

Intro to Christian Theology

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Organizational Purpose

The Institute of Biblical Studies (IBS) exists to help develop Christ-centered missionaries who possess the biblical and theological competencies they need (head, heart, and hands) to live out the Great Commandment and help fulfill the Great Commission through the ministry of Cru. This course explores twenty Christian doctrines that are foundational to our life and mission.

Course Description

Good theology is vital to the life and health of the church. Theology helps us answer questions like, ‘What is God like?’ ‘How does God speak to us?’ ‘Why did God create the world?’ ‘What does it mean to be human?’ ‘What’s wrong in the world?’ ‘Who is Jesus Christ and what did he do for us?’ ‘What is the good news of the gospel?’ ‘Who is the Holy Spirit?’ ‘What is a church?’ ‘How will God’s story end?’ This course will introduce you to the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith affirmed in the Cru Statement of Faith. Not only will you gain a deeper understanding of these doctrines, but you will also discover how these doctrines should practically shape our lives and ministries.

Learning Outcomes

Affective (attitudes, motivation, character)

1. Deepen your motivation to know, love and worship the triune God and reflect God’s character in the world as an image-bearer and faithful disciple of Jesus.
2. Cultivate virtues that are central to the practice of theology including faith, humility, generosity, and curiosity.
3. Strengthen your missionary calling to serve with Cru.
4. Gain greater motivation to learn believers in ethnic and cultural contexts different from your own.

Cognitive (knowledge and thinking skills)

1. Develop a deeper understanding of and greater confidence in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. Gain greater confidence in Scripture as the inspired, inerrant, authoritative, sufficient, and powerful Word of God.
3. Develop a deeper understanding of and commitment to the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith expressed in our Statement of Faith.
4. Grow in your capacity to reflect theologically on cultural and ethical challenges we encounter in our world.

Behavioral (personal and ministry skills)

1. Grow in your capacity to ask good questions as you navigate theological challenges in ministry by discussing and reflecting on case studies.
2. Grow in your capacity to read Scripture “theologically” as a disciple who is faithful both to the truth of Jesus and the way of Jesus.
3. Be better prepared to partner with those who hold differing theological views allowing for differences of opinion on matters not central to our Statement of Faith while pointing people to a compelling center (i.e., Christ, the gospel, and our mission).
4. Grow in your capacity to teach these foundational doctrines from Scripture and relate them to personal growth, evangelism, discipleship, movement-launching, cross-cultural mission.

Learning Resources: Books (See pp. 7-9 for reading schedule)

Beth Felker Jones, *Practicing Christian Doctrine: An Introduction to Thinking and Living Theologically*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023). ISBN-13: 978-1540965141. Beth Jones is a professor of theology at Northern Seminary in Chicago. This book will introduce the key doctrines we’ll be exploring together in the class. *Be sure to get the second edition published in 2023.* [PCD]

David Platt, *Counter Culture: Following Christ in an Anti-Christian Age*, revised and updated (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 2017). ISBN-13: 978-1414390383. David Platt is the pastor of McLean Bible Church in Virginia. Good theology includes not only the beliefs we confess but also the virtues, practices, and moral vision that shape how we live in the world. This book will help you reflect theologically on a number of important ethical issues. [CC]

Learning Resources: Articles (See pp. 7-9 for reading schedule)

Gregg R Allison, *50 Core Truths of the Christian Life: A Guide to Understanding and Teaching Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), chapter 49.

Thabiti Anyabwile, “An Apology to Beth Moore and My Sisters” (May 3, 2018).

Phillip Bethancourt, “10 Connections Between Jesus and the Kingdom of God” (February 24, 2014)

Charles Octavius Boothe, *Plain Theology for Plain People* (Bellingham, W.A.: Lexham, 2017), intro and chapter 5.

Carl Ellis, Jr., “Biblical Righteousness Is a Four-Paned Window,” The Gospel Coalition (August 22, 2018).

Jayson Georges, “Talking about Faith in Non-Western Contexts,” *Modern Reformation* 27 (July 2017).

- Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), chapters 1 and 8.
- Keith E. Johnson, “Is Water Baptism Necessary for Salvation?” (unpublished)
- Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (April 16, 1963)
- Beth Moore, “A Letter to My Brothers” (May 3, 2018).
- Alan Scholes, “Doctrinal Convictions and Persuasions,” in *Principles of Leadership: What We Can Learn from the Life and Ministry of Bill Bright* (Orlando: New Life, 2001), chapter 24.
- Byron Straughn, “Like Families and Soccer Teams: Church and Parachurch,” *9Marks Journal* (March-April 2011).
- Scott Swain, “Ten Things You Should Know about Systematic Theology” (Oct. 08, 2017).
- A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), chapter 3.

Learning Resources: Cru Documents (See pp. 7-9 for reading schedule)

You will read several internal Cru documents outlining Cru’s approach to several issues. They are printed in the back of this notebook

Cru Resources

Number	Title	Page
Article 1	Sex & Gender: Cultural and Biblical Factors	
Article 2	Oneness in Ethnic and Cultural Diversity	
Article 3	Reflections on the Incarnation	
Article 4	Compassionate and Faithful: Navigating LGBT+ Questions in Ministry	
Article 5	Understanding the Complementarian/Egalitarian Debate	
Article 6	Men & Women in Ministry Together	
Article 7	Missionary Staff Rights and Responsibilities	

Learning Tasks

- A. **Class Sessions (2 hrs daily plus two special seminars):** Class sessions will involve a mix of lectures and discussions (whole class and small groups). If you get sick and need to miss a class session, please let the TA know. We will try to record audio of the sessions so you can listen to it later. (Please note that if you miss more than 20% of the class sessions, you cannot pass the class.)
- B. **Reading:** In addition to certain chapters from Jones and Platt, you are also reading articles and watching a couple of videos. A few articles, published by Cru, are included at the end of this notebook. Most of the articles are posted on the IBS website. You will find a reading schedule on pp. 7-9. **Try to complete as much reading as possible before class begins. Otherwise, you will be reading almost 50pp per night. Every year on the course evaluation, students write “I wish I had completed the reading before I came to class.”** You will submit a reading report. **DUE: Tuesday, January 23, by 11:59pm (submit in Canvas)**
- C. **Daily Journal:** Throughout the class, you will keep a journal where you record what you are learning and experiencing. Each day after class you will write a short journal entry (100-150 words) reflecting on how you felt about something you heard or discovered in class. It could be something that surprised you, something you found helpful or something that upset you. Consider the following questions: What was the most important thing you heard in today's session? Why was it important? Was there anything you found challenging in today's class? Why? Was there anything that made you feel uncomfortable or with which you disagreed? What is one way your future life and ministry might be impacted by what was discussed today? **Due after class each day by 11:59pm (submit in Canvas)**
- D. **Attributes of God Project:** This assignment is designed to help you grow in your ability to read Scripture theologically by exploring the attributes of God in Ephesians. You will find the worksheet, with instructions, posted in Canvas. **DUE: Tuesday, January 16 at 8:00am (beginning of class)**
- E. **Reading Reflection:** You will pick two readings (chapters or articles) that impacted you during the class and write about your experience with them. **One reading must address Side A of theology (beliefs, e.g., Jones, Boothe), and one reading Side B (ethics, e.g., Platt, Ellis, Moore).** What were the ideas from the chapter or article that connected with you? Why did you find them helpful? How did they challenge or encourage you? How do you want to apply them? Write 250 words for each reading. **DUE: Monday, January 22 by 11:59pm (submit to Canvas)**
- F. **Case Studies:** You will write responses to a series of case studies. These case studies integrate the doctrines we are studying in this class with practical ministry situations. The case studies, with instructions, are posted in Canvas. **You will not have access to the case studies until Tuesday, January 22.** **Due Wednesday, January 24 by 5:00pm (submit in Canvas)**

Mutual Commitments¹

My commitments to you are:

1. To pray for you that God would use this course to broaden your view of God, deepen your understanding of the gospel, form you spiritually, and fuel your vision to take Christ to the nations.
2. To promote active learning, using problem-based learning, polls, case studies, questions, discussion, attractive PowerPoint slides, and structured notes.
3. To show respect toward every student in the class, being sensitive to national, cultural, ethnic, generational, gender, and other individual differences, and listen courteously when students speak.
4. To provide opportunities outside class to discuss theological questions.
5. To ensure you receive constructive feedback on your work.
6. To welcome your feedback on the course content and methods.

What I expect from you:

1. To pray that God would help you see how he wants to use this course to help form you as a Cru missionary and faithful disciple of Jesus.
2. To bring a learning posture to the class and participate fully in all course activities and avoid distractions (e.g., email, social media).
3. To show respect towards fellow students, being sensitive to national, cultural, ethnic, generational, gender, and other individual differences, and listen courteously when others speak.
4. To proactively communicate with me about any unique needs that affect your involvement in the class (e.g., if you are sick one day and need to miss a session).
5. To submit work on time, or, if this is not possible, to request an extension adequately in advance of the deadline.
6. To provide constructive feedback on the course content and methodology that will help me as I teach this course in the future.

Contact Information

Email: Keith.Johnson@cru.org

¹ These commitments are adapted from Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education* (Langham Press), p. 159. I have received great help from Shaw in thinking about the design of this course.

Course Feedback

Reading Report	20%
Reading Reflection	10%
Attributes Project	30%
Daily Journal	10%
Case Studies	<u>30%</u>
Total	100%

Grading Scale

94-100	A	80-81	C+
92-93	A-	74-79	C
90-91	B+	72-73	C-
84-89	B	0-71	F
82-83	B-		

Note: A grade of C- or better is required to apply this course toward your IBS requirements

Students with Learning Issues

If you have a learning issue that affects your participation in the class, please let the instructor or lead TA know so we can help you as you engage with the learning tasks in the course.

Use of Laptops and Tablets in Lecture

One of the things I love about working with Cru is our strong commitment to development. We want to create the best learning environment we can for you in this class. As a result, we're going to ask you not to bring laptops, iPads, or tablets to class. There are three reasons for this. First, if you have your laptop or tablet open, it's almost impossible not to check email, surf the web, or engage in social media. That's distracting not only to you but also to other learners around you. Second, a growing body of research from cognitive science and neuroscience demonstrates that "multitasking" impairs learning. We not only remember less but have a hard time transferring that learning to new contexts. Third, handwritten notes help you better metabolize what you are learning. You might say, "But I can type way faster than I can write." While it may be true that most people can type faster than they can write, this isn't necessarily an asset in learning. A study published in June 2014 showed that students who take hand-written notes have a higher level of comprehension rather than those who type. It appears that when you take notes on your laptop, you basically become a stenographer rather a learner who has to synthesize the material. We're providing structured notes so you can listen and write more strategically without feeling overwhelmed to write everything down. If this is a problem for you, please reach out to me. (Note: In the Bible Study Methods course, you will need your laptop or tablet in some of the coaching sessions.)

Course Schedule and Assignments

Readings are “due” the day they are assigned (i.e., readings for January 9 should be completed prior to class on January 9).

- “Online” means that the article is posted on the IBS website
- “Notebook” means that the article can be found in the appendix to this notebook

Date	Topic	Reading Due
Monday January 8 7:00-8:00pm	Introduction to Intro to Christian Theology and Bible Study Methods	
Tuesday January 9 8:00-10:00am	Introduction to the Practice of Christian Theology	González, <i>Mañana</i> , 21-30 [10pp online] “Doctrinal Convictions and Persuasions,” [13pp, online]
	Convictions, Persuasions, and Opinions	“Ten Things You Should Know about Systematic Theology” Swain [1p, online] PCD intro [10pp]
Wednesday January 10 8:00-10:00am	God Speaks: Revelation, Inspiration and Canon	PCD c2 [24pp] CC c9 [20pp] (Review instructions for Attributes Project in Canvas)
	Authority and Truthfulness of God’s Word	
Thursday January 11 8:00-10:00am	What is God Like?	PCD c3, c4 [42pp] Tozer, “A Divine Attribute” [5pp, online] (Begin work on Attributes Project - due Tuesday) Optional reading: “Trinitarian Patterns in Ephesians” [12pp, online]
	Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit	
Friday January 12 8:00-10:00am	Creation: God Made All Things	PCD c5 [20pp] González, <i>Mañana</i> , 117-23 [7pp online] “A Letter to My Brothers” [2pp online] “An Apology to Beth Moore and My Sisters” [2pp online] “Oneness in Ethnic and Cultural Diversity” [10p notebook] “Sex and Gender: Cultural and Biblical Factors” [1p, notebook]
	Creation: Made in the Image of God	
Friday 2:00-3:00pm	“Oneness in Ethnic and Cultural Diversity” Special Seminar	

Course Schedule and Assignments (continued)

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Date	Topic	Reading Due
<p>Monday January 15 (No class)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Martin Luther King, Jr. Day</p> <p>Today we honor the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. You will read MLK’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” On the IBS website, I’ve posted a five-minute video providing some context as well as a PDF file containing both a letter from Birmingham clergy to MLK calling his nonviolent resistance “unwise” and “untimely” as well as King’s response “A Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” [8pp, online]</p>	
<p>Tuesday January 16 8:00-10:00am</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Who is Jesus Christ?</p>	<p>**Attributes Project Due PCD c6 [24pp] PCD c7 [26pp] “Reflections on the Incarnation” [2pp, notebook]</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">What did Jesus do to save us?</p>	
<p>Wednesday January 17 8:00-10:00am</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Who is the Holy Spirit?</p>	<p>PCD c8 [24pp] Ellis “Biblical Righteousness is a Four-Paned Window” [2pp, online] CC c5 [24pp]</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Baptism and Filling with the Holy Spirit</p>	
<p>Thursday January 18 8:00-10:00am</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Fall: Corruption of Humanity</p>	<p>CC c2 [34pp] “Compassionate and Faithful” [16pp, notebook] Please read Cru’s public statement on LGBT+ questions as well [2pp, online]</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Election: God Chose Us</p>	
	<p style="text-align: center;">Ethics of Human Sexuality</p>	
<p>Thursday 12:45-2:00pm</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">“Navigating LGBT+ Questions in Ministry” Special Seminar</p>	
<p>Friday January 19 8:00-10:00am</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Gospel Call</p>	<p>“Gifts Flowing from the Grace of God,” Boothe [20pp, online] “Is Water Baptism Necessary for Salvation?” Johnson [11pp, online] “Talking about Faith in Non-Western Contexts” Georges [2pp, online]</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Coming to Faith: Regeneration, Conversion and Justification</p>	

Course Schedule and Assignments (continued)

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Date	Topic	Reading Due
<p>Monday Jan. 22 8:00-10:00am</p>	<p>Assurance, Growth, Perseverance</p>	<p>PCD c9 [24pp] CC c3 [22pp] “Understanding the Complementarian/Egalitarian Debate” [3pp, notebook]</p>
	<p>What is the Church?</p>	<p>“Men and Women in Ministry Together” [4pp, notebook] “Ten Connections between Jesus and the Kingdom” [1p, online] ** Reading Reflection Due</p>
<p>Tuesday Jan. 23 8:00-10:00am</p>	<p>How does Cru relate to the Church?</p>	<p>“Like Families and Soccer Teams” Straughn [9pp, online] “Missionary Rights and Responsibilities” [7pp, notebook]</p>
	<p>How Will God’s Story End?</p>	<p>PCD c10 [22pp] PCD, prayer, pp. 237-38 [2pp] “Eternal Punishment,” Allison [8pp online] **Reading Report Due Total Reading = 464 pages</p>
<p>Wednesday Jan. 24</p>	<p>Case Studies Due 5:00pm</p>	

Submitting Your Reading Report

To determine the percentage of reading you completed, divide the number of pages you completed by the total number of required pages and convert to a percentage. Example: Joe staff completed 300 pages of required reading. $300 \div 464 = 0.66 \times 100 = 66\%$. You will submit your reading report electronically in Canvas.