationship between apologetics and theology: The Princeton School has long believed in Common Sense Realism in their apologetics and therefore they think they must appeal to man’s intellect and use apologetics as a “springboard” for the truth of God’s revelation.

In some of the Systematic theologies and dogmatics of this school, they believe they must establish the truth of scripture before they can speak to man about what the scripture teaches. In contrast, the Dutch School has clearly taught (along with C. Van Til) that man’s mind is as fallen as the rest of his body and he will not truly believe unless he be regenerated. God, the only God, has revealed himself in Scripture and the creation clearly (his world and word) and there is no necessary evidence which must be given to fallen man as a sort of “foundation.”

Man’s revelation from God does not begin when he is convinced of God’s truth; revelation begins when God chose graciously to reveal himself to man and he did so in the Scriptures.

“A study of Systematic Theology will help us to keep and develop our spiritual balance.” A systematic presentation of the truths of Scripture
assists us to avoid the misuse of a biblical text, out of context on the one hand, as well as given us an “overview” of the whole of God’s revelation.

“The study of Systematic Theology will help ministers to preach theologically the whole counsel of God.” Rather than ministers having only one topic, one passage of Scripture containing one doctrine, the study of systematic theology gives the minister a whole with which to work, to engage, to study, to develop a received understanding of the world and word God has revealed in the Scriptures.

**The Christian-Theistic Method of Systematic Theology**

**A. God is *principium essendi* of knowledge.** If God was not self-conscious and self-existence we could know nothing. “God is absolute rationality. He was and is the only self-contained whole, the system of absolute truth.” Before the creation of the world, God was self-contained knowing self consciously absolute truth about all things because all things, all knowledge comes from Him. In Trinitarian completeness God knows. The creation and man as “re-interpreter” of God’s revelation receives this knowledge with humble hands extended.

**B. Man’s knowledge of God is analogical.** This knowledge is derivative, received from God and reinterpreted, whereas God’s knowledge of himself and all things is absolutely comprehensive and self-contained.
God’s knowledge is comprehensive and man can only apprehend God’s truth and knowledge. Without the existence of God there could be no truth, nor facts; these truths and facts rely on the existence of the Trinitarian God of Scripture. In other words, man is to be the humble re-interpreter of God’s truth; the goal of all systematic theology is to think God’s thoughts after him as he has revealed himself. This is what the Apostle Paul meant in Romans 12 of “renewing our mind…not conforming to the pattern of this world according to truth, but of conforming to God’s revelation so that we might truly know, understand, obey, and do the will of God.”

“The Bible sheds its indispensable light on everything we as Christians study.” Although the Bible is not a text book on geology, biology and psychology, the principles, or truths of Scripture can be, rather, must be applied to every aspect of study which the Christian engages himself. Without the Trinitarian God who makes sense of the whole—-all the facts—-there would be all diversity with no unity. There could be no coherence to man’s thoughts.

Van Til wrote, “Any fact and every fact proves the existence of God and therefore the truth of the Scriptures…Every fact proves the existence of God because without the presupposition of God and his counsel no fact has any distinguishable character at all.”
Christian Epistemology

I. The Object of our Knowledge in Systematic Theology

“For man to know any fact truly, he must presuppose the existence of God and his plan for the universe.” Man lives in God’s world which is a universe made up of unity and diversity. This is not a pluriverse where there is many, but nothing to make sense of it all as a unity. Christians begin with God as the One and the Many, revealed to us in Scripture as Trinity. Because of this fact, the world can make sense to us as we begin and end with God and can truly know. Without the existence of the God of Scripture no sense could be made of this world; nay, there would be no world of facts or knowledge at all, but this is inconceivable for man made in the image of God to conceive.

II. The Subject of our Knowledge in Systematic Theology

God is the ultimate interpreter of the world; man receives knowledge as derivative from God. As Christians we may apprehend the things God has revealed in Word and his world but we look to God only as the one who can comprehend all things. He is the one with absolute knowledge; we are the “re-interpreters” of this knowledge which he has revealed.

A. Adamic Consciousness: The conscious receiving of God’s revelation of himself to man before the Fall. It was still received and understood in light of God’s revelation (the Holy Spirit interpreted for man before
the Fall), but without the sin that ultimately prevents man from having true light and knowledge in this world (1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:2).

B. **Unregenerate Consciousness**: Man as he is in a fallen state: dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2). As the unnatural man, he is unable to rightly think about all of creation and about God. He is an idolater, he suppresses the true knowledge and light of creation and replaces it with those ideas which the sinful mind conjures (Rom. 1).

C. **Regenerate Consciousness**: The consciousness of receiving God’s truth in light of the fact that we are still fallen but enabled by God to understand - - being renewed daily by God’s gracious truth through his Holy Spirit.