



On-Campus Course Syllabus

THS 203 : L1

Systematic Theology I

Spring 2023

Class Information

Day and Time: Tues/Thurs 9:30–10:45 AM

Room Number: E208

Contact Information

Instructor Name: Dr. Ty Kieser

Instructor Email: tkieser@criswell.edu

Instructor Phone: (214) 818-1306

Instructor Office Hours: Tues 12–2 PM; Thurs 8:30–9:30; 11–12; Mon/Thurs 4:15-4:45

Sign up [here](#)

Course Description and Prerequisites

Introductory discussions to Theological Method (Prolegomena), Scripture (Bibliology), God (Theology Proper), Creation, Providence, Angels (Angelology), Humanity (Anthropology), and Sin (Hamartiology), defining the scriptural views and showing the arguments for them, refuting other views, and emphasizing the relevance of theology to the Christian life and witness. (Prerequisite: BIB 105)

Course Objectives

At the end of the course, the student should be able to:

- Articulate a survey-level understanding of Christian doctrines—including their biblical, historical, cultural, and theological components—with attention to the distinctives of the evangelical tradition.
- Defend theological commitments with clarity, charity, and coherence.
- Formulate nuanced questions regarding theology and theological inquiry.
- Apply Christian doctrinal content toward its ecclesiological, cultural, and devotional ends.

We will pursue these objectives under the assumption that rigorous theological learning is an act of Christian discipleship that will bring us into closer communion with Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit.

Required Textbooks

Erickson, Millard J. *Introducing Christian Doctrine*. Edited by L. Arnold Hustad. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015. (ISBN: 9781441222541)

Kapic, Kelly M. *Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation on Pain and Suffering*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017. (ISBN: 9780830851799).

McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2019. (ISBN: 9781433564260).

Course Requirements and Assignments

Quizzes (40% — 2 ²/₃ pts each): Each week will culminate with a quiz consisting of multiple-choice, true/false, and short answer questions over material from the reading and lectures. Each quiz will be approximately seven questions. You are allowed to use your notes and books during the quiz, although the quiz must be taken alone and you may *not* Google answers. Quizzes will be posted at the end of each module (e.g., by Thursday at 11:59 PM) and must be taken before the day of the next class (i.e., Monday at 11:59 PM). Each of the fifteen quizzes is worth 2 ²/₃% of your final grade (40% total).

Papers (32% – 16 pts each): To help you think more critically about key doctrines, questions, readings, and the world that you live in, you will be asked to write two 1,000+ word papers (one paper per quad). The first paper will be a “Why Does it Matter that _____” paper and the second will be a “Letter to a Skeptical Friend.” The specific topics of these papers will largely be up to you, but you can see example topics listed below and you will submit your initial outlines of the paper about a week before the paper is due. Papers should be saved as a PDF or Docx and submitted via Canvas. Each outline is worth 1% and each of the two papers is worth 15% of your final grade (32% total).

Theological Learning Logs & Participation (28% – 7 pts each): Before every class you will prepare a theological learning log. For most days this will be focused on one chapter of Erickson. However, there are exceptions, so please see the schedule below and prepare a log entry for every reading marked with an *. These logs are designed to serve you, your learning, and your future ministry, so the format is largely up to you, however, there are some aspects that are required, so see below for details. Your participation will be included in this grade. If you are attending class and prepared for the discussion, you will receive full marks. Unprepared and unattended classes will cause your grade to drop.

Podcast days/prep: On “podcast days” you will NOT prepare an entry based on the reading for that day, but will instead prepare notes (from the readings and additional research) on the topics at hand—as though you were going on a podcast to discuss them. Include these notes within your theological learning log below the reading notes from the previous days. On these days randomly selected students will discuss the topics listed for the day. If selected you will have a chance to ask and answer questions related to that topic, tell stories, and encourage your classmates with the word of God.

Course/Classroom Policies and Information

Late work: Unless a date/time is specified below, your assignments are due at the start of class on the date listed, and your grade will be reduced by 10% for each calendar day late. However, any missed assignment may be submitted end of the semester for up to 50% credit.

Technology: Cell phones should *not* be used during class time. Additionally, laptops inherently have several negative consequences on classes that prioritize discussion.¹ However, I recognize that computers also have several advantages and that some of the assigned reading will be originally accessed digitally. Therefore, computers may be allowed under the condition that they are used properly. However, I reserve the right to deduct grades for misuse of any technology or designate particular periods of time as laptop-free.

Class Attendance

Students are responsible for enrolling in courses for which they anticipate being able to attend every class session on the day and time appearing on course schedules, and then making every effort to do so. When unavoidable situations result in absence or tardiness, students are responsible for acquiring any information missed. Instructors are not obliged to allow students to make up missed work. Per their independent discretion, individual instructors may determine how attendance affects students' ability to meet course learning objectives and whether attendance affects course grades.

Campus Closure

To ensure the health and safety of students and employees, college administrators may decide it is necessary on rare occasions to close the campus. Once this decision is announced, instructors will contact students to provide further details regarding the campus closure's impact on those courses. Students are responsible to watch for communication from their instructors and respond appropriately. (Unless otherwise specified by the instructor in this syllabus, this communication will be sent to the student's Criswell College e-mail account.)

In order to make progress toward the courses' objectives, instructors have the freedom during most campus closures to require students to participate in activities as alternatives to meeting on campus. An instructor may, for example, hold class remotely (through Zoom) at the scheduled time, provide a recording of a class or presentation for students to watch independently, or assign other activities that students are to accomplish before returning to campus. Students are responsible for accomplishing these alternative activities as well as any course requirements listed in this syllabus during the period of the campus closure. If, during the period of the campus closure, personal circumstances prohibit a student from accomplishing these alternative activities or course requirements and assignment listed in the syllabus during the campus closure, the student is responsible for communicating with the instructor as soon as possible. Instructors will not penalize students who do not have the means to accomplish the alternative activities during the period of the campus's closure and will work with students whose circumstances during the campus closure prohibited their timely completion of course requirements and assignments in the syllabus.

Grading Scale

¹ In addition to the potentially distracting nature of computers for the user and their neighbors, the negative consequences can include adverse effects: (A) Interpersonally: they create a physical barrier between humans in dialogue. (B) Mentally: your brain does not function as sharply when it is subconsciously aware that you could access the answer in two seconds with less effort than you could by simply thinking; plus you more quickly forget the content retrieved this effort-less way (see *Make it Stick; The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains; "Is Google Making Us Stupid?"*). (C) Teleologically: computers inherently prioritize efficiency; whereas a discussion is a gradual process oriented toward intellectual formation (and, therefore, is often superficially inefficient).

A	93-100	4.0 grade points per semester hour
A-	90-92	3.7 grade points per semester hour
B+	87-89	3.3 grade points per semester hour
B	83-86	3.0 grade points per semester hour
B-	80-82	2.7 grade points per semester hour
C+	77-79	2.3 grade points per semester hour
C	73-76	2.0 grade points per semester hour
C-	70-72	1.7 grade points per semester hour
D+	67-69	1.3 grade points per semester hour
D	63-66	1.0 grade point per semester hour
D-	60-62	0.7 grade points per semester hour
F	0-59	0.0 grade points per semester hour

Incomplete Grades

Students requesting a grade of Incomplete (I) must understand that incomplete grades may be given only upon approval of the faculty member involved. An “I” may be assigned only when a student is currently passing a course and in situations involving extended illness, serious injury, death in the family, or employment or government reassignment, not student neglect.

Students are responsible for contacting their instructors prior to the end of the semester, plus filing the appropriate completed and approved academic request form with the Registrar’s Office. The “I” must be removed (by completing the remaining course requirements) no later than 60 calendar days after the close of the term or semester in which the grade was awarded, or the “I” will become an “F.”

Academic Honesty

Absolute truth is an essential belief and basis of behavior for those who believe in a God who cannot lie and forbids falsehood. Academic honesty is the application of the principle of truth in the classroom setting. Academic honesty includes the basic premise that all work submitted by students must be their own and any ideas derived or copied from elsewhere must be carefully documented.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to:

- cheating of any kind,
- submitting, without proper approval, work originally prepared by the student for another course,
- plagiarism, which is the submitting of work prepared by someone else as if it were his own, and
- failing to credit sources properly in written work.

Institutional Assessment

Material submitted by students in this course may be used for assessment of the college’s academic programs. Since programmatic and institutional assessment is done without reference to specific students, the results of these assessments have no effect on a student’s course grade or academic standing at the college. Before submitting a student’s work for this type of assessment, the course instructor redacts the work to remove anything that identifies the student.

Institutional Email Policy

All official college email communications to students enrolled in this course will be sent exclusively to students' institutional email accounts. Students are expected to check their student email accounts regularly and to respond in an appropriate and timely manner to all communications from faculty and administrative departments.

Students are permitted to setup automatic forwarding of emails from their student email accounts to one or more personal email accounts. The student is responsible to setup and maintain email forwarding without assistance from college staff. If a student chooses to use this forwarding option, he/she will continue to be responsible for responding appropriately to all communications from faculty and administrative departments of the college. Criswell College bears no responsibility for the use of emails that have been forwarded from student email accounts to other email accounts.

Disabilities

Criswell College recognizes and supports the standards set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and similar state laws, which are designed to eliminate discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities. Criswell College is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualifying students, faculty, and employees with disabilities as required by applicable laws. For more information, please contact the Student Services Office.

Intellectual Property Rights

Unless otherwise specifically instructed in writing by the instructor, students must neither materially nor digitally reproduce materials from any course offered by Criswell College for or with the significant possibility of distribution.

Resources and Supports

Canvas and SONIS: Criswell College uses Canvas as its web-based learning tool and SONIS for student data. Students needing assistance with Canvas should contact the Canvas Help Support line at (844) 358-6140. Tech support is available at this number, twenty-four hours a day. Students needing help with SONIS should contact the Campus Software Manager at studenttechsupport@criswell.edu.

Student Services: The Student Services Office exists to foster and encourage success in all areas of life—physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, and emotional. Students are encouraged to reach out for assistance by contacting the office at 214.818.1332 or studentservices@criswell.edu. The Student Services Office also works with local counseling centers to ensure that every student has access to helpful mental health resources. More information is located on the college website at [Criswell College Mental Health Resources](#), and students may contact the Director of Student Services if they have any questions.

Wallace Library: Students can access academic resources and obtain research assistance by contacting or visiting the Wallace Library, which is located on campus. For more information, email the Wallace Library at library@criswell.edu. Offsite login information is available in Canvas in the “Criswell Student Training Course” under “Library Information.”

Tutoring Center: Students are encouraged to consult with tutors to improve and enhance their skills and confidence in any subject matter taught at the college. Tutors have been recommended by the faculty to ensure that the tutor(s) are qualified to serve the student body. Every tutor brings experience and expertise in an effort to provide the proper resources for the subject matter at hand. To consult with a tutor, students can visit the Tutoring Center located on the second floor in room E203, or schedule an appointment by emailing tutoringcenter@criswell.edu or by calling 214.818.1373.

Course Outline/Calendar

Module 1) Prolegomena

Jan 17th — Introduction

Jan 19th — Why we Do Theology

Erickson, Ch 1^{*2}

Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book 1 (chs. 3–4, 35–40) [\[link\]](#)

Week #1 Quiz³

Jan 24th — How we do theology

Erickson, Ch 2*

Jan 26th — Knowing God

Erickson, Ch 3*

McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, Introduction and Ch 1

Week #2 Quiz

Jan 31st — Revelation

Erickson, Ch 4*

Feb 2nd — Character of Scripture

Erickson, Ch 5*

McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, Ch 6

Week #3 Quiz

Feb 7th — Character of Scripture & Hermeneutics

Erickson, Ch 6 & 7* [your log should combine both chapters; so 3-5 texts, questions, etc. total]

Feb 9th — Podcast

Gonzalez, "Reading the Bible in Spanish" [pdf]

Prepare Podcast topics*

- Why should we study theology?
- How should we do theology?

² Readings in standard font

³ Assignments in bold

- (How) can we know God?
- (How) can we know God in nature?
- Should we trust Scripture?

Week #4 Quiz

Prolegomena Log (due Feb 10th at 11:59 PM)

Module 2) Doctrine of God

Feb 14th — Models of God

Erickson, Ch 8*

Feb 16th — God's existence

Anselm, *Proslogium*, Chs III–XX [[link](#)]*

McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, Ch 3

Week #5 Quiz

Feb 21st — God's Perfections – Incommunicable

Erickson, Ch 9*

Feb 23rd — God's Perfections – Communicable

Erickson, Ch 10*

Soskice, “Calling God ‘Father’” [pdf]

Week #6 Quiz

Feb 28th — God's Trinity in Scripture

Erickson, Ch 11*

March 2nd — God's Trinity in history

McGrath, “The Doctrine of the Trinity” [pdf]*

Week #7 Quiz

Outline of “Why it Matters that _____” Paper—see below for details (due March 3^d at 11:59 pm)

March 7th — God's Trinity in Action

Erickson, Ch 12*

March 9th — Podcast

Swain, “The End of God’s Triune Work” [pdf]

Prepare Podcast Topics*

- Is God infinite?
- How should we understand God's grace and justice?
- Is the Trinity in the Bible?
- How has the church historically understood the Trinity?
- Why does it matter that God is triune?

Week #8 Quiz

Doctrine of God Log (due March 10th at 11:59 PM)

Why It Matters Paper (due March 13th at 11:59 PM)

March 14th — Spring break

March 16th — Spring break

Module 3) Doctrine of Creation

March 21st — Creation and Scripture

Erickson, Ch 13*

March 23rd — Goodness of creation

Aquinas, Light of Faith [pdf]*

McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, Ch 7

Week #9 Quiz

March 28th — Providence

Erickson, Ch 14*

March 30th — Evil and suffering

Erickson, Ch 15*

Kapic, *Embodied Hope*, Prelude & Ch 1

McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, Ch 11

Week #10 Quiz

April 4th — Angels and Demons

Erickson, Ch 16*

April 6th — Culture

Chatraw and Swallow Prior, *Cultural Engagement* [pdf]*

Week #11 Quiz

April 11th — Podcast

Cone, “Divine Liberation and Black Suffering” [pdf]

Kapic, *Embodied Hope*, Ch 2 & 3

Prepare Podcast topics*

- Why does non-human creation matter?
- How is God involved in the world?
- Why do angels matter?
- How should Christians understand culture?
- Why does a good God let bad things happen?

Doctrine of Creation Log (due April 12th at 11:59 PM)

Module 4) Humanity

April 13th — Image of God

Erickson, Ch 17 & 18* [your log should combine both chapters; so 3-5 texts, questions, etc. total]

Week #12 Quiz

April 18th — Human constitution

Erickson, Ch 19*

April 20th — Sex, sexuality, and gender

Kapic, *Embodied Hope*, Ch 4

McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, Ch 8 & 9*

Week #13 Quiz

April 25th — Race and ethnicity

McCaulley, *Reading While Black* [pdf]*

McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, Ch 10

April 27th — Sin(s)

Erickson, Ch 20 & 21* [your log should combine both chapters; so 3-5 texts, questions, etc. total]

Week #14 Quiz

May 2nd — Original Sin

Erickson, Ch 22*

May 4th — Podcast

Kapic, *Embodied Hope*, Ch 5

Prepare Podcast topics*

- What does it mean to be a human?
- How/why does God care about sex and gender?
- How/why God care about race and ethnicity?
- What's wrong with the world?
- Why does God care what I do with my life?

Week #15 Quiz

Outline of Letter to a Skeptical Friend (due May 5th at 11:59 PM)

Doctrine of Humanity Log (due May 5th at 11:59 PM)

May 9th — Final Meeting

Attend class

Letter to a Skeptical Friend (due May 12th at 11:59 PM)

Theological Learning Log

These logs are designed to be helpful to you as students, for the semester and for the rest of your life.

Therefore, there is no prescribed method/medium (i.e., word document, scratch paper, etc.) so long as you can submit them (or a scan of them) digitally. The format/structure is also largely up to you. However, there must be (minimally) three sections—n.b. a good log will have additional notes beyond these sections.

Required sections for every class:

3-5 key **biblical verses** (written out, with references) — for podcasts, you should have at least 1 text per topic

3-5 **key terms** defined, in your own words — for podcasts, you should have at least 1 term per topic

1-2 **Theological arguments**, in your own words — for podcasts, you should have at least 1 argument per topic

3-5 **questions** — for podcasts, you should have at least 1 question per topic

- Questions can be of a variety of different kinds:
 - *Clarifying* questions: “When the Erickson says “X,”⁴ does he mean Y or Z?”
 - *Evaluation* questions: “If the book says “X,” but Scripture says Y, is X really true?”
 - *Interpretation* questions: “If X is true, then how should we read and understand Y biblical text?”
 - *Extension* questions: “If X is true, then is Y also true, since Y seems to follow from X?”
 - *Applications* questions: “If it’s true that X, then does that mean the church should do Y”
- Notice that the above questions are (A) engaged with the readings and (B) engaged with your own knowledge. Minimally, they are not “lazy” questions. For example, “What does X mean?” and “is X true” are lazy questions. But the above are not lazy because they engage the reading or your own knowledge.

Other sections you might include in some/all chapters

- Your answer to questions at the front of each chapter
- Important historical figures/movements and their opinion
- Devotional/practical/ministerial value of an idea
- Your disagreements with the author

Why Does it Matter That Paper

This paper should respond to the question “why does it matter that _____” and you can choose a theological doctrine that we study in the first half of the semester. The paper should be structured in two sections: (1) defining X doctrine and showing that it is true (about 25% of the paper) and then (2) showing why X doctrine matters (about 75% of the paper). Your grade will be based on the clarity of your response, coherence of your answer, biblical support you provide, and your engagement with the readings.

For example, you might choose one of the following topics, but feel free to develop your own and/or specify even further:

- Why does it matter that we do systematic theology?
- Why does it matter that I study theology?
- Why does it matter that Jesus is the Word of God?
- Why does it matter that Scripture is inerrant?
- Why does it matter that Scripture is authoritative?
- Why does it matter that God is infinite?

⁴ X is simply a variable (like in algebra), so that it might refer to any idea/term/argument in the reading.

- Why does it matter that God is love and justice?
- Why does it matter that God is triune?
- Why does it matter that Jesus is God?
- Why does it matter that God works as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- Etc.

Outline

Your outline should include:

- A) The specific topic that you are addressing.
- B) A draft of your main thesis.
- C) The headings/descriptions for 3-5 key sections of your paper and their main points.

Letter to a skeptical friend

This paper is intended to be formatted as a letter to your friend who is asking questions about Christian faith and doctrine addressed this semester—this can be a real friend/question, a made-up friend/question, or a letter to yourself. You will get to choose the specific question that they are asking and then provide a clear and charitable response. This paper should provide a clear response, thoroughly engage (and cite) the readings, theologically support your position, and do so while retaining a charitable tone.

The question that you choose can be closely related to one of McLaughlin’s questions, but it does not ‘need’ to be. Further, the more specific your question, the more likely you are to provide a clear, coherent, and charitable answer.

Example paper questions—feel free to develop your own and/or specify even further

Questions about the truthfulness of Christianity

- Did the resurrection really happen?
- Can we trust Scripture?
- Etc.

Questions about the Christianity and science

- Does Christianity exclude evolutionary theories?
- Does Christianity require a certain view of reproductive rights?
- Etc.

Questions about Christianity and history

- How can you belong to a religion that condoned the crusades?
- How can you belong to a religion that condoned slavery?
- Etc.

Questions about Christian doctrines

- How could a good God let bad things happen to good people?
- Do I need to believe in the Trinity to go to heaven?
- Etc.

Questions about Christianity and other religions

- Is Jesus the only way to God?
- How do Christians explain the good things in other religions?
- Etc.

Questions about Christianity and culture

- Is Christianity homophobic?
- Is Christianity necessarily judgmental?
- Etc.

Feel free to specify the question further by providing a brief explanation of the situation at the beginning of this letter.

Outline

Your outline should include:

- A) The specific question that your friend is asking.
- B) A draft of your main point in response.
- C) The headings/descriptions for 3-5 key sections of your paper

Syllabus Signature

Please read the following carefully, answer the T/F questions, initial the statements, and sign

T/F: Grades are the most important thing in this class? _____

I understand that learning (of all kinds) is valuable for my own formation and future ministry, therefore I will focus on learning with the confidence that good grades follow good learners. _____

T/F: The most important aspect of a class discussion is being right _____

I understand that discussions about theology are especially to be conducted in humility and charity _____

T/F: My grade will be viewable only at the end of the semester _____

I understand that the semester grade is out of 100 points and I can see my current grade on Canvas _____

T/F: If I don't submit an assignment before class on the due date, I will receive a 0 _____

I understand that if I miss an assignment I can submit it late for partial credit, even up to the last day of the semester for partial credit _____

T/F: Discussions in class will be graded based on their proper delivery, polish, and sophistication _____

I understand discussions are about learning and engaging with meaningful content, therefore the goal is not polish but whole-hearted participation _____

T/F: I only need to do assignments that my professor reminds me about? _____

I understand that I am responsible for my own learning and schedule, therefore I am responsible for checking the syllabus and submitting the assignments at the appropriate times. _____

T/F: I will take a quiz every other week? _____

I understand that I must take a quiz at the end of every week _____

T/F: I can work together with classmates on quizzes _____

I understand that I may not work with classmates, and I may not google answers on quizzes _____

T/F: I need to prepare an entry in the learning log before class? _____

I understand that every class, including podcast days, require me to prepare an entry _____

T/F: I need to do a log entry for every reading listed in the syllabus? _____

I understand that I only prepare an entry for the readings marked with an asterisk, however I ought to do the readings without an asterisk to prepare for the quizzes _____

T/F: I can select a paper topic on whatever I want and whenever I want _____

I understand that I have a lot of freedom on paper topic selection, however I must submit an outline of the paper about a week before (see exact dates in the syllabus) *and* I must take the professor's recommendations on my outline seriously before submitting my paper _____

_____ [signature]