



On-Campus Course Syllabus

THS 203 : L1

Systematic Theology I

Fall 2023

Class Information

Day and Time: Mondays 7:30 pm – 10 pm

Room Number: E 209

Contact Information

Instructor Name: Dr. Ty Kieser

Instructor Email: tkieser@criswell.edu

Instructor Phone: (214) 818-1306

Instructor Office Hours: Monday: 1–3 PM; Wednesday 9–11 AM

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, prayerfully, 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% — 2.85 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 nine 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 after each class (e.g., Tuesday at noon) and must be taken before the day of the next class (i.e., by Sunday at 11:59 PM). Each of the fourteen quizzes is worth 2.85% of your final grade (40% total).

Letter to a Skeptical Friend (17% — 15 + 2 pts): To help you think more critically about key doctrines, questions, readings, and the world that you live in, you will be asked to write one 1,250+ word paper as 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 outline of the paper about a week before the paper is due. Papers should be saved as a PDF or Docx and submitted via Canvas. The outline is worth 2% and the paper is worth 15% of your final grade (17% total).

Theological Reflections on Scripture and Bible Memorization (15% — 5 + 5 + 5 pts): Since Scripture is the ultimate source of theology and reading Scripture well is one of the main goals of theology, students will write three brief theological reflections on Scripture (one for each of the first three modules). The specific theological topic and biblical text will be up to you, but examples will be listed below alongside the paper expectations. These should be saved as a PDF or Docx and submitted via Canvas. Each reflection is worth 5% of your final grade (15% total).

Reading Reflection Questions (28% — 1 pt each): Before every class you will prepare reading reflection questions and submit them on Canvas by noon on the day of class. For most weeks this will be focused on chapters in Erickson. However, there are exceptions, so please see the schedule below and prepare questions for every reading marked with an *. Every * = at least 1 question — so you will submit 2+ questions per day. These questions are designed to serve your learning and your formation. So the content is largely up to you, however, there are details and examples below. Your participation will be included in this grade. So if you submit a question, but do not attend/participate in class, your grade will drop. Likewise, a failure to submit questions will cause your grade to drop.

Podcast days/prep: On “podcast days” you will NOT prepare any questions on the readings, 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. You will submit these notes on Canvas before class. On podcast 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: For all assignments except your reading reflection questions, your grade will be reduced by 10% for each calendar day an assignment is late. If your questions are late (even by a few minutes), you can only receive 50%. However, any/all missed assignment may be submitted before the end of the semester for up to 50% credit.

Extra Credit: Extra credit is already built into the class. No additional extra will be offered.

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 (1) anticipate being able to attend every on-campus class session on the day and time appearing on course schedules, or (2) participating in academically related activities as identified in online-course schedules including synchronous class sessions conducted remotely by video, and then making every effort to do so. When unavoidable situations result in absence or tardiness, students are responsible for acquiring any missed information. Professors are not obliged to allow students to make up missed work. Per their independent discretion, individual professors may determine how attendance affects students' ability to meet course learning objectives and whether attendance affects course grades. Professors apprise students of such information in course syllabi.

Students receiving grants, loans, or scholarships must meet specified requirements of various departments at the college and should consult relevant sections of the *Academic Catalog*. To ensure such funds will not be forfeited, students are responsible for contacting the proper departments to ascertain any specific course participation requirements and consequences of not meeting such requirements. Students receiving grants, loans, or scholarships should consult the Financial Aid office.

While Criswell College is a non-attendance taking institution, it nevertheless must demonstrate that students begin their courses in order to comply with Federal Aid regulations. Accordingly, students must participate in academically related activities during census periods. Failure to meet this requirement will result in students being administratively dropped from courses.

Academically related activity is defined as any course-related activity that may be used as evidence of attendance. Examples include:

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).

- physical presence in a classroom during a class session with the instructor present,
- participation in a synchronous remote video class session with the instructor present,
- submission of an academic assignment, quiz, or exam,
- participation in an interactive tutorial or computer-assisted instruction,
- participation in a study group or discussion board that is assigned by the instructor,
- documentation showing that the student and a faculty member corresponded about the academic subject of the course.

NOTE: Logging into a Canvas course alone and logging into a Synchronous Online class session without active participation or with the camera off are not considered attendance.

NOTE: A census period begins on the first day of a semester/term and runs through the end of the last day to drop courses. During the census period, attendance data is collected in order to demonstrate compliance with Federal Aid regulations. There is no census period for winter terms since there is no last day to drop courses.

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

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.

Research and Writing Standards

The default writing style for written assignments in Criswell College Courses is the latest edition of *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian. However, instructors are free to require alternative writing styles in their courses. These styles include but are not limited to the American Psychological Association (APA), Chicago Manual of Style, Modern Language Association (MLA), and Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) writing guides.

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. Login credentials are emailed to students near the beginning of the semester.

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 schedule an appointment through Calendly (<https://calendly.com/criswell-tutoringcenter>) or by visiting the Tutoring Center located on the second floor in room E203. For questions, call 214.818.1373 or email at tutoringcenter@criswell.edu.

Course Outline/Calendar

August 21st (A) — Introduction

Introduce yourself*

August 21st (B) — Why we Do Theology

Erickson, Ch 1²

Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book 1 (chs. 1–5, 35–40) [[link](#)] (reading in class)

Week #1 Quiz³

Doctrine of God Module

August 28th (A) — Models of God

Erickson, Ch 8*

August 28th (B) — God's Existence

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

McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, Ch 3

Week #2 Quiz

September 4th — Labor Day

September 11th (A) — God's Perfections – Incommunicable

Erickson, Ch 9*

September 11th (B) — God's Perfections – Communicable

Erickson, Ch 10*

Soskice, "Calling God 'Father'" [pdf]

Week #3 Quiz

² Readings in standard font

³ Assignments in bold

September 18th (A) — God's Triunity in Scripture

Erickson, Ch 11*

September 18th (B) — God's Triunity in history

McGrath, "The Doctrine of the Trinity" [pdf]*

Week #4 Quiz

Reminder: Start Memorizing and Reflecting on your biblical text

September 25th (A) — God's Triunity in Action

Erickson, Ch 12*

September 25th (B) — Podcast

Swain, "The End of God's Triune Work" [pdf]

Prepare Podcast Topics*

- Is God infinite?
- Why does it matter that God is perfect?
- Is the Trinity in the Bible?
- How has the church historically understood the Trinity?
- Why does it matter that God is triune?

Week #5 Quiz

Theological Reflection on Scripture #1 (due Oct 1st at 11:59 PM)

Doctrine of Creation Module

October 2nd (A) — Creation and Scripture

Erickson, Ch 13*

October 2nd (B) — Goodness of creation

Aquinas, Light of Faith [pdf]*

McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, Ch 7

Week #6 Quiz

October 9th (A) — Providence

Erickson, Ch 14*

October 9th (B) — Evil and suffering

Erickson, Ch 15*

Kapic, *Embodied Hope*, Prelude & Ch 1

McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, Ch 11

Week #7 Quiz

October 16th — Student Development Week

October 23rd (A) — Angels, Demons, and Culture

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

Erickson, Ch 16

October 23rd (B) — 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/demons matter?
- How should Christians understand culture?
- Why does a good God let bad things happen?

Week #8 Quiz

Theological Reflection on Scripture #2 (due October 29th at 11:59 PM)

Humanity Module

October 30th (A) — Image of God

Erickson, Ch 17 & 18*

October 30th (B) — Human constitution

Erickson, Ch 19*

Kapic, *Embodied Hope*, Ch 4

Week #9 Quiz

November 6th (A) — Sex and gender; Race and Ethnicity

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

McCaulley, *Reading While Black* [pdf]

McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, Ch 10

November 6th (B) — Sins

Erickson, Ch 20 & 21*

Week #10 Quiz

November 13th (A) — Original Sin

Erickson, Ch 22*

November 13th (B) — 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 #11 Quiz

Theological Reflection on Scripture #3 (due November 19th at 11:59 PM)

November 20th — Fall Break

Late Assignments Due

Prolegomena Module

November 27th (A) — How we do Theology

Erickson, Ch 2*

November 27th (B) — Knowing God

Erickson, Ch 3*

McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, Introduction and Ch 1

Week #12 Quiz

Outline of Letter to a Skeptical Friend (Nov 30th at 11:59 PM)

December 4th (A) — Revelation

Erickson, Ch 4*

December 4th (B) — Character of Scripture

Erickson, Ch 5*

McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, Ch 6

Week #13 Quiz

December 11th (A) — Character of Scripture & Hermeneutics

Erickson, Ch 6 & 7*

December 11th (B) — Podcast

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

Prepare Podcast topics*

- Why should we study theology?
- How should we think theologically?
- (How) can we know God in nature?
- (Why) should we trust Scripture?
- How can we read Scripture wisely?

Week #14 Quiz

Letter to a Skeptical Friend (due December 14th at 11:59 PM)

Reading Reflection Questions

Our class will be structured around engaging the questions that you draw from the readings. Therefore, you will write 1+ questions per class portion (i.e., two per week). These questions should be engaged with the readings (including Scripture) and thoughtful. They should have two parts: (1) the question itself; (2) the evidence and explanation of the question.

The question itself: This should be a brief, precise, and genuine question.

- 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?”
 - *Coherence* question: “I’ve always been taught Y, but the book says X. Do these contradict?”
 - *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.

The evidence and explanation of the question: This may include some of the relevant evidence to consider when answering your question (e.g., biblical passages to consider), it may include the significance of answering one way or another, it may include clarity on definitions in the question, etc.

Reading Reflection Examples

The question itself¹: When Dumbledore says, “There are things much worse than death” (6:814), is he specifically referring to a life with a lack of love?

Evidence and explanation¹: The order of the Phoenix (i.e., a “resurrection bird”) insists that death (or, a kind of death) must be embraced on the way to a life of love. Sacrificial love is regularly considered the most potent form of magic, as Harry was protected by the love of his mother from Quirrell (HP, 1:216) and as it is studied in the department of ministries as “a force that is at once more wonderful and more terrible than death” (HP, 6:843). Since love is greater than death, a failure to love, or a betrayal of love, is worse than death. Sirius Black tells Peter Pettigrew that he should’ve “died rather than betray [his] friends” (3:375). Not only is a betrayal of love worse than death, but an absence of love is likewise worse than death. Dumbledore tells Harry, “Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and above all, those who live without love” (7:722). So what is worse than death? According to Dumbledore, in my opinion: a life without love.

The question itself²: If Dumbledore is right to suggest that “There are things much worse than death,” then should Christians be (like Dumbledore) courageous in the face of death and not fear it (see Hebrews 2:15)?

⁴ X, Y, and Z are simply variables (like in algebra), so they refer to any idea/term/argument in the reading.

Evidence and explanation²: While the narrative of resurrection is not as explicit as I would like in HP, I think that there is a connection between Dumbledore’s claim about death and the power of resurrection if we accept the premise that Christ has died, was raised, and will one day raise us to new life. Apart from the resurrection, death is indeed the victor and the greatest power (see 1 Cor 15:13–15; see James and Lily's tombstone). Yet because Jesus has been raised from the grave, he can promise us, “whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it” (Matt 16:25). While Voldemort tried to save his own life from death, it is only through resurrection that we find true life. We have hope in the face of death because the “resurrection stone” (HP, 7:416) has been “rolled away” from the tomb of Christ (Matt 28:2). Because there are things worse than death, I can embrace death to my own flesh, desires, preferences and instead “walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up [unto death] for us” (Eph 5:2). Knowing that if we have “died with him, we also will live with him” (2 Tim 2:11).

Podcast Preparation

In preparation for the podcast discussion, you’ll submit a doc. or PDF to Canvas containing each of the following elements. Podcasts will either be recorded in individual groups OR conducted in front of class with a randomly selected set of students. Your grade will be based on your preparation and participation. However, if you don’t participate (e.g., you’re not randomly selected), you can still receive full marks through your preparation.

For EACH question of each podcast day, you should have:

1+ biblical text you’re prepared to discuss.

1+ theological concept that you’re prepared to discuss, alongside their significance for your conclusion

1+ sub-question you’re prepared to discuss. — this, especially, might relate to the practical significance of your conclusion.

Podcast Preparation Example

For example, if the topics were (unrelated to theology): “Why the Bears are going to win a playoff game” and “Why the Cowboys will not win a playoff game” my preparation would look like:

- 1) Bears question
 - a. Texts
 - i. “.....” — Mina Kimes, ESPN.com
 - ii. “.....” — Mel Kiper Jr., ESPN.com
 - b. Concepts
 - i. Dual-threat quarterback — the ability of Justin Fields to throw and gain yards with his feet. Last season he broke the single-game rushing record for a QB and amassed over 1,500 yards.

- ii. Parity in the NFC north — with Rodgers out, the Lions poor defense, and the Vikings likely regressing the mean, the NFC north lacks a clear favorite, which gives them a good chance to have a good division record and get a high seed in the playoffs.
- c. Sub-questions
 - i. Is there any chance the Eagles don't get the bye this year?
 - ii. Can the bears Rookie defensive tackles, Gervon Dexter and Zacch Pickens, bring pressure and support the defense?

2) Cowboys question

- a. Texts
 - i. "....." — Stephen A. Smith
 - ii. "....." — Mina Kimes
- b. Concepts
 - i. The evolution of the running back — the way that the NFL has diminished its view and value of the running back position and the way that the Cowboys prioritize the running back position.
 - ii. Dak Prescott's injury prone'ness — Dak has missed 16 games in the last 3 seasons.
- c. Sub-questions
 - i. Will the Cowboys second ranked defense (in DVOA last season) be able to win games for them?
 - ii. If the Cowboys end up playing the Eagles in the playoffs, could they beat them?

Theological Reflection on Scripture and Memorization

These papers should be 500+ word reflections on a particular passage of Scripture. You should choose a relevant biblical text, a specific theological topic/theme covered in the module, and an aspect of its pastoral/ethical/devotional significance.

In preparation for writing these papers, you should (A) memorize the biblical text (if your passage is too long, you should memorize at least 25+ words); (B) reflect of this biblical text for 7+ days (before submitting the paper); (C) read/cite three+ other theologians reflections on this text (in addition to the course readings) — at least, 1 commentary, 1 journal article (relevant to the text or topic), and 1 classic theological text (see examples below).*

***Library Opportunity — Extra Credit**

If you meet with Valeri Knighten to discuss resources at least a week before the due date of the paper, you can gain 1 pt extra credit. The extra credit is only available once, however, I would recommend consulting Valeri every time.

Format (and Grade)

Name:

Title: _____ [theological topic] and _____ [ethical/devotional significance] in _____ [biblical passage]

Biblical Text: Writing out the content of the passage and the citation.

Affirmation that you memorized the text and recited it from memory to another human. For example: “I memorized this text and said out loud to my roommate Bill.” [.25 pts]

Affirmation that you reflected on this passage 7 days: For example: “I reflected on this text for 7 days” (if it’s more or less, please be honest). [.25 pts]

The Spiral of the Text and Topic (350+ words) — The Fundamental Questions are: “How does this topic help me understand this text? And vice-versa.” By engaging the text closely, you might ask yourself, “how does this text relate to my view of this topic?” “What aspect of this topic is most clear and necessary from this text?” How does this topic help me understand this text?” “How does this topic support the claims that the author of Scripture is making?” “What other biblical texts inform my understanding of this topic and this text?”

Connecting the Spiral to Life (150+ words) — this portion should demonstrate the significance of this text and topic on a devotional/ethical theme. “How do this topic and text help me view myself before God?” “What about my life should change because of this topic and text?” Notice how this section starts talking about your/our lives today and do so by engaging the text and the topic.

Bibliography — naming the theologians that you engaged

Examples of Theological Texts

My recommendation: Look at how they address your topic AND look at the Scripture index (if available)

John of Damascus, *Sentences*

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*

Thomas Oden, *Systematic Theology*

James William McClendon Jr., *Systematic Theology*

Examples (5 examples for each module; obviously, you should feel free to pick a variety of other topics)

Indivisible Operations and confidence in the Father’s love in Romans 5:6–8

Divine simplicity and human identity in Exodus 3:14

The Creator/creature distinction and human finitude in Isaiah 40:28–31

The Holy Spirit as the Love of God and prayer in Luke 11:13

The immutability of God and faith for your future in James 1:17-18

The goodness of creation and having pets in 1 Tim 4:4–5
Divine concurrence and productivity in Psalm 127:1–2
Evil as privation and pornography in Hebrews 13:4
The problem of evil and the death of my grandma in 1 Corinthians 15:55–58
Cultural fluency and dialoging with friends in Ephesians 4:29

The image of God as human intellect and aliens in Genesis 1:26–27
Ethnicity in the eschaton and diverse friend groups in Revelation 7:9
Social sin and Amazon purchases in Ezekiel 16:15–19, 49–52
Dogmatic rank and the experience of doubt in Jude 22–23
Indwelling sin and confession in James 1:14–16

Example of Indivisible Operations and confidence in the Father's love in Romans 5:6–8

Biblical Text: For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.... 8but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

"I memorized this text and said out loud to my wife, Kate."

"I reflected on this text for 7+ days"

Introduction to Reflection and Indivisible Operations

The doctrine of the indivisible operations of the triune God helps us grow in confidence that the Lord loves us, as evidenced by a careful reading of Romans 5:6–8. The doctrine of indivisible operations is that every divine action is indivisible and inseparably involved in every divine action. So if we asked, "who created the world," the doctrine of indivisible operations suggests that the Father (Mal 2:10; Isa 45:12, 18), the Son (Heb 1:2; John 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16), and the Spirit (Gen 1:2; Ps 33:6) were indivisibly involved in the act of creation. As John Owen says, "Now, the works that outwardly are of God (called '*Trinitatis ad extra*'), which are commonly said to be common and undivided," comprise "a concurrence of the actings and operations of the whole Deity in that dispensation, wherein each person concurs to the work of our salvation."⁵

Indivisible Operations and Romans 5

Paul's claim in Romans 5 is that "God shows his love for us in that . . . Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8) and such a claim relies upon Christ's self-sacrifice being an act of God. It is not simply that Christ is demonstrating his love for us in his death, but that God as demonstrating his love in the death of Christ on the cross. Yet this is not merely the love of Christ, but the love of God, the Father. The NASB, following the Greek, includes the reflexive pronoun "own" after the subject ("God") so that it is clear that this is God's own love made manifest in the cross

⁵ WJO, *Communion*, 2:18. See also 2:268–69.

of Christ. Leon Morris claims, “Paul says that the cross shows us God’s *own* love. One might expect him to say that the cross shows us the love of Christ. It does that, of course, but *own* puts the emphasis on the love of the Father.”⁶ It is the Father’s own love displayed in the acts of the Son because the Son and Father are one (in essence, life, and love) and act as one. As one biblical scholar says, “So entirely at one are the Father and the Son that the self-sacrifice of the latter can be presented as a token of the love of the former.”⁷

The Father in Romans 5

Some may suggest that the referent of θεός (“God”) in 5:8 might better be seen as “the triune God” or “the divine nature” (as in John 1:1c). However, a few verses later, Rom 5:10 clearly refers to the Father as θεός. Therefore, it makes sense to think that the Father is in view in Romans 5:8 also. Seifrid notes this correlation and says, “God’s action is thus implicitly identified with Christ’s action, and Christ’s action is identified with that of God.”⁸

Confidence in the Father’s Indivisible Love (Connecting the Spiral to Life)

Growing up in Sunday School, I’m pretty convinced that “Jesus loves me.” However, it can feel as though the Father is the austere judge who looks down disapprovingly at me until Jesus comes to graciously offer forgiveness, and only then does the Father (begrudgingly) accept me. In my worst moments, I can imagine Jesus as the display of divine love, life, and grace through meekness and the Father is the one who brings judgement, justice, and righteousness through (intimidating) power. However, if indivisible operations is true, then the cross is a demonstration of the Father’s love because the Father is active. The primary function of this passage in Romans is to assure the reader of the abundance and magnitude of God’s love. The *minori ad maius* (light and heavy) argument that Paul makes in verses 9 and 10 depends on the death of Christ being a remarkably bold act of *God* himself, so that Christians can understand that the persevering love and requisite strength to reach the culmination of salvation in the eschaton pale in comparison to the love that God demonstrated for us on the cross in Christ.⁹ Moo states that these verses “set Christian hope on the unshakable foundation of the love of God revealed in the cross.”¹⁰ The pastoral logic here depends on the act of Christ on the cross being an act of God. And if the cross is an act of God, then we can be confident in all things that God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) loves us.

Letter to a skeptical friend

This 1,250+ word paper is intended to be formatted as a letter to your friend who is asking questions about the 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. As a “letter” this can be as personal and relational as you would like. However, if you use a lot of words making it sound

⁶ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 224.

⁷ F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1985), 115.

⁸ Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 257; cf. Gorman, *Death of the Messiah*, 175 for a similar claim about 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 262.

¹⁰ Douglas Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 2nd ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 325; see also 333.

relational, I would strongly recommend that you exceed the word count so that you can include important content.

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) Your 2-4 claims that support your main point
- D) At least one piece of evidence for believing each of these 2-4 claims.

Example of an Outline

Skeptical friend is asking: Are the Bears even going to be good this year?

Main point: The Bears are going to be good, indeed, they're going to win a playoff game.

Claims:

- 1) Mobile Quarterback have dominated the NFL over the past 5 years.
 - a. Evidence: Hurts, Mahomes, Jackson, Rodgers, Allen, Russel Wilson AND the Bears have a mobile QB (Justin Fields)
- 2) The Bears lack of success has been due to a lack of a #1 receiver.
 - a. Evidence: The only two times the Bears have made the Playoffs in the last 12 years was when Allen Robinson was on the team – a clear #1 receiver
 - b. See Boomer Esiason on the Bears WR difficulties (..... p. ##)
- 3) The NFC North champion may make the playoffs with an 8-9 record.
 - a. Evidence: The NFC North has so much parity, even if the Bears have a below average season, they might be able to make the playoffs.
 - b. Evidence: The Bears have the easiest schedule in the NFC — <https://www.sharpfootballanalysis.com/analysis/2023-nfl-strength-of-schedule/>