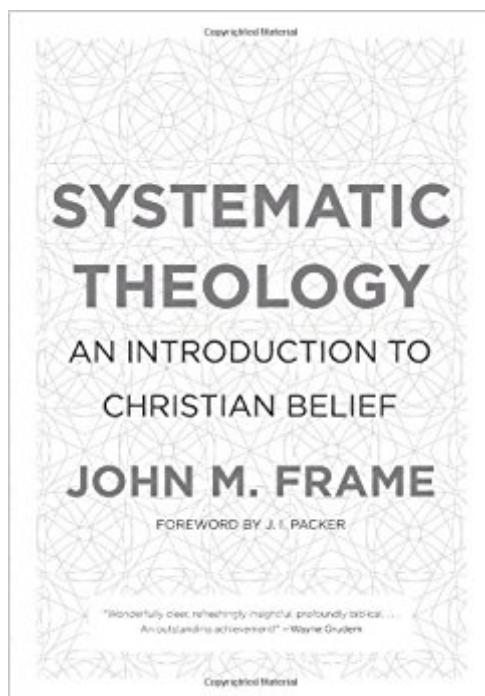


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# Systematic Theology: An Introduction To Christian Belief



## Synopsis

Systematic Theology is the culmination and creative synthesis of John Frame's writing on, teaching about, and studying of the Word of God. This magisterial opus—at once biblical, clear, cogent, readable, accessible, and practical—summarizes the mature thought of one of the most important and original Reformed theologians of the last hundred years. It will enable you to see clearly how the Bible explains God's great, sweeping plan for mankind.

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## Customer Reviews

"Few in our day champion a vision of God as massive, magnificent, and biblical as John Frame's. For decades, he has given himself to the church, to his students, and to meticulous thinking and the rigorous study of the Bible. He has winsomely, patiently, and persuasively contended for the gospel in the secular philosophical arena, as well as in the thick of the church worship wars and wrestlings with feminism and open theism. He brings together a rare blend of big-picture thinking, levelheaded reflection, biblical fidelity, a love for the gospel and the church, and the ability to write with care and clarity."—John Piper, Chancellor, Bethlehem College and Seminary; Founder and Teacher, desiringGod.org

"John M. Frame's Systematic Theology is a remarkable achievement. It is simultaneously scholarly yet accessible, sweeping in scope but penetrating in insight, steeped in historic orthodoxy yet fresh in reflection."—Peter A. Lillback, President, Westminster Theological Seminary

"Systematic Theology . . . is a worthy climax to the life's work of one who has only ever sought to be a faithful servant of Christ, teaching in his church. It is a privilege to celebrate its appearing and to commend it for serious study. I guarantee that the dividends of such study will

be uniformly high. Thank you, John Frame, for this superb gift." •J. I. Packer, Board of Governors' Professor of Theology, Regent College "The biblical and practical nature of his perspective makes this a refreshing and much-needed resource for all of us who care about a vital Reformed theology." •Richard J. Mouw, President, Fuller Theological Seminary "This new systematic theology comes from one of the great theological minds of our age. John Frame's contributions to theology are already massive and many, but now he has given the church a systematic theology. This is a very important book, and it represents a lifetime of consecrated theological reflection. This new volume promises to be an enduring contribution to evangelical theology." •R. Albert Mohler Jr., President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary "John Frame is one of my favorite theologians, and his *Systematic Theology* is filled with the deep learning and warranted wisdom of a lifetime. I commend it warmly to the Lord's people everywhere." •Timothy George, Founding Dean, Beeson Divinity School of Samford University; General Editor, *Reformation Commentary on Scripture* Frame has produced what should become required reading in seminary classrooms and pastors studies for years to come.

•Mark Young, President, Denver Seminary "Clear, thorough, intelligent, and fair to opposing views, John Frame's work will now be the standard within traditional Reformed theology." •Cornelius Plantinga Jr., President, Calvin Theological Seminary ---Near the end of his long and fruitful career, John Frame has given us his *chef d'oeuvre*. His *Systematic Theology* is the distillation of a life's work in reflecting on how God's Word relates to the Christian life of the simple believer. As his readers have come to expect, his chief emphasis is on the glory of God, the God who saves, the God who loves us. It would be nearly impossible to read this volume without being drawn into fellowship and conversation with the God who is at its center. Full of quotes from poetry, traditional theology, and even hymns, this is perhaps one of the most practical systematic theologies ever penned. It belongs alongside Turretin, Hodge, Bavinck, and the other hall-of-famers in the discipline. All we can say is: thank you, John Frame! •William Edgar, Professor of Apologetics, Westminster Theological Seminary John Frame's *Systematic Theology* is an important landmark in one-volume treatments of the major loci of doctrine. Frame's signature is readily apparent on every page: commitment to Scripture for everything he writes, accessible philosophical analysis of difficult questions, and, yes, triperspectivalism. This volume ranks as the most recommendable single-volume systematic theology of our time. •Derek W. H. Thomas, John E. Richards Professor of Systematic and Practical Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson; Minister of Teaching, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson John Frame the author has in *Systematic Theology* captured comprehensively and with clarity what many of us have benefited

from in the classroom through John Frame the professor and teacher. His biblical precision and personal passion is spread on every page, which you will quickly desire to turn in order to get to the next page as he allows and propels us to see the singular glory of the triune God revealed in his Word as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. •Harry L. Reeder, Pastor/Teacher, Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham Hurray for John Frame! At a time when systematics has been shoved into a corner by biblical theology in many seminaries, John has published what I can only hope will be an alternative to that imbalance. Not since A. A. Hodge's *Outlines*, Buswell, Reymond, and Grudem has a truly substantive systematic theology appeared. I expect *Systematic Theology* to become a classic, and I look forward to its publication with the greatest anticipation. •Jay E. Adams, Author of *Competent to Counsel*; founder of the Institute for Nouthetic Studies (INS), the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors (NANC), and the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) ---On my bookshelf sit numerous systematics by Charles Hodge, Louis Berkhof, Robert Reymond, and Wayne Grudem. I enjoy them all. They inform, educate, and bring clarity to different issues within Scripture. While systematics are full of precious knowledge to assist any student to better understand God and his holy Word, the reader will find none so well written, with a meekness and tenderness of heart, as Frame's. The breadth and length and height and depth of God's amazing love graces this volume of theology. If Edwards's *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* can be said to have drawn sinners to Christ, Frame's work will be said to draw Christians even closer to understanding their Creator, God, and Lord more fully. This work is a necessity for every layman, pastor, and scholar alike. This systematic theology is written from and faithful to a Reformed perspective glorifying God and his Word. As expected, Frame makes extensive reference to Scripture and the Westminster Confession of Faith, but he makes good use of other confessions, too. While Frame is careful to address numerous contemporary issues, his work directs the reader to Christ to his salvation alone. This personalizes the text. Though it draws on yesterday, it makes it applicable to the reader today and forever (Heb. 13:8). •Joseph R. Nally, Theological Editor, Third Millennium Ministries John Frame writes theology for those who want to use, and be used by, the Word of God. He has done his professional theologizing for many years in the context of the preparation of young men for ministry in seminary. But more to the point, his theology's practicality springs from his understanding of the nature of theological reflection itself. When I was his student over forty years ago, he told us, Theology is application. His discussions of the various loci of systematic theology always have an eye on the Holy Scriptures power and purpose to transform the lives of the people who study them intellectually and ethically. Anyone who reads this volume will be blessed with a more comprehensive and systematic appreciation for the

teachings of the Word of God and at the same time will grow in renewing the mind and life by the Holy Spirit s speaking through the Word. •Roger Wagner, Pastor, Bayview Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chula Vista, California Systematic theology is notoriously challenging to read but even more challenging to write. I tell students that too many modern theologians have given us cookbooks that feed neither the mind nor the soul. John Frame is a great evangelical exception. He has mastered the historical method, and more importantly, his readers have come to expect that biblical theology will guide his systematic theology. As he says, The Bible is the most important thing. I welcome this important volume and encourage all readers of theology, especially students, to have Frame s valuable work at their side. •John H. Armstrong, President, ACT3 Network; Adjunct Professor, Wheaton College Graduate School As one who has long admired and learned so much from John Frame s contributions to Reformed life and thought, I am so pleased that we now have this fine volume that gathers together the insights of a half-century of serious theological scholarship. The biblical and practical nature of his perspective makes this a refreshing and much-needed resource for all of us who care about a vital Reformed theology. •Richard J. Mouw, President, Professor of Christian Philosophy, Fuller Theological Seminary ---

John M. Frame (A.B., Princeton University; B.D., Westminster Theological Seminary; M.A. and M.Phil., Yale University; D.D., Belhaven College) holds the J. D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology and Philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando and is the author of many books, including the four-volume *Theology of Lordship* series.

I love the work of John Frame. He is not afraid to say, "I don't know, but in the same breath he makes you realize that we don't need to know all things, because the Lord we worship is in control, with authority, and is present and is working all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. I have tremendous regard for Dr. Douglas Kelly, and his comments are far more valuable than anything this 67 year old layman can contribute so I defer to these words: "This Systematic Theology is by any measure a crowning achievement in a fruitful theological career of teaching, preaching, and writing by Professor John Frame. It is the outpouring of many jars of fragrant and well-aged wine on the lees: the richvintage that has been matured in a bright Christian mind that has been immersed in meditation on (and obedience to) the Word of God in the fellowship of the Reformed church for more than threescore years and ten." "Like Frame, as other works that I have read, this book is written with enthusiastic faith in

God and in the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit inspired, and in fellowship with the risen Christ. It is written clearly; Frame is never ashamed of his position (traditional Calvinism), and is humble enough to say about some difficulties, “I do not know.” His writing exhibits humility and unwavering submission before both the clear truths and the mysteries of God. He is always charitable toward those whose position he thinks is wrong and presents it fairly, and yet he does take a stand, which he knows will not suit everyone. You might not agree with all that he says, but at least you will grasp precisely what he is saying.

“Someone described C. S. Lewis as ‘A Mind Awake,’ and that is how I see John Frame. This volume shows how alert he is to moral, philosophical, and societal issues raised by Christian truth claims over the last three centuries in a secular culture.”

“One of the great contributions of Frame’s theology is that it shows the inescapable necessity of starting with and remaining with the presupposition of the truth of Holy Scripture, for theology and for everything else that we wish to make sense of. Along this line, not only in this book but in others that he has written, I have found very helpful his explanation of why a certain circularity of reasoning is always necessary when arguing for any ultimate authority (e.g., whether Holy Scripture, human reason, empiricism, or, perhaps, evolutionism). Rationalists have long accused Christians of circular reasoning (as concerns the Bible), but what they do not tell you is that they, too, must use the assumption of a final authority themselves, in order to prove their point.”

“Frame’s section on the providence of God is one of the most beautiful that I have ever read. At times I was less than comfortable with his account of the rather direct relationship of God to evil, yet I am not sure that I could treat the subject any better, if as well. But I must keep thinking about it. His discussion of how God brings about free decisions of humans—which both avoids short-circuiting our responsibility and avoids the false theory of libertarian free will (i.e., that our will is free from the control of our fallen personality, and is ultimately free from the control of the Sovereign God)—is one of the best I have seen.”

“In sum, Frame’s Systematic Theology cogently and succinctly presents the most crucial thought and practice of the long Christian tradition (especially in its Reformed branch, which has been concerned above all to be faithful to the entirety of Holy Scripture), in terms that can be understood in this twenty-first century, where we are called to live. Frame’s English is lucid; his learning is great, but he does not overwhelm you with it. His doctrine is in accordance with the Westminster tradition of the seventeenth century (and behind that, Calvin of the sixteenth century, and Augustine of the fifth), always looking at these Augustinian traditions in light of God’s written Word (and under it), and he helps the

reader to deal with the problems of speaking and living out that tradition in an aggressively secular age. This volume is eminently suitable for a seminary or college textbook. It will also give inspiration to many a preacher (as it has to this one!). I perceive that it was written in an atmosphere of quiet joy, and I will be surprised if it does not convey something of that joy to those who read it. • Douglas F. Kelly, Richard Jordan Professor of Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte

Great review of the subject matter. Clear, well organized. A joy to read and easy to read despite the topic.

John Frame is at his best in the writing of this book. He is insightful and helpful in digesting the teaching of the Bible and making its truth accessible to readers willing to use their own mind to its fullest capacity. But if you want light dribble, you will find this book laborious and wishing you had not invested the money in it. I'm of the mind that light dribble is devastating to Christian belief. I've read much of what John Frame has written and find him refreshingly above the "low information" books that apparently sell better than his deep theological reflection.

UPDATE 4/25/14: I noticed several don't find the following review helpful. I don't quite understand that. Oh well, maybe that would change if I had over 20 pages worth of endorsements preceding my own comments :) Update 6/2/14: Dr. Paul Helm offers some similar criticisms I provide below in relation to notions like God having two "modes". His discussion centers on K. Scott Oliphint (but notes the similarity of Oliphint's views with Frame's):

[http://paulhelmsdeep\(DOT\)blogspot\(DOT\)com/2014/06/what-motivates-oliphints-proposals.html?\\_sm\\_au\\_=iVVV055QMnsD73qQ](http://paulhelmsdeep(DOT)blogspot(DOT)com/2014/06/what-motivates-oliphints-proposals.html?_sm_au_=iVVV055QMnsD73qQ) One thing I've noticed about online reviews of this book is that folks seem to love or hate Frame's Systematic. Apparently it's either perfection or from the pit of hell. Hopefully this review will offer a balanced look at this very good intro to the Christian faith. For many, Frame's ST will be easy to understand most of the time. It's full of Scriptural references - to Frame's credit (and who would expect otherwise?). It rarely gets bogged down in multiple "conversations" with arcane evaluations of minutia. For these reasons, it really is a good introduction to Christian faith. To my mind, this book suffers from the fact it serves as a collection of Frame's previous works - nothing against those works, but it makes for odd discussions at points in the book. Because Frame has written in response to contemporary problems, there is considerable discussion with those and little to history. I did not expect a historical theology, but it would be difficult for the new student to

determine if he's reading a landscape view or a flattened view of subjects. Having said that, Frame does a fantastic job introducing difficult topics in easier to swallow ways. This stems especially from Frame's focus on Lordship and establishes this from creation so that predestination is a forgone conclusion. Frame spends considerable time with application or at least raises topics in such a way that application will be a natural outflow for the student looking to apply his knowledge. Because Frame has dedicated time to various controversies, there's considerable space given to things that may not warrant as much space as he dedicates. For example: Open Theism. This was a flash in the pan between 10-15 years ago. For an introduction to Christian faith, this seems like a strange discussion to carry on with along with the notion of middle knowledge and more. Of course, the problem is that collecting works written in response to different controversies inevitably mars cohesiveness. Frame overcomes some of this by the way he's organized the material - so there's a helpful logic to the arrangement of the material at least. Additionally, Frame makes a number of assertions throughout the work that are unwarrantedly weird, such as God having two "modes" of existence: eternal and temporal. He confesses this sounds like process theism, but dismisses that without discussion. First, this is an intro to the Christian faith...why make an assertion like this? Further, on its face it's just plain ridiculous. God has two modes of existence? That means two essences. What of the Trinity, and when we speak of the incarnation, which nature of the Person of the Son is united to the human nature? How does the eternal mode interact with the temporal? Is the temporal aware of the eternal? Does it contain the eternal? How many divine consciousnesses are there? Frame goes on to say that God's temporal omnipresence allows Him perspectives from every vantage point - including our own. Does God "share" our perspective? Perspectives are informed by disposition. One doesn't see from another's vantage point simply by trading locations. If God were to share our perspectives, this would confuse God with man...not just man...everything. This would arguably go further than process theism into pantheism. Further, our dispositions are tarnished by sin, so God cannot "share" our perspective, though He certainly has knowledge of it, indeed, He understands us better than we do. One can appreciate what Frame is trying to do - acknowledge God's nearness to us, and that He's not "trapped" in the eternal unable to penetrate the temporal. Unfortunately, Frame functions from the principle he was out to oppose. If the created order is not closed on God's end, then why would He need a "temporal mode"? The implication, clearly, would be the eternal cannot interact with the temporal! Oh the irony. Even more ironic, Scripture references are lacking when he makes these assertions. One would expect Frame to ante up with Scripture, or at least engage what previous Fathers have said...maybe Calvin, Owen, or someone... In many places, Frame makes mention of God being "absolute Person", echoing

Cornelius Van Til...and one can see Van Til's influence throughout, though Frame does a far, far better job incorporating Scripture than Van Til and makes positive contributions to theology; however, this leads to a number of contrivances and idiosyncrasies. I see no value introducing the Christian faith with references like these. This is arcane, even in Reformedom. Frame is conversational, and many will be able to easily follow him most of the time. This is a great strength, along with how he couches and arranges the material. Even though he's conversational, some of the arcane items he raises will simply confuse the new student or open a lot of cans of unsatisfying worms for a student with a broader grasp of issues. If a pastoral systematic was the intention, Frame largely delivers, but I would caution the student who is in need of such pastoral help to be careful while going through certain chapters. I would caution against breaking God down according to attributes as this tends to muddy Who we're trying to understand; and discussion of attributes tends, in this work, toward the creation of additional attributes - perhaps one of the more troubling was speaking of God's tripersonality as an attribute...which was strange because Frame had spent some time nuancing divine simplicity so as to hold to a more biblically-accurate notion while avoiding the weaknesses...one weakness is that divine simplicity, if taken as "strong" simplicity, equates God with His attributes making each Person identical. This reduces God to a monad...so Frame, in saying tripersonality is an attribute, takes on the very weakness we do well to avoid.

My go-to and is placed next to Grudem's Systematic Theology. I love reading both of them. Frame does a great job covering some areas that Grudem doesn't.

People over-use the term "magisterial" for any thick academic book; however, I would say the term applies without qualification here. If I have anything negative to say about the work, it's to wonder about Frame's addiction to speculative triads--but then, they're intriguing, and sometimes even convincing.

Going through a Theology class at my church and this is the book we are using. I love the class and look forward to the weekly teachings pertaining to this book so thought provoking and interesting!!!!

John Frame has written a wonderful, comprehensive book of theology, in language easily understood. I would recommend it to anyone who is interested in broadening their knowledge of Christian theology.

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