

BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
SYLLABUS FOR COURSE 411: HISTORICAL THEOLOGY
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411 Historical Theology. A study of the progress of the understanding of doctrine through the centuries, as expressed in writings of individual Christians and the church creeds.

I. INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

A. Factors in the Study

1. Character of the subject

Historical theology is a happy study in that it concentrates on the fruits of theology rather than the problems. The problems are mentioned only as they give rise to new developments and since these are for the most part edifying, the course has an uplifting effect. If, at one time we are appalled by the disclaimers of some heretic, rationalist, modernist, etc., we are later rewarded by the character of truth expressed to meet his objection. In this way historical theology has an advantage over church history since in that discipline we are much taken up with the foibles of man while in this one we are involved with what is known or apprehended of the truth! We are studying the progress of the understanding of truth and that is an enriching experience.

The material may be studied in one of two ways. We may take a single doctrine and see how it is gripped throughout the entire passage of history. This is called the vertical approach. On the other hand we may take the periods of history and see the character of comprehension of all or of many of the doctrines during those times. This, if you have not already guessed it, is called the horizontal approach although we confess that this terminology in most of our classes usually designates a student who has fallen asleep. In the course as it is now envisioned we are working rather vertically and in a somewhat backwards direction. With the Westminster Confession as our doctrinal statement, we are taking the major theological statements and seeking to show how they have been developed through the process of history. While we cannot touch on all doctrines it is hoped our methodology will set a pattern for later discussion on other studies of systematics proportion. We allow that the Scripture is the source of doctrine but the better understanding of Scripture is something that has benefitted enormously from historical development. And this is the subject matter for which we are searching.