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**Preparing the Next Generation for a Pluralistic World: The Need to Teach  
Systematic Theology to Christian Youth**

A Thesis Project Submitted to  
the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity  
In Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry

by

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Lynchburg, Virginia

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**Thesis Project Approval Sheet**

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## THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

### **Preparing the Next Generation for a Pluralistic World: The Need to Teach Systematic Theology to Christian Youth**

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Liberty University School of Divinity, 2021

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The continuation of Christianity is rooted in the historical practice of the preceding generation theologically educating the next generation. This process has led to the spreading of the gospel throughout the world. However, in recent years, the Christian church has watched an entire generation walk away from the faith. Many youths who affirmed their faith in Christ are abandoning their confessions and practice. The challenges and skepticism of a pluralistic and relativistic culture have questioned historic Christianity. Regretfully, Christian youth are unable to respond theologically and accurately with confidence. The church has failed to prepare them. This study sought to explain the missing component in youth ministry education and provide the theological solution to ensure that the next generation is prepared to continue to spread the historic Christian faith in the world. This study consists of pre and post-assessments, surveys, and systematic theological instruction for youth. The result of this study is to help other churches develop a theological education program for youth that will prepare them to continue in the Christian tradition.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

The Lord commands His people to disciple the next generation so that each subsequent generation will trust in God.<sup>1</sup> The biblical model for the continual influence of the Christian faith in the world is rooted in the churches' ability to educate and prepare the next generation of believers spiritually. Many years ago, church leaders understood that the church could no longer be adult-driven if its influence in the community and the world would continue. The dominant Christian church organizational model includes ministries design for Christian teenagers. Therefore, are an innumerable amount of studies and resources on attracting youth in Christian bookstores. Many seminaries offer degrees in youth education. Subsequently, large youth buildings were built, and youth pastors were hired so that the Christian faith could be passed down to the next generation. At this point in church history, an intentional focus on youth in the church became a ministry within most local churches.

However, research is revealing that youth ministries are failing. In recent years multiple studies tracking evangelical teenagers into young adulthood suggest the church is not producing life-long disciples of Christ who can pass the Christian faith to the next generation. The data indicate that there is a consistent departure of teenagers and young adults from the Christian church. "In a nutshell, the crisis can be described as falling short of leading young people to

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 78:5,6, New American Standard (NAS).

become mature Christian adults.”<sup>2</sup> The church is watching an entire generation walk out to embrace other religious perspectives or no religion at all.

Research shows that the primary reason for this lack of growth is the church's failure to theologically prepare the youth for the world outside of the church. The Internet has opened the door to countless ideas, beliefs, philosophies, and religions worldwide. Opposing or contrasting beliefs and ideas in other parts of the world were formerly only known by those who traveled abroad. However, the Internet made the world a smaller place. It provided quick and easily accessible engagement with cultures and religions all over the world. Many of these religions and ideas are in opposition to historic Christianity. The added challenge is the people who have other religious perspectives or ideas are not externally immoral people. Through the Internet, people learned that most humans seem to have the same fundamental desires for security, freedom, and happiness. These universal desires helped people to become comfortable with communicating and interacting with others who may not share the same religious perspective. It was easy to develop a view that religious beliefs may not be as significant as it is commonly taught in church. It seems that all humans are searching for the same fulfillment and happiness in life, regardless of their religious history and belief. Furthermore, internet access provided an opportunity to express a religious view, compare religious premises, integrate religious ideas, and convert or be converted to new spiritual convictions.

Engagement with and responding to the multitude of religious perspectives of others in the world who are sincerely passionate about their beliefs and ready to defend their faith has been a challenge for the church. In addition, the advancement in science and its reliance on

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<sup>2</sup> Philippa Strong, “Effective Youth Ministry: Theology-Driven in a Cultural Context,” *In Die Skriflig/in Luce Verbi* 49, no.13 (2015), 1.

empirical data has been used as a platform to challenge traditional Christian beliefs, such as the origin of the earth. Youth ministries have not prepared the next generation of the Christian church to respond theologically with truth and confidence to questions and critiques of a pluralistic, scientific, and relativistic society.

### **Ministry Context**

Truth Community Church (TCC) is a small local fellowship in an urban community of a large city. The church was established six years ago after a theological and doctrinal difference caused a separation from another local body. The former church viewed theology and doctrine as divisive and did not agree that theological instruction was necessary for spiritual growth and maturity. Therefore, a small group of believers established Truth Community Church. The church has experienced growth, considering its humble beginning. The church started with four families. There are currently eighteen families who attend the church. The church now has a diverse membership, which includes African Americans, Caucasians, Hispanics, and Asians. There are multiple Christian doctrinal histories among the congregation. These traditions include Southern Baptist, Missionary Baptist, Catholic, Charismatic, and Reformed Baptist. Among these Christian traditions, there are fundamental beliefs that unify all believers, such as the nature of God, the person Jesus, the redemption in Jesus Christ alone by faith, the bodily return of Jesus Christ, and the unity of the Church by the Holy Spirit. However, there are significant theological differences among each of these Christian traditions. These differences include the nature of saving faith, the perseverance of faith, the use of the Law for believers in Christ, the use of spiritual gifts, eternal security, and the purpose of God in time and eternity. Therefore, to ensure unity in faith, consistent theological instruction must be a significant component of the discipleship model.

Truth Community Church holds to the premise that Bible-based systematic theology informs and motivates Christian practice. Therefore, systematic theological propositions are embedded in most of the biblical instruction, directly and indirectly. Currently, TCC schedules six months of systematic theological courses for new members. The teaching elder teaches these courses. The researcher for this study serves as the teaching elder of TCC. Indirectly, most sermons include theological terms and reference systematic theological premises. The church leadership has provided systematic theology lessons for the adults but has never offered the same teaching for teens. TTC does not have an organized youth ministry or designated youth minister. TCC determined that separating Christian youth education from the parents hindered the family from learning and worshiping as a family. The intent was to encourage the parents to use the lessons and sermons from the worship service to educate their families further. Therefore, teenagers learn and worship with the adult members in every service.

There are ten teenagers between the ages of thirteen and eighteen in the congregation of Truth Community Church who affirm their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. All these teenagers are members of Christian homes. Six of these teens are homeschooled, and four of them attend local public schools. Some parents assume that public school children are more likely to struggle with fidelity to their faith in Jesus than homeschool teens because the parents have more control over their home-school teen's exposure to non-Christian culture. However, technology has made other cultures and religions of the world easily accessible. All these teens own cellular phones and admit to spending time on social media, where they engage many pluralistic religious ideas

Their parents are all professing believers in Jesus Christ and consistently attend Christian worship gatherings with their families weekly. According to their parents, the home life of the

teenagers is guided ethically and morally by the Bible. The teenagers are held accountable for their time and use of the Internet and social media. The parents of these teenagers all affirm the sincerity of their teenagers' faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. These teenagers have never participated in direct systematic theological instruction since becoming Christians.

### **Problem Presented**

A pervasive problem in Christian church communities today is that professing Christian teenagers lack systematic biblical-theological instruction. After multiple conversations with a group of teens at Truth Community Church, it became apparent that they needed systematic theological education. They shared the frustration they experienced being challenged by classmates and neighbors about the validity of the Scriptures, the person and nature of Jesus Christ, and the need for salvation. They admit that they are sure of their faith but were unable to answer the questions apart from their religious convictions and testimony. Christian Smith, who studies and writes about this issue, states, “The most common answer for becoming nonreligious (32 percent) was some version of intellectual skepticism or disbelief.”<sup>3</sup> The Christian church is failing to prepare the youth to respond to the pluralistic culture they will encounter after they leave home.

The leadership at Truth Community Church is now concerned that the potential danger for the teens to be swayed from the teachings of Jesus Christ is significant. The absence of systematic theological instruction prevents these teens from developing a biblical-theological framework. Without this framework, these teens’ comprehensive biblical knowledge will be

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<sup>3</sup> Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Life of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 248.

limited. They will remain unable to respond with confidence to the critiques and skeptics of Christian beliefs. Also, the sanctification process, including their pursuit of practical holiness, abstaining from worldliness, and participation in spiritual disciplines will be hindered because the depth of understanding of Christian beliefs informs the growth in Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, “speaking the truth in love; we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him, who is the head, *even Christ*” (Eph 4:15).<sup>4</sup> In the New Testament, the original order of biblical instruction begins with theology (what to believe) and then practice (how to live). Insufficient theological understanding and the inability to respond to questions and critiques of Christianity by the leadership are some of the leading issues that cause many Christian youths to doubt or wander from the Christian faith.

It is most likely that the lack of systematic theology instruction for youth exists for two reasons: the first is an assumption that teaching systematic theology to teens will be “over their heads.” Secondly, most youth ministries and parents are more focused on youth making the right life decisions instead of thinking biblically. These assumptions may be the reasons so many professing believing teenagers waver in their faith and practice after they leave home.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry Study is to discover the effects of teaching systematic theology to Christian youth (ages 13-18) at Truth Community Church. The study seeks to demonstrate that teaching systematic theology to Christian teenagers may increase their comprehension of biblical knowledge, support their ability to respond apologetically to common

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<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 4:15. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version (ESV).

critiques of Christianity, and increase their time in personal devotion, prayer, private Bible reading, and prayer. The growth in each of these areas of faith will further establish them in the faith, decreasing the possibility that they will leave the Christian faith in belief and practice as teens and young adults.

### **Basic Assumptions**

This study assumes that the participants are sincere believers in Jesus Christ. Each participant will provide a brief testimony of their personal salvation experience. These testimonies will be reviewed to ensure that their testimonies of saving faith correspond to Paul's explanation that Christians are "saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ" (Eph 2:8). Nevertheless, this research assumes that the testimonies are legitimate.

This study assumes that these participants are supported and trained by Christian parents. Each participant's parents will provide a testimony describing the influence of Christianity in their home environment. The parents of the participants are all confessing believers in Jesus Christ. Also, all the parents affirm that Christian principles within the Bible are the foundation for their family's interrelationships and expectations.

### **Definitions**

This study intends to evaluate the effects of systematic theological instruction on Christian teenagers in Truth Community Church. The teenagers will be pre-assessed, receive instruction on, and then will be post-assessed on the following subjects:

1. Systematic Theology – a comprehensive organization of teachings, themes, and concepts from the Bible
2. Bibliology – a study of the origin and authority of the Christian Bible
3. Theology Proper – a study of the nature and character of God

4. Christology – a study of the humanity, deity, and redemptive activity of Jesus Christ
5. Soteriology – a study of the need, accomplishment, and application of the work of Christ for men.
6. Ecclesiology – a study of the origin, nature, and purpose of the church
7. Eschatology – a study of the eternal plan of God and the completion of the plan

### **Limitations**

This study has included only teenagers whose ages range from thirteen to eighteen. The participants in this study are all members of Truth Community Church. The sample group has received the same weekly, biblical instruction for three years at Truth Community Church. Also, the participants' parents are all members of Truth Community Church. All of the parents providing Christian training in their home have also been receiving biblical instruction at Truth Community Church for three years.

The research process includes self-reporting and surveys as data gathering tools. These methodologies allow for the potential of inflated or inconsistent data; however, the study will consist of pre-assessments and post-assessments of content knowledge and application of the new learning in apologetic scenarios. It is believed that these methods will provide some support and accountability for the data gathering tools that may be inconsistent. Also, the use of identification codes for each participant allows for anonymity to encourage honest responses from participants.

### **Delimitations**

This study's boundaries were based on the theological conviction that only sincere believers in Jesus Christ have the spiritual ability to comprehend and practice genuine Christian truth. Also, the focus on previous research suggests focusing on teenagers who are consistent



participants in Christian communities. The previous research identifies the participants as “Christians.” Therefore, all of the participants are professing believers in Jesus Christ, who have consistently participated in Truth Community Church gatherings for three years. There were no participants chosen who are uncertain about their faith in Jesus or have not publicly affirmed their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Systematic Theology has eleven categories of biblical study: Theology Proper, Christology, Bibliology, Pneumatology, Soteriology, Harmartiology, Ecclesiology, Angelology, Demonology, Eschatology, and Anthropology. The theological instruction for this study was limited to Bibliology, Theology Proper, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology. The intention is to demonstrate that systematic theology instruction of these six categories will provide sufficient Christian support for teenagers to become mature Christians and respond apologetically to the pluralistic, relativistic critiques of the Christian faith.

### **Thesis Statement**

If professing Christian teenagers in Truth Community Church are provided systematic theology, they will be able to deepen their commitment to the Christian faith and provide a biblical defense of their faith, thereby solidifying a life-long commitment to and practice of Christianity.

## **CHAPTER 2: FOUNDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of previous research on the insufficient theological instruction for Christian youth and the subsequent negative impact on preparing them to maintain fidelity to Christianity in a religiously pluralistic culture. Much has been written on the Christian Church's inability to retain most of the professing Christian youth after graduating from high school and entering college or the marketplace. This issue has led to further studies concerning the purpose and nature of youth ministry, the trends within Christian youth education curriculums, and the depth of theological training provided for Christian youth.

The review of previous work will consider data and research from three perspectives. First, a review of the data and literature detailing Christian youth's problem abandoning the practice and participating in Christianity as young adults. Second, a review of previous literature analyzing the trends of Christian youth ministries and its' influence on youth leaving the Church. Finally, a review of the Christian youth education curriculum and the need to integrate systematic theology instruction to better prepare youth for the pluralistic anti-Christian culture they now live within.

### **Literature Review**

There is a significant and necessary concern for the state of the church in the future. This concern is rooted in the exit of youth from the Christian church. Research data shows that more than half of young people with Christian backgrounds drop out of the church, and two-fifths state

they go through periods in which they seriously doubt their faith.<sup>5</sup> It has become an alarming trend and expectation for many in Christian communities for teenagers and college students, who make up the youth in many local assemblies, to struggle in their faith and stray from the church during these periods of life. According to Kinnaman, there is a 43 percent drop-off between the teen and early adult years in terms of church engagement. These numbers represent about eight million twenty-somethings who were active participants in the local church while growing up.<sup>6</sup> Their homes were founded on Christian beliefs and practices. They were consistent participants in youth ministries and Christian summer camps. They were once committed to their faith.

Now, many young believers stray from the church. The numbers increase after many youths finish their first year of college.<sup>7</sup> Ken Ham summarizes a survey of one thousand college students, “55% attended church regularly during high school. Of the thousand, only 11% were still going to church during their early college years.”<sup>8</sup>

The Christian church is always concerned about the effect that the culture abroad will have on Christian young adults when they leave their Christian home to attend college. It appeared as if young Christians struggled with temptation and morality during the college years only. Therefore, there was a considerable increase in ministries that focus on strengthening and spreading the Christian faith on college campuses. There was a quick and impactful expansion of ministries, such as Campus Crusade for Christ, on college campuses. Nevertheless, organizations such as these have not proven to be impactful enough to prevent the mass exit of youth from the

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<sup>5</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Brian Cosby, “The Reformed View of Youth Ministry,” in *Youth Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Five Views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 39.

<sup>8</sup> Ken Ham, *Ready to Return*, (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2015), 89.

church. Therefore, researchers began to consider the possibility that many of these young adults struggled with their faith before they arrived at college. Leaving their parents' homes for college provides young people the opportunity to walk away from the Christian faith practiced at home.<sup>9</sup> These youth may physically leave the church once arriving on college campuses, but they left the church intellectually and emotionally as teenagers sitting in church service and attending youth programs. Strong cites George Barna's 2000 survey that of the secondary and high-school students who attend church as youths, only one out of three plans to continue to attend church when they are adults.<sup>10</sup> They are planning to leave as teenagers before they have the ability and the freedom to leave. Once they leave their Christian parents' homes, many of them walk away from the Christian faith. The sad reality is that many of these young people never return to Christianity because they were never truly connected to the body of Christ as needed.<sup>11</sup>

### Reason Youth Leave the Church

The research suggests that the primary reason that youth leave the Christian church relates to a limited or insufficient understanding of Christian theology. In the book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Life of American Teenagers*, Christina Smith argues that "skepticism or disbelief is the reason 32% of young people become nonreligious. Many teenagers have led astray because of scientific reasoning and unanswered questions."<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> Brian Cosby, "The Reformed View of Youth Ministry," in *Youth Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Five Views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 38.

<sup>10</sup> Philippa Strong, "Effective Youth Ministry: Theology-Driven in a Cultural Context." *In Die Skriflig/in Luce Verbi* 49. no.13 (2015), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Chap Clark, "The Adoption View of Youth Ministry," in *Youth Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Five Views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 75.

<sup>12</sup> Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Life of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 248.

argument that intellectual skepticism leads youth to stray from their faith remains consistent across the literature and data. Research suggests that the youth who are attending church, participating in youth ministry, and listening to countless sermons are walking out the church doors with many unanswered questions. Waiting outside the doors to provide answers for them are the non-Christian science teachers, secular college professors, and the Internet, which can instigate a departure from the Church. Bradley Wright et al. reinforce this concept in another study that shows two-thirds (32 of 50, 64%) of young adults identify a theological or scientific reason for their departure.<sup>13</sup>

Theologically, the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as the only means of eternal happiness is a significant struggle for many youths. The pluralistic culture provides so many alternative possibilities to eternal happiness that it is hard for many to concede that so many people in the world are wrong. They find it impossible to believe and harsh to suggest that God intends to condemn most of the people in the world because their religious history is not Christianity. The Internet has opened and connected people around the globe. Most would argue that the majority of humanity is “good” and are sincere in faith in the religious perspective that has been established in their cultures for thousands of years. Therefore, to demand that they abandon their beliefs for Jesus, and if they do not, they are destined to be condemned to eternal damnation, is exceedingly difficult for many youths to reconcile.

Scientifically, evolutionary theories and explanations are still the dominant positions taken in opposition to Christianity. The simplistic Christian belief that all humans come from two people, in contrast to the existence of dinosaurs, the extensive age of the earth and the

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<sup>13</sup> Bradley Wright et al., "Explaining Deconversion from Christianity: Evidence from On-Line Narratives." *Journal of Religion and Society* 13, (2011), 6, accessed June 10, 2019, [http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p242813\\_index.html](http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p242813_index.html).

evolution process of all species, seem to suggest that the Bible is not scientifically accurate. Most public institutions of education for children start introducing adaptations to students in primary grades. The formation of planets by gases, heat, and rock is introduced before they begin middle school. Therefore, the groundwork for evolutionary thinking is laid early in most children's thinking before they are introduced to creation theology based on the Scriptures.

Another typical result of youth leaving the church is for believers in Christ is to apply blame to the pluralistic, anarchic, individualistic, and pseudo-spiritual millennial culture. The world view that most millennials embrace is radically different from their parents. The spiritual identity of American culture has shifted toward secularism and away from the Bible and Christianity.<sup>14</sup> Research suggests that intellectual skepticism developed by unanswered questions is causing spiritual havoc among the millennial population. Research shows the millennial generation as one-third less likely than their grandparents to identify with Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

#### Concern for Christian Education for Youth in the Church

The research detailing the youth leaving the Christian church describes youth who spent a significant amount of time involved in church, particularly in youth ministries. The contemporary model of church has divided the Christian education and spiritual development for believers into sub-population based on age. Because youth are leaving the Christian church, researchers are motivated to consider the intricacies of youth ministry.

Models of youth ministry vary significantly. There is the Gospel-Driven Model, which suggests that if the church wants teenagers to be like Jesus, then the church must cultivate in

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<sup>14</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 86.

<sup>15</sup> Larry Barnett, "The Need for Apologetics: What the Data Reveal About the Crisis of Faith Among Young Christians in America," *Philosophia Christi* 17, no.2 (2015): 478.

them a driving passion for reaching the lost.<sup>16</sup> The Generational Discipleship Model encourages parents to be the primary spiritual guides of the youth. The Relational Model intentionally connects youth to older members in the church who emphasize the Christian faith through mentoring and education.<sup>17</sup> The Reformed Model and the Ecclesiastical Model emphasize the practice of involving the youth as participants in every aspect of the life of the church.<sup>18</sup> These models suggest that youth need more involvement in the church to develop a sense of responsibility to the local church.

Though there are a variety of ministration models, there is a common concern across all denominations of Christians regarding the ineffectiveness of youth ministries to help young believers mature spiritually to become unwavering followers of Christ. Commonly, youth ministry models provide fun social activities with biblical theology, hoping that the fun will keep young people coming back until they become true disciples of Christ.<sup>19</sup> The high numbers of youth and young adults leaving the church affirm that this model is ineffective.

### Effective Youth Christian Education

Continual research is demonstrating that fun event-driven programs are not enough to produce long-term followers of Christ. The research shows that many youths participate in these

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<sup>16</sup> Greg Stier, “The Gospel Advancing View of Youth Ministry,” in *Youth Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Five Views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Chap Clark, “The Adoption View of Youth Ministry,” and Ron Hunter, “The D6 View of Youth Ministry,” in *Youth Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Five Views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 75.

<sup>18</sup> Brian Cosby, “The Reformed View of Youth Ministry,” and Fernando Arzola, “The Ecclesial View of Youth Ministry,” In *Youth Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Five Views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 37, 113.

<sup>19</sup> Brian Cosby, “The Reformed View of Youth Ministry,” in *Youth Ministry In The 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Five Views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 38-39.

activities because of relational and fun opportunities instead of Christian development.<sup>20</sup> The youth are participating but not growing in their faith. In America, the youth are attending church services and events. “Three out of five Americans claim to be practicing Christians; However, they possess little understanding of Christian doctrine, practices, and are unable to express their convictions or explain the validity of Christianity based on scripture and biblical language.”<sup>21</sup> They leave without any comprehension of the Scriptures and develop a theological framework that leads them to become cursory followers of Christianity in the current culture of pluralistic spirituality and scientific rationalism. The research reveals that most Christian youths view Christianity as “moralistic therapeutic deism.”<sup>22</sup> In the research among conservative Protestants, about half of their teens say that many religions may be true; more than one-third say it is normative to practice multiple religions; more than one-quarter believe people should not try to evangelize others; more than one-third say it is okay to pick and choose one’s religious beliefs and not accept the teachings of one’s faith as a whole, and nearly two-thirds say a person can be truly religious and spiritual without being involved in a church.<sup>23</sup> Current practices and guiding principles for youth ministry are failing to educate and prepare young Christians for the cultural context in which they live.

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<sup>20</sup> Philippa Strong, “Effective Youth Ministry: Theology-Driven in a Cultural Context.” *In Die Skriflig/in Luce Verbi* 49. no.13 (2015), 2.

<sup>21</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers are Telling the American Church*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 80.

<sup>22</sup> Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Life of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 518.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *Soul Searching*, 213.



## Changing Christian Education for Youth in the Church

Christian education for youth must become discipleship-driven. The church must view Christian youth as disciples in training, not merely as a youth that attends church. “The dropout problem is, at its core, a faith-development problem; the church has not intentionally focused on making disciples among youth.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the church must intentionally focus on helping Christian youth mature in the Christian faith. The focus must be placed on “what” and “how” we teach the Christian youth, not just more programs.<sup>25</sup>

The Christian church affirms the biblical premise that spiritual growth relates to biblical knowledge (1 Pet 2:1, 2; 2 Pet 3:18). It is a conviction of Christians that the believers' growth begins with the understanding of God and His works in creation. This is a theological pursuit. Therefore, if Christian education is going to impact the spiritual growth of youth, it must be founded on theological truth. Youth ministry is theological because its focus is comprehending and responding to God.<sup>26</sup> As the Christian youth becomes more entrenched in their understanding of God and His actions in the world, their knowledge grows, faith deepens, and they build a theological framework that will allow them to respond to secular or tepid Christian cultures apologetically.

### Equipping our Christian Youth with Systematic Theology

It is paramount for the church to train the youth theologically so that they can respond apologetically in this secular society, or the church in America may follow the path of the

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<sup>24</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Malan Nel, "Imagine-Making Disciples in Youth Ministry ... that Will make Disciples," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 8.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 71.

vanished church of England.<sup>27</sup> The church is losing members as a result of the apologetic battle between young Christians. If the Christian church continues in this path, each generation becomes more theologically illiterate, and the fight for the next Christian generation could be lost. Therefore, the Christian church's theological convictions must become the focus for passing on the faith from one generation to the next.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ham, *Ready to Return*, 46.

<sup>28</sup> Chap Clark, *Youth Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Five Views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 54.

## Theological Foundation

This chapter provides the biblical support and theological framework that the Church is responsible for preparing Christian youth to engage the world. The Bible is the primary source for the Church. Therefore, this section explains God's instructions in the Bible to His people and the practice of God's people, preparing subsequent generations to know and serve the Lord.

### God has Revealed Himself

A fundamental premise of Christian theology is the truth that God exists and has revealed His nature, character, and expectations to humanity. He reveals Himself generally through the physical world. David wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Ps 19:1). The Apostle Paul affirmed David’s idea stating: “For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes—his eternal power and divine nature—have been seen because they are understood through what He created. So, people are without excuse” (Rom 1:20). Both writers suggest that God has revealed Himself in the created order so that all of humanity can know that He exists and that He is divinely powerful. This revelation of God through the physical world is defined as general or natural revelation. General or natural revelation is seen and can be understood by all of humanity. Berkoff stated, “The mode of revelation is natural when it is communicated through nature, that is, through the visible creation with its ordinary laws and powers.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the Scriptures do not agree with agnostic ideologies, which suggest that humans cannot know whether God exists. Christian theology affirms that every human can perceive and know for sure that the eternal and powerful God does exist.

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<sup>29</sup> Louis Berkoff, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1938), 36.

However, according to the Scriptures, humanity has collectively denied and suppressed the truth about God intentionally in rebellion against God. Paul wrote that men, in unrighteousness, suppress the truth about God (Rom 1:18). Humanity in every generation has consistently developed arguments and philosophies to reject and deny the existence and authority of God revealed through creation. “Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal human beings or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles” (Rom 1:22–23, NET). Human wisdom produces evolutionary theories that attempt to remove the concept that an eternal being is the creator of the natural order. These theories suggest that the physical world with all of its minute details and design is the result of cosmic chance produced from exploding chaos or to other creatures with the intent of denying the existence of God. Boice wrote, “God has revealed in nature certain truths about himself to everyone; but third, people have rejected this revelation and have substituted false gods in place of the Creator.”<sup>30</sup> This line of reasoning affirms David’s conclusion that “Fools say to themselves, “There is no God” (Ps. 14:1, NET).

Nevertheless, God has revealed Himself to humanity so that He may be worshipped and honored as God. Therefore, the scriptures record accounts of God making Himself known to people so that they may worship Him and witnesses to the world His character and nature. This personal revelation of God to people is called special revelations. Special revelation is the divinely inspired and direct revelation of God to people. Boice wrote, “God has provided a

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<sup>30</sup> James Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive & Readable Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 36–37.

special revelation designed to lead those who did not know God and did not want to know God to a saving knowledge of him.”<sup>31</sup>

In early Old Testament history, God’s special revelation of Himself to individuals and groups of people occurred in various ways. He spoke directly to Abram (Gen 12:1,2). He spoke to Joseph through dreams (Gen 37:1). He spoke to Moses through a burning bush (Exod 3:4). God’s revelation of himself through these means would eventually become documented by men who were divinely inspired by God to record His words and actions in the world (2 Pet 1:20, 21). These revelatory writings continued through the first century and were compiled into one book called the Bible by Christians. The epitome of God’s revelation of Himself, as recorded in Scripture, is the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-3). Christian theology teaches that Jesus is the revelation of God in human flesh. The Apostle John affirmed that Jesus is eternal and equal with God. He condescended to become fully human to reveal God and redeem a people for Himself (John 1:1, 12, 14, 18).

There are significant differences between God’s general or natural revelation and God’s special revelation of Himself. These differences can be categorized based on extent and effectualness. Concerning the extent, the general or natural revelation is seen and expected to be understood by all of humanity. Paul concluded that men are without excuse for their denial of God because of this revelation (Rom.1:20). However, special revelation is understood and comprehended only by those whom God enables them to comprehend. Jesus stated, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son decides to reveal him” (Matt

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<sup>31</sup> Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 36-37.

11:27). Concerning effectualness, general revelation reveals the power of God and the righteous ethics and morality of God through the human conscience (Ps 19:1,2; Rom 1:20). Paul explained when Gentiles who do not have the law practice instinctively the ethics of the law, they are showing that God's ethical expectation is written on the hearts through their conscience (Rom 2:14, 15). This general revelation is insufficient to produce a biblical change of heart and give spiritual life to the spirit of men. However, special revelation is effectual by the power of God, which changes the heart and gives spiritual life to men, which results in salvation for the individual or people. The scriptures record the conversion of Lydia as she was listening to Paul proclaim the gospel. Luke wrote, "A woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, a God-fearing woman, listened to us. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying" (Acts 16:14). Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica, "But we ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth" (2 Thess 2:13). It is a privilege for men to be allowed by God to know Him personally and relationally through special revelation. Jeremiah wrote, "...let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things, I delight, declares the LORD" (Jer 9:24). Huey wrote, "These verses put life's values in a proper perspective. When all the nonessentials are laid aside, the only appropriate basis for boasting is that a person knows and understands the Lord."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> F.B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publisher, 1993), 122.

## God's Purpose for Revealing Himself to People

The individuals and groups of people who are given the privilege to know the Lord are given the sacred responsibility of representing and sharing God's revelation to the world. They are conduits for God to reveal Himself to the world. Abram was a man privileged to know God personally so that he would be used as a "blessing to all the families of the earth" (Gen 12:3). The disciples were called and trained by Jesus to be sent into the world as His witnesses (Acts 1:8). However, the pattern of sharing the revelation of God with the world does not start with reaching out to the entire world; it begins with teaching children to know the Lord so that they may teach the next generation about the Lord. In this manner, the truth about God will continue to be passed from generation to generation.

### Theological Instruction for Youth in the Old Testament

#### **From Adam To Jacob**

The process of passing the truth about God is seen implicitly early in the Christian scriptures. After the sin of Adam and Eve, the Lord provided a model for sacrificial offering by His covering of guilty humans with the skin of an animal (Gen 3:21). Kenneth Matthews argues that "Although the text does not specify that animals were slain to provide these coverings, it is a fair implication and one that likely would be made in the Mosaic community, where animal sacrifice was pervasive."<sup>33</sup> Subsequently, Adam and Eve trained their children to offer sacrifices to the Lord. The narrative account of their children, Cain and Abel, show them offering sacrifices

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<sup>33</sup> Kenneth Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 255.

to the Lord (Gen 4:2-4). Sacrifices and offering systems developed early as a theological premise to be passed down from generation to generation.

After the death of Cain, Eve gives birth to Seth (Gen 4:25). It is implied through the continuation of this lineage that offerings and sacrifices are the means to relate personally with God. By the time Noah, a descendant of Seth (Gen 4:25), is introduced, it seems a theological system of offerings and sacrifices is progressively developing. After the flood, Noah offered a burnt offering to the Lord on an altar he built (Gen 8:20). Noah's altar is the first mentioned in the scriptures. Abram, who is in the lineage of Noah, built four altars for sacrifices and offerings to God (Gen 12:7, 13:4, 18; 22:9). His son, Isaac (Gen 26:25), and his grandson, Jacob (Gen 33:20), both follow the same theological beliefs and traditions which were consistently passed from one generation to the next. At the end of the patriarch's life, Jacob cements the theological tradition of his family. While en route to Egypt with all his family and possessions, which would inevitably become 400 years bondage, he offered a sacrifice to God (Gen 46:1).

### **From Moses to the Judges**

The children of Israel, who are the descendants of the patriarchs, whose lineage traces back to Adam, were captives in Egypt for 400 years. At the sovereignly appointed time, God determined to release the Israelites from bondage through Moses. God sent Moses to Egypt, demanding that he release the Israelites so that they "may sacrifice to the Lord" (Exod 3:18). The theological traditions were handed down from generation to generation for 400 years while in bondage. After the Israelites were released, the sacrificial and offering traditions were set as the center of their theological traditions. A tabernacle was constructed and eventually a temple, which was designated by the Lord for these sacrifices and offerings (Lev 16:34). The Israelites obeyed the Lord's command and instructed each new generation to know and worship the Lord.



The Lord's chosen methods of ensuring that His laws and guidelines were propagated among his people were through teaching the children to know the Lord. In Moses' last address to the Israelites, he reminded the people of their history with God, the importance of following the Law of God, and the necessity of teaching the next generation about God. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." (Deut 6:5–7)

The adults were commanded by God to teach the children diligently, intentionally, and continuously. Eugene Merrill explains, "an important demand of the covenant relationship was that it be perpetuated beyond the immediate generation of those with whom the Lord made it."<sup>34</sup> Training the next generation carried the same weight of responsibility as any of the other listed commandments. The significance of the command to teach the youth is demonstrated through constant repetition of the command. The danger of not teaching the children leads to forgetting what the Lord has done, which culminates in irreverence for His authority and power:

Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children— (Deut 4:9)

how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so. (Deut 4:10)

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deut 6:7)

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<sup>34</sup> Eugene Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 166.

You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deut 11:19)

After the death of Moses, Joshua is called to lead the Israelites into the promised land (Josh 1:1, 2). The Lord commands Joshua to follow the same pattern that Moses established. He was to “do according to all the Law which Moses commanded” (Josh 1:7). As David Howard explains, “The command in v. 7 to be strong and very resolute is to ensure Joshua’s scrupulous obedience to the law of Moses.”<sup>35</sup> Joshua observed the ministry of Moses intimately; he was expected to follow the same pattern without deviation. The pattern of passing theological convictions and practices continued, and Joshua followed the Lord’s commandments and led the people victoriously in Canaan.

After the death of Joshua, training the next generation in theology came to a halt. According to the writer of Judges, “And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel” (Judg 2:10). This statement serves as a transition point in the historical narrative of Israel. There lies the breaking point in the consistent pattern of passing theological convictions and worship from one generation to the next. Daniel Block wrote, “This text is a witness to the apparent failure of the community to keep alive its memory of Yahweh’s gracious saving acts.”<sup>36</sup>

The Book of Judges identifies two areas of theological deficiency. The first deficiency noted is that the “next generation” did not know the Lord. The statement seems to imply a

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<sup>35</sup> David Howard, *Joshua*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 85.

<sup>36</sup> Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 122.

cognitive and relational lack of knowledge of the Lord. Cognitively, people of the next generation were unaware of the Law of God, which was the written disclosure of the Lord's character and purposes. The Law of God, which communicates His sovereign authority, righteousness, and power, is not a developed concept in the newer generation's world view. Their training and understanding of theology proper were non-existent. Subsequently, they did not know the Lord relationally. Because they were not trained theologically, they did not relate to the Lord personally. They were unable to worship and experience the Lord genuinely. Secondly, the next generation did not know the historical account of the Lord's activity among His people. The history of their nation, Israel, was the context of the Lord's work in the world. However, after they enter the "promised land," which is a phrase that encompasses a theological history, the knowledge of God does not exist in a written form that would allow their faith to be passed down without consistent verbal instruction.

Those who were responsible for training the next generation failed to educate the youth theologically. According to the Law of Moses, the Levitical priest was designated to teach and train the nation of Israel in theology and worship. Moses wrote, "... you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses" (Lev 10:11). "The priests had failed in their instructional duties, and the elaborate system of festivals, memorials, and other customs, designed to pass on the rich spiritual tradition had either lapsed or been reduced to a formality."<sup>37</sup> Those who were responsible were unfaithful in their theological instruction and practice. Their unfaithfulness to fulfill their duty to the Lord, according to the scriptures, produced a generation of theologically ignorant people.

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<sup>37</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 122.

The failure also resided with the parents of the previous generation. In Moses' last message to Israel concerning the Law of God, he stated, "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (Deut 6:7). The parents were responsible for teaching their children to fear the Lord and worship Him according to His word. Moses knew how easy it was for them to forget what the Lord had done for them (Deut 4:9): "God trusts His great events of revelation, such as His giving the Law at Sinai, to faithful stewards who must never forget them and who must pass them on to their children."<sup>38</sup> It was evident that the parents failed to heed the words of Moses.

The lack of theological instruction for the next generation had an enduring and severe impact on Israel. The author of Judges wrote, "And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals" (Judg 2:11). The lack of knowledge of God removed the parameters which were established to guide the spiritual, moral, and ethical life of Israelites. They were people who belonged to and were guided by the theological conviction provided by God. Once those convictions were no longer central to the people, they were left to define truth and righteousness on their own; however, this proved to be detrimental to living a joyful in the promised land. Moving forward, the history of Israel entails continual spirals of judgment, repentance, idolatry, and judgment. The last description of the Israelites during this period is, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg

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<sup>38</sup> Jack Deere, "Deuteronomy," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, vol. 1, edited by J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 269.

21:25). As Berry et al. explain, “Religious apostasy [was] now connected to a lack of central governance.”<sup>39</sup> The underlying truth is that they did have a King, but they did not know Him.

## **Kings and Prophets**

The history of the Israelites was significantly influenced by their failure to educate subsequent generations theologically. They neglected to maintain fidelity to God by training the next generations to know Him so that they would not forget Him. Their neglect of God intensified into rejecting God in the generations that followed. Initially, they were to be God’s representatives to the nations around them. However, progressively, they began to mold themselves to mirror the nations around them.

The covenantal relationship God promised to the patriarchs was confirmed with Moses and accomplished through Joshua. This established God as the king of the Israelites. However, after the period of the judges and the failure to theologically prepare the next generations, the people desired to follow the ideals of the nation’s surrounding them; they asked for a king (1 Sam 8:5). Their neglect matured into rejection: “And the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them’” (1 Sam 8:7). Robert Bergen explains, “Israel’s demand for an earthly king is presented as merely the latest instance of their long-standing pattern of rejection.”<sup>40</sup> The Lord allowed Israel to have a king like the other nations. Their history is filled with multiple kings who brought great harm to the nation. Their kings divide the kingdom’s

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<sup>39</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Jdg 17:6), Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 116-117.

southern kingdom, Judah, and the northern kingdom, Israel. The kingdoms fought among themselves, and their kings led them into idolatry and further away from God. Few would seek to bring spiritual reformation to the southern kingdom. The Lord sent prophets to call them back to God. However, neither kingdom escaped 70 years of captivity because they rejected God. The implication is that their journey into bondage is the culmination of the lack of theological instruction taught to the next generations.

## The History and Effect of Theological Instruction for Youth in the New Testament

### The Command to Teach Children

The New Testament's affirmation of theological training for youth is concise and direct, similar to the Lord's command to Israel to teach their children (Deut 6:7). Paul commands parents to train their children theologically: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). Children should be nurtured and reared in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. The term discipline (*παιδεία*) describes instruction or training. Kittle wrote, "The words *paideía* and *paideúō* relate to the upbringing of children, who need direction, teaching, instruction, and discipline."<sup>41</sup> The term refers to the education process and goal for childrearing.

Included in the education of the child should be the instruction (*νουθεσία*). "A compound of *nous* and *tithēmi*, the verb *noutheteō* means 'put something in someone's mind,' hence 'instruct, lecture,' sometimes by way of refreshing the memory, sometimes by way of making

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<sup>41</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, & Geoffrey Bromiley, Geoffrey. W., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 753.

observations or giving warnings.”<sup>42</sup> The theological education the child receives is intellectual, admonishing, and may include warnings. It is commanded that theological instruction provided by parents be holistic, including both the doctrinal components and the practice.

### **A Model of Youth Theological Instruction**

The New Testament provides a model of how children are impacted by theological instruction. The Apostle Paul wrote two letters to a young man named Timothy, whom he traveled with and trained. Timothy would eventually become a leader in the church. Luke provides some insight into his background. Timothy was a young believer living in Lystra. His father was Greek, and his mother was a Jewish believer in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:1,2). It seems possible that she became a Christian through Paul’s ministry in Lystra during his first missionary journey (Acts 14:6). When Paul returned to Lystra on his second missionary journey, Timothy had a good testimony with the brothers in the local church. Paul decided to bring Timothy with him on his second missionary journey.

Timothy’s theological training provided spiritual protection from the pagan religions and human philosophy prevalent in his culture. His Greek father would have given Timothy access to human wisdom and false theologies in his culture. Greek culture was inundated with multiple deities. The scriptures provide a detailed account of the Apostle Paul in Athens. Luke writes, “Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols” (Act 17:16). Intertwined with multiple idolatries was multiple philosophical ideas and premises which attempted to provide logic for their spirituality. Luke

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<sup>42</sup> Ceslas Spicq, C., & James Ernest, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 548.

writes, “Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babblers wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"-- because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.” (Act 17:18). This is the culture that Timothy’s Greek lineage would have exposed him to. Nevertheless, it was Timothy’s theological foundation based on the Scriptures provided by his mother and grandmother that guarded his heart against idolatry or being led astray by human wisdom culminating in his devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The theological instruction Timothy received as a child led to his conversion to Christianity. Paul wrote, “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well” (2 Tim 1:5.) His faith began with the training provided by his mother and grandmother. As Thomas Lea explains, “Jewish parents normally began instructing children in the Scriptures from their fifth year.”<sup>43</sup> Paul wrote, “...from childhood; you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which can make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). Timothy’s mother and grandmother provided a theological framework that would be the foundation of Timothy’s faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the Old and New Testaments, there are commandments regarding and consistent examples of youth receiving theological instruction. The Lord chose to employ these means to continue His purpose of making Himself known in the world. The previous covenant community held the responsibility of theologically training the next generation to know the Lord and His works in the world. In the Old Testament, the priest and parents were to teach the children the

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Lea, T. D., & Hayne Griffin, H. P., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 233.



truth about God. In the New Testament, the parents and the church trained young believers in the faith. The scriptures show that if The Church fails to provide theological training to the next generation, it will mimic the sinful wandering of the Israelites, resulting in a generation who does not know the Lord (Judg 2:10). The scriptures provide the truth and means to educate the next generations so that they will not be blown off course by every wind of doctrine (Eph 4:14). Therefore, if the Christian Church is going to serve the Lord faithfully according to the scriptures, it must return to the biblical calling of training the next generation theologically.

### **Teenagers as Disciples**

The instruction from the Lord to the church is to make disciples. Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19,20). Jesus’s instructions are clear. He begins with an imperative to make disciples; a disciple is a trained follower of another person. Jesus commands the initial disciples to go out and make more disciples. This is the purpose of their going out into the world as His established disciples. Also, Jesus tells the disciples how to make disciples. They were to baptize and teach others. Baptizing in this context is a means to publicly identify with a religious leader or religious system. The new believer in Jesus is baptized in the name of Jesus, affirming that they believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. With baptizing, Jesus tells them they should be teaching. It was never Jesus’s intent to simply lead people to faith for salvation demonstrated through being baptized. Jesus’s instruction includes the spiritual education and spiritual maturity gained from teaching. Those who are baptized are learners and students of the teaching of Jesus. A third component embedded in Jesus’s instruction is the content of their teaching. Jesus tells

them their content they should teach is what He taught. They were not to deviate from His teaching when teaching others.

An interesting note about Jesus's instruction is the "who" the disciples should go to with the intent of making more disciples. Jesus tells them to go to all nations. This was Jesus's way of telling His initial disciples that they should reach beyond their own communities and kinsmen. In another conversation with His initial disciples after His resurrection, Jesus said, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Jesus asserts that their ministry of witnessing for Him will lead them across the world, and there are no distinctions made between people groups, cultures, or ethnicity. Furthermore, there no distinctions made between the age of those who are to become disciples.

The command of Jesus to make disciples is devoid of distinction based on age. Regretfully, the church has been neglecting this population for years. Youth ministry is known by most as safe social gatherings among good kids who want to make the right choices. The job of the youth pastor is not focused on making disciples. Moser wrote, "North American youth ministry has long been characterized by a focus on entertainment and the pursuit of fun to attract non-Christian young people. It is the norm that the youth group must have fun as this will attract unchurched youth to the church."<sup>44</sup> Somehow, the church adopted a consumer evangelistic scheme presuming that if they like being around the church because it makes them feel good and enjoy a good time, then they will like Jesus. The commission of teaching the truth with the intent to make disciples is set aside for games, pizza, and trips. Stanton wrote, "Much of the criticism of youth work stems from its inclusive nature, in allowing young people to engage as much with

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<sup>44</sup> Kenneth A. Moser, "The Connection between Youth Ministry's Division of Evangelism and Discipleship, and the Lack of Retention of Youth in North American Churches." *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 40, no. 1 (2019): e1-e8.

the Christian teaching as they choose, without catering exclusively for those who do engage with this teaching.”<sup>45</sup> Subsequently, the church produced “temporary enthusiastic youth departments that failed to disciple and equip young believers in Jesus to respond to the secular world. Consequently, their inability to respond becomes the seeds of doubt that eventually lead them away from the faith.

Nevertheless, the Great Commission does not exclude youth from the command. God desires that all who trust in Jesus are taught the truth of Jesus and become disciple-making disciples. The truth of Jesus is explained through systematic theology. Adawu wrote, “to do theology with children is to journey with them in their effort to understand their faith in the God who encounters them and what this means for their lives.”<sup>46</sup> Believers are commanded by God to continue to grow in their understanding of who Jesus is, his work of redemption on their behalf, and the manner of life they are called to live as His people in the world. Youth ministry centered on biblical, systematic theology exist to empower young believers to mature in their faith in this manner. Dean wrote, “religious formation is not an accident. Teenagers with high degrees of religious devotion did not get that way on their own; their faith is the legacy of communities that have invested time, energy, and love in them, and where the religious faith of others inspires the faith of their children.”<sup>47</sup> It is not an accident that disciples become disciples. It requires the intentional and consistent action of disciples to make disciples. The teenager must be a genuine believer and in a relationship with other mature believers in the local church. The

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<sup>45</sup> Naomi Stanton, "Christian Youth Work: Teaching Faith, Filling Churches or Response to Social Need?" *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 33, no. 3 (2012): 385-403.

<sup>46</sup> Anthony Adawu, "Doing Theology with Children through Multimodal Narrativity." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 75, no. 1 (2019): e1-e11.

<sup>47</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, "Faith, Nice and Easy: The almost-Christian Formation of Teens." *The Christian Century* (1902) 127, no. 16 (2010): 22.

mature believers must purposely work to train and educate the believer in Jesus's teaching to be prepared to make other disciples through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In Paul's second letter to his disciple in the faith, he encourages him to continue the same disciple-making process with others. He wrote, "what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."<sup>48</sup> Paul's training of Timothy and his instructions to repeat the pattern is in obedience to the command of Jesus to his first disciples has been the process used by the Lord to spread Christianity throughout the world.

## **Theoretical Foundation**

### **Youth Leaving Christianity**

As recently as the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, most Americans formed worldviews through the lens of Christian beliefs. Today, however, as one generation fades, another steps to the forefront, it is unwise to assume that people encountered are educated believers in Christ. Smith stated, "We are not in Christendom anymore."<sup>49</sup> The days of Christianity being the leading faith of the nation are coming to an end. There are increasingly more viewpoints, philosophies, and religious ideas permeating the culture. Also, more people are being drawn away from Christianity and embracing other worldviews. Today, the Christian church's fundamental problem is that it has participated in the digression of faith because it failed to provide theological instruction for the youth.

In recent years, a significant amount of research has been conducted concerning the youth and their fidelity to Christianity. The research shows that Christianity is consistently losing the

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<sup>48</sup> 2 Tim 2:2, (NAS).

<sup>49</sup> James Smith, *How Not to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 60.

next generation to the pluralistic, relativistic, and non-religious world. Kinnaman wrote, “Millions of young adults leave active involvement in church as they exit their teen years. Some never return, while others live indefinitely at the margins of the faith community, attempting to define their spirituality.”<sup>50</sup> Other research shows that more than half of the youth who consistently participate in their church communities will not continue to practice or identify with Christianity as young adults. One study of one thousand young adults demonstrates the increase of youth leaving Christianity, “Of these thousand 20 to 29-year-old evangelicals who attended church regularly but no longer do so, 95% of them attended church regularly during their elementary and middle school years. 55% attended church regularly during high school. Of the thousand, only 11% were still going to church during their early college years.”<sup>51</sup>

How can this happen when so many churches have spent a large amount of money on building youth ministries? Churches dedicate significant amounts of money to hiring young and enthusiastic youth ministers. They build age-appropriate facilities that rival some public-school facilities and plan youth events, programs, and trips to create an attractive environment for youth. Significant measures are taken to ensure that young people will continue to attend church. However, attendance at youth functions is proving not to be enough to produce disciples of Jesus Christ. According to the data, many of the students who are enjoying the youth ministry are already on their way out the doors of the church. Brian Cosby, who studies the effectiveness of youth ministry, stated, “The drive to elevate experience over biblical teaching and ministry within a youth ministry context has caused youth leaders to spend through the roof on fog

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<sup>50</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 29.

<sup>51</sup> Ham, *Ready to Return*, 89.

machines, circulating lights, dueling DJs, and artistic backgrounds.”<sup>52</sup> The numbers of youth leaving the church to continue, and the leaders seem to believe that somehow having fun at church will strengthen young people’s bonds with their religious convictions. Philippa Strong shares this determination as well. She states: “In a nutshell, the crisis can be described as falling short of leading young people to become mature Christian adults.”<sup>53</sup>

### The Failure of Youth Theological Education

The number of youth and young adults leaving Christianity demonstrates that it is not enough for the youth to participate in church events. Kenda Creasy Dean, who has several publications on this topic, writes, “Three out of four American teenagers claim to be Christians, and most are affiliated with a religious organization—but only about half consider it very important, and fewer than half practice their faith as a regular part of their lives.”<sup>54</sup> These are the youth who eventually fade away from the church. They are unable to respond biblically to the temptations, arguments, and the pluralistic, relativistic culture in which they live. At best, The Church has provided a moralistic and self-centered education focused on American prosperity and self-esteem building. The message implies that “God wants you wealthy and happy.” Langford wrote most teenagers he spoke to believed, “God is a distant being with vaguely a moral code which provides comfort and security from difficult times.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Brian Cosby, “The Reformed View of Youth Ministry,” in *Youth Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Five Views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 39.

<sup>53</sup> Philippa Strong, “Effective Youth Ministry: Theology-Driven in a Cultural Context.” *In Die Skriflig/in Luce Verbi* 49. no.13 (2015), 1.

<sup>54</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers are Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 33.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Langford, “Spirit-Driven Discipleship A Pneumatology of Youth Ministry,” *Theology Today* 71, no. 3 (2014): 323-336.

American culture today is not the same as it was when Christian youth ministry started years ago. The Church's primary focus was to make attending church just as much fun as the concerts, movies, and social gatherings in the world. Moser wrote, "North American youth ministry has long been characterized by a focus on entertainment and the pursuit of fun to attract non-Christian young people. It is the norm that the youth group must have fun as this will attract unchurched youth to the church."<sup>56</sup> Today, young Christians are facing intellectual opposition to Christian beliefs, and most are unable to explain why they believe what they believe. Smith argues that "The most common answer for becoming nonreligious (32 percent) was some version of intellectual skepticism or disbelief."<sup>57</sup> Today, everything is debatable, and everyone must be able to demonstrate the validity and soundness of their beliefs. Like Smith, Kinnaman explains that "The spiritual narrative of our culture has shifted—slowly in places, quickly in others—toward secularism and away from the Bible and Christianity."<sup>58</sup> Regretfully, many Christian youths find themselves unable to respond to the skeptical world they interact with daily. For many, this creates hesitation and skepticism about beliefs they once affirmed dogmatically, and due to a lack of theological instruction, they are forced to question their convictions. Barnett wrote, "I hypothesized (predicted) that the recent generational decline of Christianity in the United States was caused by unanswered questions and unresolved doubts about Christianity."<sup>59</sup> The Christian church sent the youth into the world uncertain about what they believe and unequipped to defend their beliefs.

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<sup>56</sup> Moser, "Division of Evangelism and Discipleship," e1-e8.

<sup>57</sup> Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Life of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 248.

<sup>58</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 86.

<sup>59</sup> Larry Barnett, "The Need for Apologetics: What the Data Reveal About the Crisis of Faith Among Young Christians in America." *Philosophia Christi* 17, no.2 (2015):48

Like a Geiger counter under a mushroom cloud, the next generation is reacting to the radioactive intensity of social, technological, and religious changes. Moreover, for the most part, they are being sent into the world unprepared to withstand the fallout. Too many are incapable of reasoning clearly about their faith and unwilling to take real risks for Christ's sake.<sup>60</sup>

The data shows that most Christian youth and young adults have never been provided with a theological framework to establish their faith personally. "American teenagers may engage in substantial amounts of youth ministry and Christian education, but they do not seem to be spending much time in communities where historically orthodox Christian doctrines and practices are talked about or taught."<sup>61</sup> Therefore, they are easily susceptible to be led astray into anti-Christian doctrine, as exemplified below:

Researchers report that 33 percent of conservative Protestant youth "maybe or definitely" believe in reincarnation. The same percentage believes in astrology, while a slightly smaller percentage believes in communicating with the dead. Of all United States teens, less than a third say there is only one true religion, a little over half believe one can practice more than one faith, and two-thirds do not believe it's necessary to be part of a congregation in the exercise of their religion or spirituality.<sup>62</sup>

...the largest percentage (37 percent) stated it was that the Bible was wrong about the age of the earth!" Do you believe if you are a good person, you will go to heaven? An alarming 62 percent answered, yes!<sup>63</sup>

A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life, except when God is needed to resolve a problem. Good people go to heaven when they die.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Barnett, "The Need for Apologetics," 38.

<sup>61</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 72

<sup>62</sup> John Oberdeck, *Eutychus Youth: Applied Theology for Ministry* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 31.

<sup>63</sup> Ham, *Ready to Return*, 60.

<sup>64</sup> Oberdeck, *Eutychus Youth*, 47.



One-third of teens (29 percent) report that they believe that only one religion is true. The majority of teens (60 percent) say they believe that many religions may be true.<sup>65</sup>

If these responses were from general youth and young adults, no one would be alarmed or surprised. However, these are the responses from youth and young adults who are participants or former participants in the Christian Church. Nel Malan writes, “It is misfiring and backfiring into our faces. Faith communities are paying the price. Shallow, even superficial, connections to the Christ and his body are falling apart in front of our eyes.”<sup>66</sup> The lack of theological training has produced ignorant Christians who are unable to defend themselves biblically from anti-Christian ideas.

#### Youth Ministry Models and the Response to the Crisis

How does the church respond to the crisis? Strong wrote, “If the crisis in Youth Ministry in leading young people into mature spiritual adulthood is ignored, results will stay the same, and only a few of today's youth will be led into a lasting relationship with God that continues into their adulthood.”<sup>67</sup> In recent years, Christian leaders have attempted to respond to the crisis. Many denominations and local congregations have reassessed their purpose and methodology for educating Christian youth. Stier writes, “The modern youth ministry model has largely abandoned the focus of Jesus and delivers, instead, a series of competing programs.”<sup>68</sup> Christian leaders are admitting that the current model of theologically educating youth has failed. There is a recognition that youth ministry must remain a theological, bible-driven ministry and not merely

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<sup>65</sup> Smith, *Soul Searching*, 205.

<sup>66</sup> Malan Nel, “Disciples in Youth Ministry,” 8.

<sup>67</sup> Strong, “Effective Youth Ministry,” 2.

<sup>68</sup> Greg Stier, “The Gospel Advancing View of Youth Ministry,” in *Youth Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Five Views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 4.

social and event-driven. Young Christians require the same theological instruction that older believers receive if Christianity is going to persevere and continue to influence the current culture.

Multiple Christian leaders have attempted to provide new models to address the problem. One model often copied is the evangelism model. This perspective on youth ministry attempts to follow the model in Acts. Stier explains that the disciples "...had one purpose: to energize a generation to evangelize their world. Discipleship shook out from there."<sup>69</sup> It assumes that they should be trained to reach the lost and develop a passion for reaching the lost. The more that young people participate in sharing the Gospel and leading others into the faith, the more committed they will become to the Gospel of Christ. As Stier clearly states, "In other words, as teenagers advanced the gospel externally into their community, the gospel would also advance internally, deeper into their hearts."<sup>70</sup>

There are some benefits to The Evangelism Model. The Evangelism Model allows youth to be involved in an active ministry that goes beyond youth gatherings and fun activities. The youth participate in the challenge of sharing the gospel with others outside of the church. However, sharing the gospel does not guarantee that they will grow in their understanding of God and the Gospel. It does not guarantee that they will become more committed to Christianity because they talk about it more. Also, this method does not prepare them for the rejection of the Gospel. How are they trained to comprehend the hatred and rejection that so many have for Christianity? So many are not and begin to doubt or become skeptical. Also, this model does not

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<sup>69</sup> Greg Stier, "The Gospel Advancing View of Youth Ministry," in *Youth Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 7.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

provide a holistic theological framework to respond apologetically to those who question the origin, validity, or source of the Gospel.

Another model presented as a response to the crisis of Christian youth leaving the faith is the community or relational model. This model purposely connects every age group through collective worship, fellowship, and discipleship. Those who support this model suggest that the youth leave the church because the older mature believers abandon the youth. Clark wrote, “The lack of discipleship is due to the lack of relationships between the older/mature believers and younger believers.”<sup>71</sup> The implications of this model suggest that limiting youth ministry to age-appropriate activities is ineffective. The youth are no longer required or encouraged to spend time with mature believers so that they can be theologically trained and prepared to engage the unbelieving world biblically.

This research corroborates that there is a disconnect between mature believers and young believers. This disconnect has separated the Christian wisdom of mature believers from the growing Christian youth. The scriptures are clear that the older believers and leaders are responsible for passing the faith to the next generation. When older believers and youth worship together, there is no guarantee that there will be an automatic transfer of faith between the two demographics. Some fellowships do not have a designated youth ministry, and they are facing the same crisis. In order for the older generation to instill a genuine dedication to faith in younger churchgoers, deliberate theological instruction is necessary.

This research intends to demonstrate that the crisis among Christian youth is a theological problem, not a methodological one. As Kinnaman clearly explains, “The dropout problem is, at

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<sup>71</sup> Clark, *Youth Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 82.

its core, a faith-development problem; to use religious language, it's a disciple-making problem. The church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture."<sup>72</sup> Disciples mature as they grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. The church must prepare Christian youth by teaching systematic theology to develop a holistic theological framework and worldview. Friedrich Schweitzer argues that "adolescents can also profit greatly from becoming clear about their own theology and from becoming able to relate to it reflectively and critically."<sup>73</sup> A robust theological framework will provide the knowledge that young people need to respond apologetically to skeptics. Systematic theology is not an academic pursuit. It seeks to comprehend the God who has revealed Himself in the Scriptures. Andrew Root applies this concept to youth ministry: "Youth ministry is theological. But it isn't theological because it uses footnotes and big words; youth ministry is theological because its very purpose is to participate in the action of God."<sup>74</sup> The intent of every ministry should be theological, culminating in believers who pursue and participate with God. Therefore, the youth ministry should intentionally develop mature young believers in Jesus through in-depth theological instruction to participate with God's activity in the world.

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<sup>72</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 25.

<sup>73</sup> Friedrich Schweitzer, "Adolescents as Theologians: A New Approach in Christian Education and Youth Ministry." *Religious Education* (2014), no.2, 109.

<sup>74</sup> Andrew Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 71.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Intervention Design

The intervention plan is designed to study and determine the impact of systematic theological instruction for teenagers. The data shows that much Christian youth leave the church because of an inability to answer theological critiques of Christian beliefs, and they have unanswered questions.<sup>75</sup> There is a lack of theological instruction provided for Christian youth in many local churches. Data shows that because of a lack of theological instruction, the Christian church is losing a significant amount of Christian youth and young adults. Ken Ham shares his experience in *Ready to Return*: “As I travel around the world teaching how to defend biblical principles and history, I find that whether my audience is secular or Christian, the questions are the same.”<sup>76</sup> There is a lack of theological instruction provided for Christian youth in the local church. One of the leading causes youth give for leaving Christianity is skepticism and unanswered questions about Christianity. This study intends to show that front-loading Christian youth with systematic theology will provide them with a theological framework to understand their faith in Christ and the validity of the Bible, which is the source of truth for Christianity and will prepare them to respond apologetically to cultural skepticism of the faith.

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<sup>75</sup> Smith, *Soul Searching*, 248.

<sup>76</sup> Ham, *Ready to Return*, 44.

## Selecting and Securing the Participants

There are twenty-one teenagers between the ages of thirteen and eighteen at Truth Community Church. However, only ten of these teenagers were chosen as potential participants for this study. The primary reason they were asked to participate is that each participant affirms personal faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Scriptures teach that only those who have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit can comprehend the truth of God. “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). Systematic theology is not the Gospel by which a sinner may receive salvation by faith. It is a reasonable explanation and categorizing of the essential beliefs of the Christian faith. There is a distinction between teaching systematic theology with the intent to define, explain, and support the believer’s confidence in the Gospel and proclaiming the gospel for evangelism. Therefore, the only teenagers asked to participate in this study are those who profess to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by faith in death and resurrection on their behalf.

The participating teenagers are members of Christian homes. Six of these teens are home-schooled, and four of them attend local public schools. The home-schooled participants spend the majority of their time in Christian-influenced communities for education and extra-curricular activities. The only time they are engaged with public-school participants is at Truth Community Church. The public-school participants spend most of their time in non-Christian communities, such as school and extra-curricular activities. They are engaged with the Christian community two days a week for an average of 6 hours.

All these teens own cellular phones and admit to spending time on social media, engaging in many pluralistic religious ideas. The teenagers have asked apologetic questions in

the past concerning the validity of the Bible and the exclusivity of Christianity as the only true faith. The public-school participants appear to have more apologetic questions than home-school participants. The public-school participants' questions are not a result of having theological knowledge than the home-schooled students; instead, they are challenged more about the Christian faith by their exposure to pluralistic and secular worldviews. Although the public-school participants have more concerns and questions, many of the theological and apologetic challenges that public-school participants consider are similar to the questions that the home-school participants have shared. The home-school participants affirm that many of the same theological and apologetic questions shared by the public-school students are the same among the Christian-influenced communities where they spend most of their time.

The teenagers in Truth Community Church have never received systematic theological instruction. The church leadership has provided brief answers to their questions in informal, small group gatherings, such as fellowship meals. Over time, it became clear that the majority of teenage believers in Truth Community Church have significant theological gaps in their understanding of Christian theology. Their misunderstanding, limited knowledge, and inability to explain their Christian faith has been revealed through the apologetic questions they are unable to answer when they are challenged about their faith. Therefore, they are susceptible to being led astray, just as other Christian youths are, as demonstrated in the pervasive data. The leaders at Truth Community Church intend to use this study as a learning experience and a guide to developing a theological discipleship curriculum for teenage believers in the local church.

On a Sunday afternoon following morning worship service, the parents and potential participants were asked to attend a meeting concerning a youth-and-theology study to be conducted at Truth Community Church. The parents were provided an overview of the study in

writing, explaining the intent and need for the study in the local fellowship. They were given a timeline for implementing the intervention and the tentative dates for each of the eight sections of instruction. For their records, they were provided with a lesson sample from the instructional resources to be used in the study. They were encouraged to ask questions about the study, the resources, the time commitments, and the parameters to protect their teenagers' confidentiality. At the close of the meeting, if the parent and the teenage participant agreed to the commitment terms, they signed an agreement form. The original forms were kept by the researcher, and a copy was provided for the parents.

### The Materials Used

The elders of Truth Community Church have provided a meeting room to be used for the study. Inside the room are a computer, a projector, and a whiteboard. Two tables will be added to the room so that the participants can complete their study guides. The computer has teaching videos saved to its hard drive. The projector is connected to the computer and will be used to project the video on the white wall in the room. The researcher is responsible for operating the computer and video devices during the study. A third table will be used each week to keep snacks and beverages for the participants.

The theology instructional material used is *Foundations: An Overview of Systematic Theology*, by R.C. Sproul. This resource is 60 videos of systematic theology, taught in 25-minute sessions. This resource was selected because of its alignment with the doctrinal positions of Truth Community Church. The church doctrinal positions are founded on Reform Theology. Dr. Sproul has been one of the leading and renowned teachers of Reform Theology. This resource provides a comprehensive systematic theology curriculum, including videos and study guides from a Reform theological perspective, to be used by the participants throughout the study. The



videos selected for the study are aligned with theological content chosen by the researcher and Elders of Truth Community Church, which will provide the participants with the theological understanding and knowledge they need to deepen and solidify their faith. Each participant will complete the study-guide session assigned to each video.

Table 1. Videos Selected for Each Section

	<b>Content Focus</b>	<b>Videos</b>
<b>Week 1</b>	Introduction to Systematic Theology	What is Theology?
<b>Week 2</b>	Bibliology	1. Inspiration of Scripture 2. Canonicity
<b>Week 3</b>	Theology Proper	1. One In Essence 2. Incommunicable Attributes 3. Communicable Attributes
<b>Week 4</b>	Christology	1. Christ in the Creeds 2. The Office of Christ 3. Why did Christ Die?
<b>Week 5</b>	Soteriology	1. Justification By Faith 2. Saving Faith
<b>Week 6</b>	Ecclesiology	1. Sanctification 2. The Church: One and Holy
<b>Week 7</b>	Eschatology	1. The Return of Christ 2. The Resurrection 3. The Final Judgment

### Intervention Process

The plan includes a theology pre-assessment and post-assessment on Bibliology, Theology Proper, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology. Also, an apologetic pre-assessment and post-assessment address the common critiques in opposition to Christianity. Additionally, the study includes a pre-survey and post-survey concerning the amount of time spent participating in spiritual disciplines such as prayer, bible reading, church attendance, and evangelism.

Meetings were scheduled with ten Christian teenagers (thirteen-to-eighteen years old) for eight weeks at Truth Community Church. The initial session will be from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm. The sessions will be held in the sanctuary room at Truth Community Church. The church has provided a computer and projector for the sessions. The researcher will be the sole operator of electronic devices. The participants will sit in a semi-circle. The computer and projector will be on a table in front of the participants.

In Week 1, the session will last 120 minutes. The participants will spend time in corporate prayer (5 Minutes). Then, they will write a brief testimony of their conversion to Christianity (15 minutes) on lined paper provided for them. The participants will take a twenty-question theological assessment in multiple-choice format covering: Bibliology, Theology Proper, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20 minutes). The participants will take a twenty-question Apologetic assessment of common critiques of the Christian faith related to the theological categories (20 Minutes). Then, the participants will complete a ten-question survey concerning their priorities and time involved in the spiritual disciplines, Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, and evangelism (10 minutes). Next, they will watch a video from R. C. Sproul's Foundations: "What is Theology?" (25 minutes). They will complete the assigned portion in the study guide provided for each participant as they watch the video. After the video is complete, they will have a guided group discussion about their responses (15 minutes). A summary of the major points will follow (10 minutes). The session will end with a prayer and dismissal. The participants will not be allowed to take the study guide with them so that they can refer to them for reflection during the study intervention. However, they will be allowed to take the summary points with them to review through the week.

In week 2, the session will last 90 minutes. The participants will spend time in corporate prayer (5 Minutes). They will watch a portion of R. C. Sproul's Foundations: "Inspiration of Scripture" (15 minutes). Next, they will watch a video of R. C. Sproul's "Foundations: "Canonicity" (25 minutes). They will complete the assigned portion in the study guide provided for each participant as they watch the video. After the video is complete, they will have a guided group discussion about their responses (25 minutes). A summary of the major points followed (15 minutes). They will pray and dismiss (5 minutes). The participants will not be allowed to take the study guide with them. However, they will be allowed to take the summary points with them to review through the week.

In week 3, the session will last 120 minutes. The participants will spend time in corporate prayer (5 Minutes). They will watch a portion of R. C. Sproul's s Foundations: "One in Essence" (15 minutes). Next, they will watch a video of R. C. Sproul's s Foundations: "Communicable Attributes" (20 minutes). Then they will watch a video of R. C. Sproul's s Foundations: "Incommunicable Attributes" (20 minutes). They will complete the assigned portion in the study guide provided for each participant as they watch the video and after the video is complete. Then, they will have a guided group discussion about their responses (30 minutes). After that, a summary of the major points was presented (25 minutes). They will pray and dismiss (5 minutes). The participants will not be allowed to take the study guide with them. However, they will be allowed to take the summary points with them to review through the week.

In week 4, the session will last 120 minutes. The participants will spend time in corporate prayer (5 Minutes). They will watch a portion of R. C. Sproul's s Foundations: "Christ in the Creeds" (20 minutes). Next, they will watch a video of R. C. Sproul's s Foundations: "The Offices of Christ" (20 minutes). Then they will watch a video of R. C. Sproul's s Foundations:

“Why Did Christ Die?” (15 minutes). The participants will complete the assigned portion of the study guide provided as they watch the video, and after the video is complete. Then, they will have a guided group discussion about their responses (30 minutes). After that, a summary of the major points was presented (25 minutes). They will pray and dismiss (5 minutes). The participants will not be allowed to take the study guide with them. However, they will be allowed to take the summary points with them to review through the week.

In week 5, the session will last 90 minutes. The participants will spend time in corporate prayer (5 Minutes). They will watch a portion of R. C. Sproul’s s Foundations: “Justification By Faith Alone” (20 minutes). Next, they will watch a video of R. C. Sproul’s “Foundations – Saving Faith” (20 minutes). They will complete the assigned portion of the study guide provided as they watch the video. Then, they will have a guided group discussion about their responses (20 minutes). After that, a summary of the major points was presented (25 minutes). They will pray and dismiss (5 minutes). The participants will not be allowed to take the study guide with them. However, they will be allowed to take the summary points with them to review through the week.

In week 6, the session will last 90 minutes. The participants will spend time in corporate prayer (5 Minutes). They will watch a portion of R. C. Sproul’s s Foundations: “Sanctification” (25 minutes). Next, they will watch a video of R. C. Sproul’s s Foundations: “The Church: One and Holy” (25 minutes). They will complete the assigned portion of the study guide provided as they watch the video. Then, they will have a guided group discussion about their responses (20 minutes). After that, a summary of the major points was presented. (20 minutes). They will pray and dismiss (5 minutes). The participants will not be allowed to take the study guide with them.

However, they will be allowed to take the summary points with them to review through the week.

In week 7, the session will last 120 minutes. The participants will spend time in corporate prayer (5 Minutes). They will watch a portion of R. C. Sproul's Foundations: "The Return of Christ" (15 minutes). Next, they will watch a video of R. C. Sproul's Foundations: "The Resurrection" (15 minutes). Then, they will watch a video of R. C. Sproul's Foundations: "The Final Judgment" (20 minutes). Then, they will watch a video of R. C. Sproul's Foundations: "The Believer's Final Rest Final" (20 minutes). They will complete the assigned portion of the study guide provided as they watch the video. Then, they will have a guided group discussion about their responses (20 minutes). After that, a summary of the major points was presented (20 minutes). They will pray and dismiss (5 minutes). The participants will not be allowed to take the study guide with them. However, they will be allowed to take the summary points with them to review through the week.

In Week 8, the session will last 120 minutes. The participants will spend time in corporate prayer (5 Minutes). A PowerPoint presentation is used to summarize each week's lessons. The participants will take a twenty-question theological post-assessment in multiple-choice format covering: Bibliology, Theology Proper, Christology (person and work), Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology (20 minutes). The participants will take a twenty-question apologetic post-assessment of common critiques of the Christian faith related to the theological categories (20 Minutes). Then, the participants will complete a ten-question survey concerning their priorities and time involved in the Spiritual disciplines: Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, and evangelism (10 minutes). They will then be given the dates when the data regarding their progress will be ready. They will pray, share a meal, and dismiss. The

participants will not be allowed to take the study guide until their results and cumulative data are returned.

### Gathering the Data

Two multiple-choice assessments and a spiritual survey will be used to measure the effect of systematic theology instruction on the teenagers. The first assessment is designed to measure the participant's depth of knowledge of fundamental Christian theology. This assessment covers Bibliology, Theology Proper, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology. The second assessment is designed to measure the participant's ability to apply their theological knowledge to apologetic questions. These questions will assess the participant's application of systematic theology to the everyday items used to challenge Christian theology. The survey is designed to gather information about the participant's time allotment to Christian disciplines such as prayer, bible reading, church attendance, and evangelism.

After completing the outlined program of systematic theological instruction, the participants will be given the same assessment as a means to determine the effectiveness of the plan of instruction on their theological knowledge, their ability to respond apologetically, and their devotion to practice Christian disciplines. This data will be analyzed and given to the parents and participants in confidential meetings two weeks later. Also, this data will be used as the primary evidence in support of the arguments in this study which is teaching systematic theology to Christian teenagers may increase their comprehension of biblical knowledge, support their ability to respond apologetically to common critiques of Christianity, and increase their time in personal devotion, prayer, private Bible reading, and prayer. The growth in each of these areas of faith will further establish them in the faith, decreasing the possibility that they will leave the Christian faith in belief and practice as teens and young adults.

## Implementation of the Intervention

In week 1 of the intervention, ten participants gathered in a meeting room after worship at Truth Community Church. The participants were familiar with one another due to their families being members of Truth Community Church for at least five years. In the meeting room, the participants talked leisurely with one another. At the start of the meeting, they were told that their participation in the study was much appreciated, and they were duly reminded that participation in the study was not mandatory. It was reiterated that they could discontinue participating at any time without reason. After the opening prayer with the participants, they received a copy of the same document given to their parents, along with a brief explanation of the research and the time requirements to complete the study. The participants were told that they were free to use the restroom and get snacks from the table at any time during the meeting. There was a brief celebration acknowledging the snacks.

The plan for that day began with each participant writing a summary of their conversion to Christianity or a description of their faith in Jesus Christ. After the participants handed in their testimonies or summaries, an identification tag was assigned to each participant, such as “Participant 1.” This was attached to the top of each testimony document, and a computer program was created to track the identification marker of each participant and their assigned tags. The researcher is the only person aware of the tag assignments.

Next, during the first meeting, the participants were asked to complete two assessments. The first assessment was a theology quiz, and the second assessment was an apologetic quiz. The participants were instructed to complete the theology quiz to the best of their ability. After the first quiz was completed and submitted, they then picked up the apologetic quiz from the table set up for the collection and distribution of the quizzes. The participants were asked to spread out

across the room so that there was substantial space between them. Each participant was provided with a pencil and a theology quiz. They were reminded to complete the quiz independently. The researcher sat in front of the room at the collection table to monitor the process and wait for all the participants to finish.

After every participant completed both assessments, they gathered in front of a screen in a semi-circle. They were informed that they would be watching a video by R. C. Sproul from his Foundations series on systematic theology. The first video, “What is Theology,” would provide a definition of theology and the purpose of systematic theology. The participants were given the handout from the Foundations study guide aligned with the video lesson for this section. They were encouraged to answer the guiding questions and to write down any questions that they may have as they watch the video.

After the video, the participants engaged in conversations around their answers to the study guide. Most of the participants answered the questions almost precisely as the answers were stated in the video. It appeared that they were attempting to get the “right” answer instead of using the questions as a launchpad to consider the video's implications. However, when they began to discuss the questions they developed as they watched the video, the dialogue became more complex.

The participants learned that the study of theology is the pursuit to know, understand, and communicate an understanding of God in some manner. Therefore, every human is a theologian in some respect. Also, it was affirmed that there is good or right theology and bad or wrong theology. Consequently, it is a Christian responsibility to know what theological ideas are correct and which are false so that they are not led astray by false beliefs. Participant #4 shared details of a conversation that occurred at school with another student who was of a different faith.



Participant #4 explained that he believed for an entire year that one classmate was a Christian because he always spoke positively about God. It was not until the participant asked the classmate about his church that he realized his classmate's understanding of God was completely different. Participant #4's experience provoked more discussion about comparative theologies and beliefs about God that these teenagers are exposed to through Christian and non-Christian associates in each of their daily lives. A common theme among the participants' experiences is that they all falsely assume that when most of their peers discuss God, they speak from a Christian theological perspective. The section ended with a brief overview of the video's content and a reminder of the next scheduled session, and a prayer.

In week 2 of the intervention, the 10 participants gathered in the meeting room at Truth Community Church. The participants were asked to go to the back table to retrieve snacks, a study guide handout, and a pencil. After all the participants returned to their seats, the session began with a short prayer and a welcome back talk where the agenda for the section was explained to the participant. This time they watched a portion of R. C. Sproul's s Foundations – Inspiration of Scripture. Next, they watched the second video of R. C. Sproul's s Foundations – Canonicity. They will complete the assigned portion in the study guide provided for each participant as they watch the video. After the video is complete, they will have a guided group discussion about their responses, followed by a summary of the major points. They will pray and be dismissed after all that.

However, before the video started, participant #6 asked, "what does that video have to do with the Bible?" This sparked off participant #1, who quickly responded that she heard the word "canon" used multiple times before as a reference to the Bible but was not entirely sure exactly why that term was used for the Bible. The researcher took the opportunity to reassure the

participants that after the videos, they would be well informed about the terms, definitions, and the connection to the Bible. The role of a mentor to provide context for the sessions cannot be understated.

The participants watched the video on "Inspiration and Authority of Scripture" and completed their study guide simultaneously. After the video, participants were asked to hold all questions until after the next video lesson. The participants were asked to tend to personal needs and get some more snacks. Once the participants returned to their seats, the next video on "Canonicity" was started. The participants watched the video on "Canonicity" and completed their study guide at the same time.

After the video, participants were told to discuss their responses to the video and ideas about the lesson. The participants appeared to be intrigued by Canonicity. Participant #3 acknowledged that "inspiration" of the Bible would not be easy to explain to someone who is not Christian, but "canonicity" made sense. The other participants agreed with this sentiment. All the participants affirmed that the Bible is from God. They all referenced the Bible in some manner, as in Paul's statement, "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim 3:16). Participant #7 asked the group to explain how can "inspiration" be proven. Participant #1 responded that inspiration is hard to prove because every religion believes that its teaching is from God. All the participants suggested that "inspiration" cannot be proven but must be accepted by faith.

The researcher facilitated the discussion by suggesting that inspiration can be affirmed by analyzing multiple data points related to the origin and content of the Bible. Furthermore, most Bibles include legitimate geographical maps as evidence that the events occur in real locations on the earth. Multiple archeological discoveries that attest to the content of the Bible were also provided as support. In addition, ten predictions that were fulfilled historically were also

discussed. Lastly, there is the added weight of the statistical probability of the Bible remaining consistent historically, thematically, and leading to a singular ultimate aim. The section ended with a brief overview of the video's content and a reminder of the next schedule section. As is the practice, the meeting ended with a prayer.

In week 3 of the intervention, the 10 participants gathered in the meeting room at Truth Community Church. The participants were asked to go to the back table to retrieve snacks, a study guide handout, and a pencil. After all the participants returned to their seats, the meeting began with a prayer and a welcome back to the study section. The participants were informed that they would watch a portion of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – One in Essence, followed by another video of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – Communicable Attributes. The third video of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – Incommunicable Attributes will be the last one for that session. They will complete the assigned portion in the study guide provided for each participant as they watch the videos. Then, they will have a guided group discussion about their responses, followed by a facilitated summary of the major points. They will end with prayer and then be dismissed.

After the participants watched the first video, "One in Essence," participant #2 remarked that the Trinity was difficult to understand and did not think it was an essential doctrine to understand since everything is about Jesus. In response, it was affirming that there are some Christians who do not consider that doctrine as essential, but they were encouraged to watch the next videos to see the implications developed collectively from all of the content is significant for Christianity.

After the videos, the participants were informed that they could begin the group discussion. Participant #2 continued to express the struggle with comprehending the trinitarian description of God. The participant shared an experience a few months earlier of listening to her

dad talk to a Jehovah's Witness representative who came to their door one morning. She heard her dad disagree with the Jehovah's Witness concerning Jesus Christ's deity. In her opinion, it sounded as though they were debating an idea that both believed to be correct but described differently. After her dad finished the conversation and closed the door, he told her that Jehovah's Witnesses were not Christians because they believed that Jesus was not God. The participant shared that she knows that she is saved by faith in Jesus Christ. If Jehovah's Witnesses' followers believed the same, then they are saved too. Participant #4 agreed with the other participants' father. He shared that he was taught that the Bible presents Jesus as equal to God. He grabbed his Bible and read John 1:1. He acknowledged his struggle to understand the Trinity. Nevertheless, if Jesus is God, then he is convinced the Trinity is real. Four of the participants agreed with Participant #2, and the remaining agreed with Participant #4. In any case, all the participants affirmed that the Trinity is not easy to understand or explain.

The participants were asked to copy the same six bible verses written on the whiteboard. The first three verses were John 6:27, Hebrews 1:8, and Acts 5:3,4. As the texts were read, it was pointed out that the Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit were referenced as God. The second set of verses were 1 Corinthians 8:4, Matthew 28:19, and 2 Corinthians 13:14. These scriptures teach that the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit have equal authority, distinct personalities, and are one God. It was acknowledged that it was a challenge to fully comprehend the scriptures because there is nothing in the created order which parallels or compares to its premise. The Biblical test affirms the basis for the Christian Trinitarian doctrine. The section ended with a brief overview of the videos' content teaching the Communicable and Incommunicable attributes, a reminder of the next schedule section, and a prayer.

In week 4 of the intervention, the 10 participants gathered in the meeting room at Truth Community Church. The participants were asked to go to the back table to retrieve snacks, a study guide handout, and a pencil. After all the participants returned to their seats, a prayer and a welcome back to the study began the meeting. The participants were informed that they would watch portions of teaching from three different videos. The first video planned was a portion of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – Christ in the Creeds. Next, they would watch a video of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – The Offices of Christ. Then they would watch a video of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – Why did Christ Die? They were reminded to complete the assigned portion in the study guide provided for each participant as they watch the video. After which, they would have a guided group discussion about their responses, a summary of the major points, and a closing in prayer. The video was then started.

After the first video, Participant #8 requested an explanation of what the video was attempting to teach. The other participants agreed that many of the terms and statements made by Dr. Sproul were confusing. The participants were directed to a section on their study guide, which defined the church's historic doctrine about the divine and human nature of Jesus. The researcher provided a brief explanation of the section and confirmed that the participants understood the teaching before continuing on with the second video of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – The Offices of Christ. They completed their study guides at the same time and appeared to be more familiar with the content of this video. They were more attentive and added more notes to their students' guide. After this video, the participants were allowed a break to get snacks and take care of their personal needs. During the brief break, a few of the participants said that the video about the Offices of Jesus was easier to understand. They were more familiar with the terms prophet, priest, and king and were familiar with the idea that Jesus fulfilled in some

manner during his life and sacrificed these offices. After the break, they watched the third video of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – Why did Christ Die? and completed their study guides.

After the videos, the participants were given 15 minutes to discuss their ideas about the nature and work of Jesus. The participants in a circle and begin to discuss their answers and notes. The majority of the conversation centered around the death and resurrection of Jesus; the participants demonstrated a depth of knowledge of the redemptive work of Jesus. However, the participants did not mention the information from the first video explaining the nature of Jesus.

After the participants completed their conversation, the ideas and beliefs that were shared in their conversation were affirmed. They were asked what it is about Jesus that made his death and resurrection valuable or important? The participants were quiet and looked at one another. The participants were asked to refer to the study guide from the first video, which explained the nature of Jesus. A review of the study's content and explanation that the nature of Jesus is foundational to the redemptive work of Jesus firmed up that portion of the study. The section ended with a brief overview of the other videos' content, a reminder of the next schedule section, and a prayer.

In week 5 of the intervention, the 10 participants gathered in the meeting room at Truth Community Church. The participants were asked to go to the back table to retrieve snacks, a study guide handout, and a pencil. After all the participants returned to their seats, a prayer, and a welcome back to the study section, the participants were informed that the session would last 90 minutes. They will watch a portion of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – Justification By Faith Alone. Next, they will watch a video of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – Saving Faith. They will complete the assigned portion in the study guide provided for each participant as they watch the video.

Then, they will have a guided group discussion about their responses and a summary of the major points before they pray and dismiss. After the agenda, the video was started.

The participants watched the first video explaining justification and answered the questions on the study guide. After the first video ended, Participant #6 and Participant #8 were comparing their responses to the study guides. They realized that neither of them answered the question asking to explain justification from a Christian perspective. They asked Participant #1 for help, who told them to write the term "salvation." The researcher intervened and told the participants that justification is a legal term and asked them to think about how the idea of justification could be used in a courtroom. When the participants settled down, the second video was started.

After the video ended, the participants were told to discuss their notes and ideas from the videos. The participants discussed their ideas about Faith in Jesus to be saved for the entire discussion time. After the participants completed their conversation, the researcher moved to the front of the room and wrote "guilty" and "not guilty" on the board and asked the participants to connect the terms on the board with their notes on justification and saving Faith. An explanation was given for the relationship between humanity's guilt before God, God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ, the nature of saving Faith explained in the video, and the benefit of justification or being declared "not guilty" before God. The section ended with a brief overview of the videos' content, a reminder of the next schedule section, and a prayer.

In week 6 of the intervention, the 10 participants gathered in the meeting room at Truth Community Church. The participants were asked to go to the back table to retrieve snacks, a study guide handout, and a pencil. After all the participants returned to their seats, a prayer and a welcome back message started the meeting. The participants were informed that the session

would last 90 minutes. They will watch a portion of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – Sanctification. and a video of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – The Church: One and Holy. They will complete the assigned portion in the study guide provided for each participant as they watch the video after the video is complete. Then, they will have a guided group discussion about their responses. After a summary of the major points, they will pray and dismiss. After the agenda was discussed, the video was started.

The participants watched the first video covering sanctification and completed the study guides. After the video, Participant #1 stated that "carnal Christian" was a phrase familiar to her. A "carnal Christian" was explained to the participants as people who profess to be Christian but practice a fundamentally contrasting lifestyle in contrast to Christian morality and ethics. He asked them to think of someone they know who may attend church or profess to believe in "Jesus," however, they do not demonstrate any devotion, concern, or desire to please Christ. Participant #8 and Participant #4 both affirmed that they knew a few people that fit that description. They were asked to withhold asking any other questions and wait for discussion time to end the session on time. Then, the next video was started.

The participants watched the video on "The Church" and completed their study guides. After the video ended, the participants were told to discuss their notes and idea from the videos. The participants begin to share their responses to the first video. The participants were all fully convinced that "perfectionism" was not possible. They all directly affirmed the idea that being a believer in Jesus does not lead to sinlessness. Also, the participants seem to be familiar with "legalism." Some of them described their parents as legalists because of all the rules and expectations governing the household where they live. During the conversation concerning "the church," the participants wrestled with the idea that the church is "one" people of God. The



fundamental cause of their struggles relates to all the different "Christian" churches that exist in every community. Collectively, the participants were convinced that the church was divided. Therefore, they struggled to comprehend the idea of the "oneness" of the Christian church. A summary of the sanctification process and the aim of sanctification was provided. The nature of the church and the role of the church within the sanctification process was also explained. The section ended with a reminder of the next schedule section and a prayer.

In week 7 of the intervention, the 10 participants gathered in the meeting room at Truth Community Church. The participants were asked to go to the back table to retrieve snacks, a study guide handout, and a pencil. After all the participants returned to their seats, a prayer and a welcome back message started the meeting. The participants were informed that the session would last 120 minutes. They will watch a portion of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – The Return of Christ. Next, they will watch a video of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – The Resurrection. Then, they will watch a video of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – The Final Judgment. Then, they will watch a video of R. C. Sproul's Foundations – The Believer's Final Rest Final. They will complete the assigned portion in the study guide provided for each participant as they watch the video after the video is complete. Then, they will have a guided group discussion about their responses, followed by a summary of the major points, prayer, and dismissal. Since there were no questions arising from the agenda, the first video was started.

The participants watched the first video and completed their study guides. The participants struggled to answer one question based on how different scholars comprehend a particular passage of scripture. They were told that many smart Christians who had studied the text had produced different interpretations of the end times. Nevertheless, all Bible-believing

Christians affirm that Jesus is going to bodily return to the earth one day. All the participants agreed to that premise. Then the next video teaching about the resurrection was started.

After the video about the resurrection, the participants were given time to take a break for snacks as the next video was prepared. During the brief break, Participants #4 and #10 asked a question about the state of believers and unbelievers after death and before the resurrection. They noticed that the video on resurrection did not make any reference to the topic. Two passages of scripture were read with them, and they were told that the matter could be discussed more after the next video. When all the participants back to their chairs, the next video was started. The participants watched the video about the final judgment of God and completed their study guides. After the video, multiple participants raised their hands with questions. They were asked to write down their questions and bring them up at the group discussion and summarization time. After the participants submitted their study guides and questions for the Final Judgement video, the last video about the final rest for the believer was started. The researcher took the opportunity to prepare responses to the questions raised.

After the video ended, the feedback to the questions about the judgment of God was presented. The central ideas for all the questions raised were about the nature of the judgment for believers in Jesus, and the rewards believers receive in heaven. After a brief answer to these questions using two bible passages, the participants were told to begin their discussion time. The participant's discussion ranged from the return of Christ to the expectation of seeing Jesus. In response to the study and the questions raised earlier, a chronological summary of the return of Christ, the resurrection, the final judgment, and the eternal state, as well as a summary of the theology of Christ's return, and the consummation that will fuel hope for the future of the created

order because of Jesus Christ was presented to the group. The section ended with a reminder of the next schedule section and a prayer.

In week 8 of the intervention, the 10 participants gathered in the meeting room at Truth Community Church. The participants were asked to go to the back table to retrieve snacks and a pencil. After all the participants returned to their seats, a prayer and the welcome back greetings opened the last week's study. The participants were given their study guides accumulated through the study and were told that the session would last 120 minutes. There are no videos to watch on the agenda, but they will be guided through a review of each theological topic studied during the intervention, and each participant will take a theology quiz and an apologetic quiz. The participants would take a 20 question Theological Post-assessment in a multiple-choice format covering Bibliology, Theology Proper, Christology (person and work), Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology. The participants will also take a 20 question Apologetic Post-assessment of common critiques of the Christian faith related to the theological categories. Then, the participants will complete a ten-question survey concerning their priorities and time involved in the Spiritual disciplines, Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, and evangelism. Finally, they will pray, eat a meal together, and be dismissed. No questions were noted about the last meeting.

The researcher proceeded to provide a review of theology terms, definitions, and scripture to explain each theological topic covered each week. Each topic was connected to the other to show the interrelationship between the topics so that the participants could comprehend the larger single narrative of Christianity. After the review, the participants were asked to complete the two assessments. The first assessment was a theology quiz, and the second assessment was an apologetic quiz. The participants were instructed to complete the theology

quiz to the best of their ability, submit it before picking up the apologetic quiz from the table that was set up. The participants were asked to spread out across the room so that there was substantial space between them. Each participant was handed a pencil and a quiz. They were asked to complete the quiz independently. Once each participant completed the assessments, they were given a spiritual discipline survey to complete. After each participant submitted a completed survey, they were thanked for their dedication to completing the study. A prayer was offered up, and they were encouraged to enjoy the special meal prepared for them in appreciation of their effort.

## CHAPTER 4: EXPLANATION OF THE RESULTS

This study intends to analyze and correct the alarming trend that most of the youth in Truth Community Church today will not remain faithful participants of the Christian faith. According to David Kinnaman of the Barna Research Group, “In 2011, the dropout rate of young adults with Christian backgrounds was 59%. In less than a decade, the proportion of eighteen-to twenty-nine-year-old dropouts has increased to 64%.”<sup>77</sup> Research demonstrates that some “dropouts” will return in mid-adulthood. However, most of the “dropouts” will not return as practicing Christians, even if they continue to identify as Christians.

The research suggests that the primary reason that many young professing Christians abandon their Christian faith is a lack of understanding of Christian truth claims. Wright said, “In explaining why they left Christianity, the narrative writers frequently wrote of intellectual and theological concerns. A full two-thirds (32 of 50, 64%) of the writers raised these concerns.”<sup>78</sup> Therefore, this study intends to discover the effects of teaching systematic theology to Christian youth (13-18) at Truth Community Church. The research seeks to demonstrate that teaching systematic theology to Christian teenagers not only increases their comprehension of biblical knowledge; it will support their ability to respond apologetically to common critiques of Christianity and grow their time in personal devotion, prayer, and private Bible reading. The

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<sup>77</sup> David Kinnaman et al., *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019),19.

<sup>78</sup> Bradley Wright et al., "Explaining Deconversion from Christianity: Evidence from On-Line Narratives," *Journal of Religion and Society* 13, (2011), accessed June 10, 2019, [http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p242813\\_index.html](http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p242813_index.html).

researcher and the elders of Truth Community Church believe that growth in each of these areas of faith will decrease the possibility that they will leave the Christian faith in belief and practice as teens and young adults.

The intervention design was developed to ensure fidelity to Christian theology, biblical apologetics, and the personal spiritual conviction of the participants. Each participant completed a personal testimony of their belief in Jesus, a survey of their participation in Christian disciplines, pre-, and post-instruction theology, and apologetic assessments, and six consecutive weeks of systematic theology instructions. The systematic theology instruction covered topics in this order:

1. Bibliology – a study of the origin and authority of the Christian Bible.
2. Theology Proper – a study of the nature and character of God.
3. Christology – a study of the humanity, deity, and redemptive activity of Jesus Christ.
4. Soteriology – a study of the need, accomplishment, and application of the work of Christ for men.
5. Ecclesiology – a study of the origin, nature, and purpose of the church.
6. Eschatology – a study of the eternal plan of God and the completion of the plan.

These systematic theological topics will be the categories to explain the results from the intervention implementation. The data from the assessment will compare the participant's systematic theology understanding for each category with their responses to the apologetic questions used in opposition to orthodox Christian theology before the systematic theology intervention. The next set of data will compare the participant's systematic theology responses on the theology pre-assessment with their responses to the Theology assessment after the intervention. This comparison will allow the growth in the participant's understanding of

systematic theology to be measured. Finally, the participant's responses from the systematic theology assessment after the intervention will be compared to their responses to the apologetic questions post after the intervention. This will allow the impact the intervention had on their ability to respond accurately to apologetic challenges of the Christian faith to be measured. The results for each category will be compared using the methodology in Figure 1.

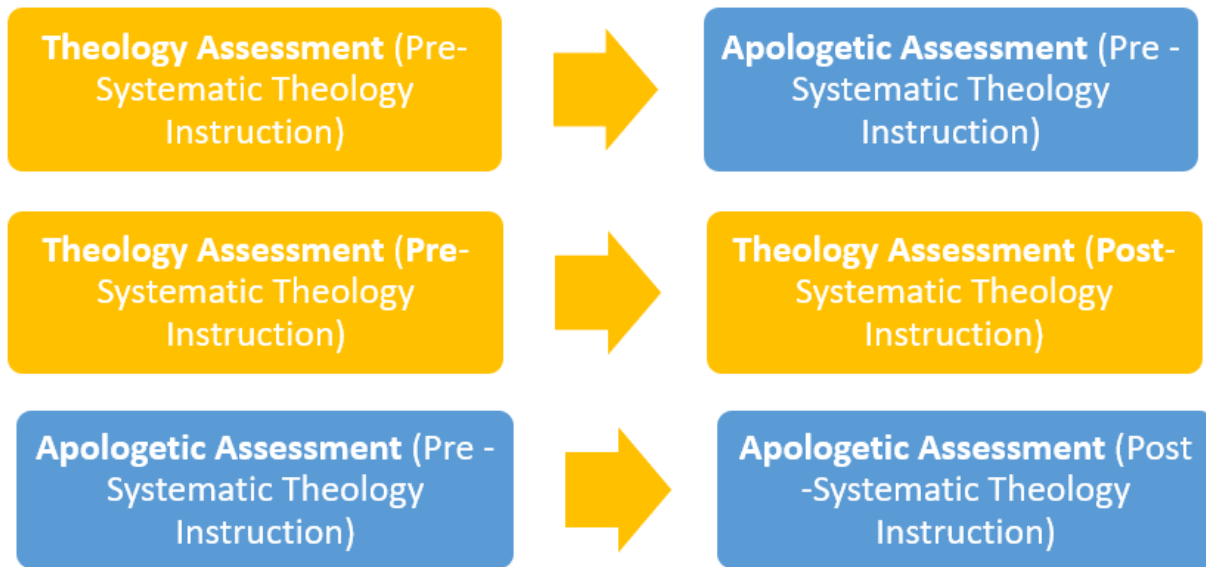


Figure 1. Theological Pre and Post Intervention Assessments

The concluding set of results for this intervention should explain the impact of systematic theology on the participants' engagement in Christian disciplines. The participants submitted a survey before the intervention and after the intervention implementation, detailing the amount of time engaged in reading the Bible, personal prayer, sharing their faith, and church attendance during the intervention. The data charts compare the participant's responses to the survey before the intervention to their responses after the intervention. The results for each spiritual discipline will be compared using the methodology in Figure 2.

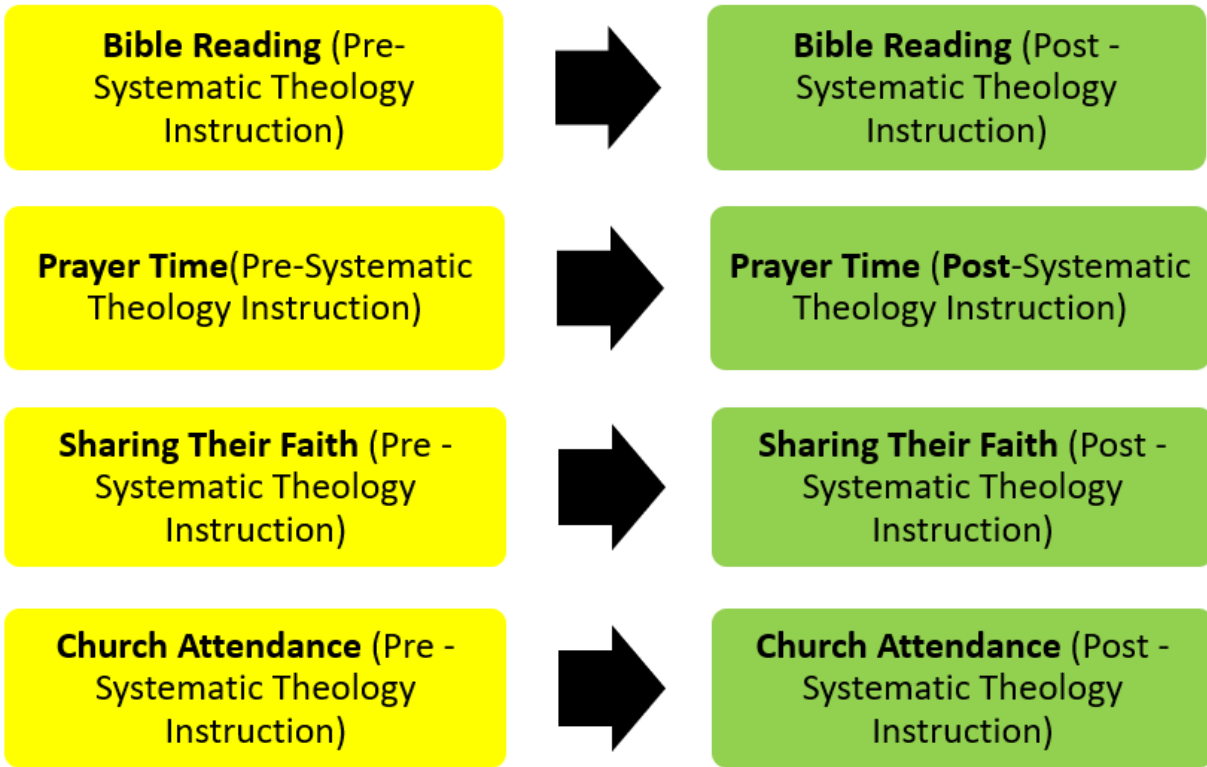


Figure 2. Spiritual Disciplines Pre and Post Intervention Assessments

**Intervention: Bibliology**

Systematic theology instruction started with Bibliology, which explains the origin and the authority of the Bible. The truth claim of the Christian faith is based on the authority of the Bible. The Bible’s truth claim is authoritative because it is the word of God. Cameron wrote, in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, “The cornerstone of evangelical theology lies in its confession of the inspiration and authority of the Bible, as the revealed “Word of God Written.”<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, if Christians teenagers do not understand and cannot explain the Christian bibliology, they are more susceptible to the challenges of the Bible’s authority. Barnett wrote, “Belief is an important aspect of one’s relationship with God, but doubt by definition

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<sup>79</sup> De S. Cameron, N. M., “Bible, Inspiration of The,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell, electronic edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 60.



involves difficulty or hesitance in believing and can therefore interfere with this relationship.”<sup>80</sup>

This is especially true for Christians when being challenged on the veracity and validity of the Bible. Most systems of thought in opposition to Christianity begin with the Bible. Therefore, young believers must be equipped to explain that the Bible is the word of God.

Table 2. Bibliology: Theology and Apologetics - Pre-Intervention Results

<b>Pre-Intervention Systematic Theology – Bibliology Questions</b>	<b>Percent correct</b>	<b>Pre-Intervention Apologetics - Bibliology Questions</b>	<b>Percent correct</b>
Q1. The Bible is...(C) The words of God written by men	100%	(Q2) Modern science can disprove some beliefs and ideas in the Bible. (DISAGREE)	60%
Q2. The content of the Bible was...(B) Discovered by the church	40%	(Q7) Christianity teaches that all other religions are wrong. (AGREE)	50%
Q3. The men who wrote the Scriptures recorded...(A) What God told them to write	40%	(Q9) Religious beliefs is a matter of personal opinion. (DISAGREE)	30%
Q4. The Bible’s validity (truth) and inspiration (from God) can be proven by...(B) Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	80%	(Q11) The Bible and evolution can both be true. (DISAGREE)	70%
Q5. Inerrancy refers to...(B) The original manuscripts did not have errors	70%	(Q13) The Bible is 100% accurate in all it teaches. (AGREE)	80%
Q6. The books of the Bible became authoritative when ...(B) They were written by the authors	40%	(Q15) The Bible is authoritative for Christians only. (DISAGREE)	50%

The participants’ results (Data in Appendix C and D) on bibliology from the systematic theology assessment before the theology instruction demonstrate the participants’ strengths and weaknesses concerning the Bible’s validity as God’s word. They affirmed the inerrancy of Scripture in the original manuscripts, the validity of Scripture seen in history and archeology, and the Bible as God’s word written by men. The participants’ responses reveal their conviction

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<sup>80</sup> Larry Barnett, “The Need for Apologetics: What the Data Reveal about the Crisis of Faith Among Young Christians in America,” *Philosophia Christi* Vol. 17, no. 2 (2015), 473.

that “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16). These results were expected. Truth Community Church is a conservative theological fellowship that often affirms the Bible as the inspired word of God. These participants have been exposed to that premise for most of their Christian tenure. At Truth Community Church, in Christian education and worship gatherings, the Bible is often referenced as the “word of God” or “truth from God” or “the revelation of God.”

However, the participants’ responses to questions concerning the organization and source of the Bible’s text demonstrate significant gaps in their understanding. The statements about the compilation of Scripture, selection, or determination of which writings would be included in the Bible reveal that they believe men, not God, were the primary decision-makers. Most participants think that men decided, determined, and added to the Bible (TA - Q. 2). Also, the data show there is confusion about the relationship between the inspiration of God and the authorship of the Bible. Only 40% of the participants affirmed that the men wrote what God intended. This suggests that the participants have a personal conviction that the Bible is God’s word, but they are unsure how the process of God’s word communicated through men produced a divinely inspired book without error and devoid of sinful influence.

Christianity teaches that the Bible is authoritative for all humanity because it is the inspired word of God. The apologetic assessment data reveal the participants’ Bibliology (systematic theology) gaps through their responses to common opposing ideas against the Bible’s authority. The participants consistently chose answers that suggest that the Bible’s authority is limited by human influence and determination. Only 50% agreed that the Bible is authoritative for all people, not just Christians. Also, 70% believe that religious belief is a matter of opinion. These responses correlate with the systematic theology understanding that the content and

organization of the Bible is a product of human determination; therefore, the truth about religion and “what to believe” about God is a matter of opinion.

The data reveals that these Christian teenagers could potentially be persuaded to doubt or deny the Bible's validity. The Bible is the primary source that defines and describes Christian theology. Therefore, these gaps in their understanding of bibliology make them targets for secular textual criticism and can cause them to doubt the validity of the Scriptures.

Table 3. Bibliology: Pre-Intervention Theology and Post-Theology Intervention

<b>Systematic Theology – Pre and Post Intervention Bibliology Questions</b>	Pre-correct	Post correct	Change
Q1. The Bible is...(C) The words of God written by men	100%	90%	-10%
Q2. The content of the Bible was...(B) Discovered by the church	40%	30%	-10%
Q3. The men who wrote the Scriptures recorded...(A) What God told them to write	40%	60%	20%
Q4. The Bible’s validity (truth) and inspiration (from God) can be proven by...(B) Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	80%	100%	20%
Q5. Inerrancy refers to...(B) The original manuscripts did not have errors	70%	90%	20%
Q6. The books of the Bible became authoritative when ...(B) They were written by the authors	40%	30%	-10%

After the systematic theology instruction (Bibliology) intervention (Lesson in Appendix), the data show growth in questions relating to the inspiration of Scripture. They increased from 10% to 20%, affirming that the men wrote God’s word and not their ideas. Manuscripts and history prove the Bible’s validity, and archaeology increased by 20%. However, the participants consistently demonstrate significant gaps in their understanding of the compilation of Scripture, even after Bibliology instruction. This gap is believed to be related to the theology instruction’s content, which describes the process or canonization but does not adequately explain the process

due to limited time. Systematic theology instruction was directed towards inspiration and compilation.

Table 4. Bibliology: Pre and Post Intervention Apologetics Comparison

Apologetics – Pre and Post and Post Intervention Bibliology Questions	Pre-correct	Post-correct	Change
(Q2) Modern science can disprove some beliefs and ideas in the Bible. (DISAGREE)	60%	80%	20%
(Q7) Christianity teaches that all other religions are wrong. (AGREE)	50%	80%	30%
(Q9) Religious beliefs is a matter of personal opinion. (DISAGREE)	30%	60%	30%
(Q11) The Bible and evolution can both be true. (DISAGREE)	70%	70%	0%
(Q13) The Bible is 100% accurate in all it teaches. (AGREE)	80%	100%	20%
(Q15) The Bible is authoritative for Christians only. (DISAGREE)	50%	40%	-10%

The results of the data demonstrate significant growth in the apologetics assessment after the systematic theology instruction intervention. The participants responded correctly to common apologetic opposition to the Bible 70% or higher on four of the six statements. Notably, the statement that affirms the Bible as the standard of truth for religious belief increased from 30% to 60% beyond human opinion. Also, their responses increased 30%, affirming the Bible as the authority which defines true religion. Furthermore, the Bible is 100% accurate in all it teaches, increased by 20% to 100%. The data shows that systematic theology instruction (Bibliology) intervention directly impacted the participants’ ability to respond to the common secular critiques of the Bible’s validity and authority.

### **Intervention Results: Theology Proper**

Christianity asserts that God has revealed Himself so that humanity may know, trust, and love him. The Bible esteems the knowledge of God above all things in the created order.

Jeremiah wrote: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches,<sup>24</sup> but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things, I delight, declares the LORD.” (Jer 9:23-24, NAS)

Theology Proper studies the nature and character of God revealed in creation, the Bible, and Jesus Christ. It is believed that the participants’ understanding of the nature of God will significantly impact their world views and, subsequently, their ability to respond apologetically to secular arguments in opposition to Christianity’s description of God.

Table 5. Theology Proper: Pre-Intervention Theology and Apologetics Results

<b>Pre-Intervention Systematic Theology– Theology Proper Questions</b>	<b>Percent correct</b>	<b>Pre-Intervention Apologetics– Theology Proper Questions</b>	<b>Percent correct</b>
Q7. How many Gods are there in the universe? (A) ONE	100%	(Q 1)There is no evidence for the existence of God. (DISAGREE)	90%
Q8. Which statement about God is true according to the Bible? (A)There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	80%	(Q4) All religions teach the same basic ideas and beliefs about God. (DISAGREE)	70%
Q9. God has revealed Himself to humans through...(C) Creation, the Scriptures, Jesus.	70%	(Q14) The beliefs about the Trinity was made up by theologians. (DISAGREE)	80%
Q10. Which statement about God is true according to the Bible? (C)God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil.	90%	(Q17) The Holy Spirit can tell me to do something that is not right according the Bible. (DISAGREE)	90%
		(Q18) God is right to judge people who have never heard the Gospel. (AGREE)	40%

The participants’ results (Data in Appendix C) from the systematic theology pre-assessment demonstrate significant strengths in their understanding of the Christian perspective of the nature of God. They are convinced that there is one God (100%) and that He is in control of all things, including bad and good (90%). They affirm the existence, solidarity, and the

sovereignty of God entirely. Their correct responses before the intervention average 85% as a group. The lowest response (70%) identifies the means by which God has revealed Himself to humans. The wrong answer consistently chosen includes “feelings and experiences” as a means of communication. This data correlates to the apparent gaps in the participants’ biblical understanding concerning the relationship between God inspiring the writers and the writer’s influence on the written text.

The participants’ results (Appendix D) from the apologetic pre-assessment before theology instruction demonstrate congruency in their understanding concerning the implications of theological premises. Their average of correct responses was 75%. However, the results suggest possible uncertainty concerning the impact of their strong theological affirmations. They affirmed the sovereignty of God; however, only 40% believe that God is right to judge people who have never heard the Gospel. Four out of six of the responses were “unsure.” It is apparent the participants’ perspective concerning God’s “right to judge” was impacted by the opportunity “to hear the Gospel.” This could be related to soteriology and their evangelistic training. Also, 80% affirmed the trinitarian theology. However, 70% believe that most religions teach the same basic ideas and beliefs about God. This inconsistency is believed to be due to their lack of information and experience with other religious perspectives about God outside of Christianity.

Table 6. Theology Proper: Pre and Post Intervention Systematic Theology Comparison

<b>Systematic Theology – Pre and Post Intervention Theology Proper Questions</b>	Pre-correct	Post-correct	Change
Q7. How many Gods are there in the universe? (A) ONE	100%	100%	0%
Q8. Which statement about God is true according to the Bible? (A)There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	80%	100%	20%
Q9. God has revealed Himself to humans through...(C) Creation, the Scriptures, Jesus.	70%	90%	20%
Q10. Which statement about God is true according to the Bible? (C)God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil.	90%	80%	-10%

After the systematic theology instruction (Theology Proper) intervention (Lesson in Appendix), the data show growth in some significant areas for the participants on the theology assessment. The average of correct responses increased from 85% to 92.5%. Their response to the triune nature of the one God increased by 20%. Also, their response to the means through which God revealed Himself increased by 20%. There is a 10% decrease in correct responses relating to God’s sovereignty over good and bad events in the world. Some uncertainty might have been caused by the systematic theology instruction, which explained the ontological and moral perfections of God. The moral attributes of goodness and righteousness were highlighted in the study and contrasted against the sinfulness of humans. The consistent wrong answer chosen affirms God’s control over good, but not in control over sinful human choices. This seems to be a common theological struggle for most believers in Scripture. The prophet Habakkuk wrote, “You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?” (Hab 1:13)

Table 7. Theology Proper: Pre and Post Intervention Apologetics Comparison

<b>Apologetics Topic – Theology Proper Questions</b>	Pre-correct	Post-correct	Change
(Q 1)There is no evidence for the existence of God. (DISAGREE)	90%	100%	10%
(Q4) All religions teach the same basic ideas and beliefs about God. (DISAGREE)	70%	90%	20%
(Q14) The beliefs about the Trinity was made up by theologians. (DISAGREE)	80%	50%	-30%
(Q17) The Holy Spirit can tell me to do something that is not right according to the Bible. (DISAGREE)	90%	100%	10%
(Q18) God is right to judge people who have never heard the Gospel. (AGREE)	40%	100%	60%

The results of the data demonstrated significant growth in the apologetics assessment after the systematic theology instruction intervention. The participants scored 100% on three of the five apologetic statements. Before the intervention, there was uncertainty between their understanding of God’s sovereignty and the implications of God’s right to judge (40%). After the intervention, the participants’ correct responses to the same apologetic statement increased by 60%. The participants affirmed the Trinity theologically but attributed the belief about the Trinity to men (50%). This misconception corresponds to their consistent gaps in grasping the relationship between divine inspiration and the human agents used to record the text. Nevertheless, the results show that systematic theology instruction directly impacted the participants’ ability to respond correctly to statements used to critique Christian doctrine about the nature of God.



### Intervention Results: Christology

The hope of Christianity is to reinforce and spread the claim that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. Christology studies the person (nature) and work of Jesus Christ. This study primarily focuses on the nature of Jesus as both fully human and fully divine.

Table 8. Christology: Pre-Intervention Theology and Apologetics Results

<b>Pre-Intervention Systematic Theology Topic – Christology Questions</b>	<b>Percent correct</b>	<b>Pre-Intervention Apologetics Topic – Christology Questions</b>	<b>Percent correct</b>
Q11. Which statement is true about Jesus? (B) Jesus is 100% God and 100% human	90%	(Q5) To be a Christian, you must believe that Jesus is God and man. (AGREE)	30%
Q12. According to the Bible, Jesus is... (B)An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature	50%	(Q10) Jesus was the first and greatest created being. (DISAGREE)	50%
Q13. According to the Bible, Jesus... (A)Could not sin because he was fully God and man	80%		
Q14. Concerning understanding Jesus nature... (D)Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important	50%		

The historical person, Jesus, is the foundation of Christianity. The promise of eternal life is received by faith in Jesus as the Christ. The apostle John’s reason for writing an account of Jesus’s life was “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name” (Joh 20:31, ESV). The participants’ results (Data in Appendix) in Christology from the systematic theology assessment before the theology instruction demonstrate significant weakness theologically, which corresponds to the apologetic assessment’s low percentages. According to the result, 85% of the participants chose correctly, affirming Jesus’ nature. These statements about Jesus are frequently stated in Christian teachings. Therefore, the participants could confirm these claims without much depth of

understanding. The data demonstrate gaps in their knowledge of the implications of this theological claim. The questions which apply the truth claims about Jesus in relation to the Father (God) and the importance of believing Jesus is human and divine were correctly answered at only 50%.

The initial apologetic assessment confirmed the misconceptions or uncertainty that the participants had when they were presented with two major apologetic premises. Christian theology teaches that Jesus is not a created being. He is 100% God; therefore, He has always existed. The results show that only 50% of the participants responded correctly to this statement. Also, the participants demonstrated significant misunderstanding regarding the necessity of believing that Jesus is fully God and human. The results show that only 30% affirmed that they must affirm this theological premise to be a Christian.

Table 9. Christology: Pre and Post Intervention Systematic Theology Comparison

<b>Systematic Theology Topic – Christology Questions</b>	Pre-correct	Post-correct	Change
Q11. Which statement is true about Jesus? (B) Jesus is 100% God and 100% human	90%	100%	10%
Q12. According to the Bible, Jesus is... (B)An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature	50%	70%	20%
Q13. According to the Bible, Jesus... (A)Could not sin because he was fully God and man	80%	90%	10%
Q14. Concerning understanding Jesus nature... (D)Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important	50%	70%	20%

After the systematic theology instruction (Christology) intervention (Lesson in Appendix), the data show growth in some significant areas for the participants on the theology assessment. The average of correct responses increased from 67.5% to 82.5%. The two

statements with results at 70% correct responses reveal some gaps in a small group concerning the importance of Jesus’s nature and the equality of Jesus with the Father. However, the participants chose wrong answers affirming that they comprehend that Jesus is divine in some aspect.

Table 10. Christology: Pre and Post Intervention Apologetics Comparison

<b>Apologetics Topic – Christology Questions</b>	Pre-correct	Post-correct	Change
(Q5) To be a Christian, you must believe that Jesus is God and man. (AGREE)	30%	90%	60%
(Q10) Jesus was the first and greatest created being. (DISAGREE)	50%	40%	-10%

The results of the data demonstrated significant growth in the apologetics assessment after the systematic theology instruction intervention. Before the intervention, only 50% affirmed that believing Jesus is God is most important. However, after the intervention, the participants’ demonstrated a much stronger understanding (90% correct responses) that to be a Christian, one must believe that Jesus was divine and human. Even though there is an increase in this area, the data reveal that many participants still have some uncertainty about the ramifications of defining Jesus as divine and human. This misconception is believed to be related to the Christian claim that He came into the world as a human, implying that he was created. Concise theological instruction concerning the incarnation of Jesus is needed to avoid these types of misunderstandings. Nevertheless, the results show that systematic theology instruction directly impacted the participants’ understanding of Jesus as divine and human (Christology).

### Intervention Results: Soteriology

Soteriology explains how a sinful person can be set free from guilt before God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christianity asserts humans can be forgiven for their sins if they trust in Jesus Christ as the payment for their sins against God.

Table 11. Soteriology: Pre-Intervention Theology and Apologetics Results

<b>Pre-Intervention Systematic Theology Topic – Soteriology Questions</b>	<b>Percent correct</b>	<b>Pre-Intervention Apologetics Topic – Soteriology Questions</b>	<b>Percent correct</b>
Q15. Humans need to be saved because... (C)They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.	60%	(Q3) God will accept worship from any religion if the person is sincere.	70%
Q16. Jesus death on the cross... (A)Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ	80%	(Q8) Most people are good and want to have a relationship with God.	90%
Q17. For a sinner to be saved from their sins, they must... (D)Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and nothing more	60%	(Q19) Faith in Jesus Christ (His death and resurrection) is the only way a person can be right with God.	90%

The participants’ results (Data in Appendix) in Soteriology from the systematic theology assessment before the theology instruction demonstrate inconsistent understanding when their theological responses are compared to their apologetic responses. According to the data, only 60% of the participants on the theology assessment affirmed that a sinner is saved from sin by believing in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and nothing more. However, on the apologetic assessment, 90% agreed that Jesus is the only way a person can be made right with God. There is a 30% difference regarding faith in Jesus as the only means of salvation from sin. Also, concerning the need for humans to be saved from sin in the theology assessment, only 60% of the participants affirmed that humans are condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment. However, on the apologetic assessment, 90% disagreed with the claim that man is good and desires a relationship with God. This suggests that these apologetic statements are

familiar and frequently stated premises in most Christian communities. The participants are often reminded about the depravity of humanity and the singular hope of Jesus as the savior as one central idea. When these premises are isolated, the participants demonstrate uncertainty in their understanding.

Table 12. Soteriology: Pre and Post Intervention Systematic Theology Comparison

<b>Systematic Theology Topic – Soteriology Questions</b>	Pre-correct	Post-correct	Change
Q15. Humans need to be saved because... (C)They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.	60%	90%	30%
Q16. Jesus death on the cross... (A)Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ	80%	80%	0%
Q17. For a sinner to be saved from their sins, they must... (D)Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and nothing more	60%	50%	-10%

After the systematic theology instruction (Soteriology) intervention (Lesson in Appendix), the data show growth in some significant areas for the participants on the theology assessment. Their average correct answers increased from 66.6% to 73%. Notably, their understanding of the need for humans to be saved increased by 30%. There was no change in their response to the statement regarding Jesus paying the sinners' debt on the cross (80%). 20% of participants chose answers that affirm Jesus's death on the cross for sin but believe that Jesus' payment through His death was a potential payment based on the sinner's faith. The results of the assessment demonstrate a need for concise instruction concerning the sufficiency of faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ for salvation from sin. 50% of the participants continue to attach saving faith and being ethical as a requirement to be saved. The researcher is aware that the Truth Community Church teaches that saving faith produces consistent spiritual development

and change in the attitude and actions of the believer (Sanctification). It seems that these participants are not making a distinction between salvation and the progressive work of sanctification.

Table 13. Soteriology: Pre and Post Intervention Apologetics Comparison

<b>Apologetics Topic – Soteriology Questions</b>	Pre-correct	Post-correct	Change
(Q3) God will accept worship from any religions if the person is sincere.	70%	100%	30%
(Q8) Most people are good and want to have a relationship with God.	90%	70%	-20%
(Q19) Faith in Jesus Christ (His death and resurrection) is the only way a person can be right with God.	90%	100%	10%

The results of the data demonstrated significant growth in the apologetics assessment after the systematic theology instruction intervention. The participants affirmed Jesus as the only way to be perfectly saved (100%). The certainty of Jesus as the only savior directly impacts their perspectives on religions outside of Christianity (100%). The systematic theology instruction affirmed the need for all humans to be saved by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. A small group of participants continues to have some uncertainty concerning the sinful nature of humans (70%). However, it is interesting to note that each participant’s responses changed from agreeing to unsure (AS – Q. 8). Nevertheless, the results show that systematic theology instruction directly impacted the participants’ understanding of salvation from sin by faith in Jesus Christ (Soteriology).

### **Intervention Results: Ecclesiology**

Ecclesiology studies the origin, nature, and function of the Christian church. The church describes the community of believers in Jesus Christ united by the Holy Spirit universally and

locally. This study focused on the origin and the expected participation in the life of the local church by all believers.

Table 14. Ecclesiology: Pre-Intervention Theology and Apologetics Results

<b>Pre-Intervention Systematic Theology Topic – Ecclesiology Questions</b>	<b>Percent correct</b>	<b>Pre-Intervention Apologetics Topic – Ecclesiology Questions</b>	<b>Percent correct</b>
Q18. The church is a ... (C) An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world	80%	(Q6) Worshipping alone or with family is a valid replacement for regularly attending church. (DISAGREE)	30%
		(Q16) A Christian does not have to attend church regularly. (DISAGREE)	50%

The participants’ results (Data in Appendix) in Ecclesiology from the systematic theology assessment before the theology instruction demonstrate inconsistent understanding when their theological responses are compared to their apologetic responses. 80% of participants affirmed the church originated with Jesus for believers to fellowship and mature among His people. However, on the apologetic assessment, 50% of the participants do not believe that Christians need to attend church gatherings regularly. Also, in the pre-assessment, 70% of the participants selected that corporate worship with other believers outside the home is a legitimate replacement for regular church attendance.

Table 15. Ecclesiology: Pre and Post Intervention Systematic Theology Comparison

<b>Systematic Theology Topic – Ecclesiology Questions</b>	<b>Pre-correct</b>	<b>Post-correct</b>	<b>Change</b>
Q18. The church is a ... (C) An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world	80%	60%	-20%

This response to the theology intervention was unexpected, but it can be explained by examining the theology instruction. The participants’ affirmation that the church originated with

Jesus decreased by 20%. The theology instruction affirmed that Jesus started the church, but most of the content emphasized the spiritual connection and the relationships among the community of believers. The incorrect response (40%) to the statement in every case affirmed that believers in Jesus started the church to teach others about Jesus. Again, results demonstrate the participants’ struggle with understanding the interrelationship between divine activity and human influence.

Table 16. Ecclesiology: Pre and Post Intervention Apologetics Comparison

Apologetics Topic – Ecclesiology Questions	Pre-correct	Post-correct	Change
(Q6) Worshipping alone or with family is a valid replacement for regularly attending church. (DISAGREE)	30%	80%	50%
(Q16) A Christian does not have to attend church regularly. (DISAGREE)	50%	80%	30%

The results of the data demonstrate significant growth in the apologetics assessment after the systematic theology instruction intervention. The instruction informed them of the significance of regular church gatherings with other believers. Their correct response average increased from 40% to 80%. The data reveal the participants’ grasp of the Bible’s expectation of fellowship: “let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another...” (Heb 10:24-25).

**Intervention Results: Eschatology**

Christian theology teaches that human history will conclude through a series of apocalyptic events when the resurrected Jesus returns to gather his people and establish an eternal kingdom for His people to live with Him for eternity. The study of Eschatology attempts to describe and organize these prophetic events so that the believers in Jesus may live in



anticipation of His return. This research section focused on the return of Jesus, the resurrection of believers, and the final judgment of all humans.

Table 17. Eschatology: Pre-Intervention Theology and Apologetics Results

<b>Pre-Intervention Systematic Theology Topic – Eschatology Questions</b>	<b>Percent correct</b>	<b>Pre-Intervention Apologetics Topic – Eschatology Questions</b>	<b>Percent correct</b>
Q19. Christian believe that Jesus will return...(A)With the same physical body that was resurrected	40%	(Q12) Jesus will physically return one day to judge every human being. (AGREE)	100%
Q20. When Jesus returns, He... (C)Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation, and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell	50%	(Q20) Heaven and Hell are real places where people will spend eternity. (AGREE)	100%

The participants’ results (Data in Appendix C) in Eschatology from the systematic theology assessment before the theology instruction demonstrate inconsistent understanding when their theological responses are compared to their apologetic responses. The theology assessment targeted the events within Eschatology, such as the resurrection of believers and unbelievers, new creation, and final judgment (50%). All of the participants that chose the wrong response believed that believers go to heaven, and unbelievers remain on the earth (50%). Truth Community Church subscribes to pre-tribulation, pre-millennial theology, which has high regard for the rapture of the church. The rapture describes an eschatological event whereby believers are “snatched away” out of the earth to be with Jesus. The participants demonstrate a limited understanding of this theological perspective. Also, participants reveal gaps in the knowledge regarding the bodily resurrection of Jesus and his future return in the same physical body (40%). Nevertheless, the participants responded unanimously perfectly to the broader eschatological themes, such as the reality of heaven and hell and the return of Jesus to judge all humans (100%).

Table 18. Eschatology: Pre and Post Intervention Systematic Theology Comparison

<b>Systematic Theology Topic – Eschatology Questions</b>	Pre-correct	Post-correct	Change
Q19. Christian believe that Jesus will return...(A)With the same physical body that was resurrected	40%	70%	30%
Q20. When Jesus returns, He... (C)Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell	50%	80%	30%

After the systematic theology instruction (Eschatology) intervention (Lesson in Appendix), the data show growth in some significant areas for the participants on the theology assessment. Their correct response average increased from 45% to 75%. The data reflect that a small group of participants are uncertain about the physical body of Jesus. For both theological premises, the wrong answer chosen relates to the type of physical body that Jesus possesses. Further, theological instruction explaining the physiology of the resurrection of Jesus is recorded in the Bible through prophecy and the historical event.

Table 19. Eschatology: Pre and Post Intervention Apologetics Comparison

<b>Apologetics Topic – Eschatology Questions</b>	Pre-correct	Post-correct	Change
(Q12) Jesus will physically return one day to judge every human being. (AGREE)	100%	100%	0%
(Q20) Heaven and Hell are real places where people will spend eternity. (AGREE)	100%	100%	0%

The data do not show any change in the participants’ conviction that Jesus Christ is returning to judge humanity and assign each person to heaven or hell for eternity. However, it is

believed that the theology intervention provided more detailed support of the events that the participants affirmed previously.

### Intervention Results: Survey of Spiritual Disciplines

Christian theology instruction intends to strengthen the believer’s faith in the truth claims, which validates the Christian faith as the singular and exclusive hope for humans to have joyful anticipation and love for Jesus Christ. This hope must continue to grow and mature through spiritual disciplines that nourish the faith of the Christian.

Developing a firm theological foundation allows the believer to defend the faith apologetically against doubters in the society and culture and doubt within their hearts. The less doubt they have, the more faith expands. As their faith grows, the amount of time dedicated to the Lord will continue to grow. Consequently, the increased time these young believers spend on pursuing the Lord will lead to them becoming true disciples of Jesus Christ.

### Spiritual Disciple Results: Bible Reading

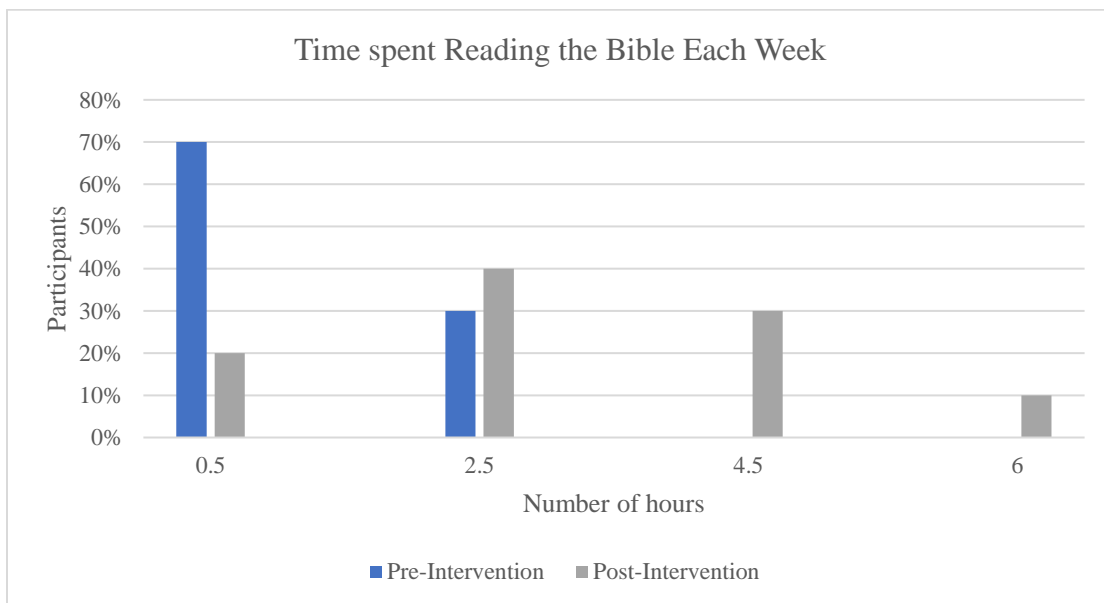


Figure 3. Bible Reading Comparison

The data shows a significant increase in time spent reading the Bible for 80% of the participants. The participants shared that the study of theology helped them understand the “meaning” of the Bible. Some stated that it made the Bible “more than just commands and instructions.” Their conviction that the Bible is the words of God increased, which led to an increase in their time reading the Scriptures. A common theme among the participants was that they no longer read the Bible as a chore or duty. Many of them testified that understanding theology helped connect to God when they read the Bible and listened to Bible teaching. They can be described as the believers in Thessalonica. Paul wrote, “when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thess 2:13)<sup>81</sup>.

### Spiritual Disciple Results: Prayer

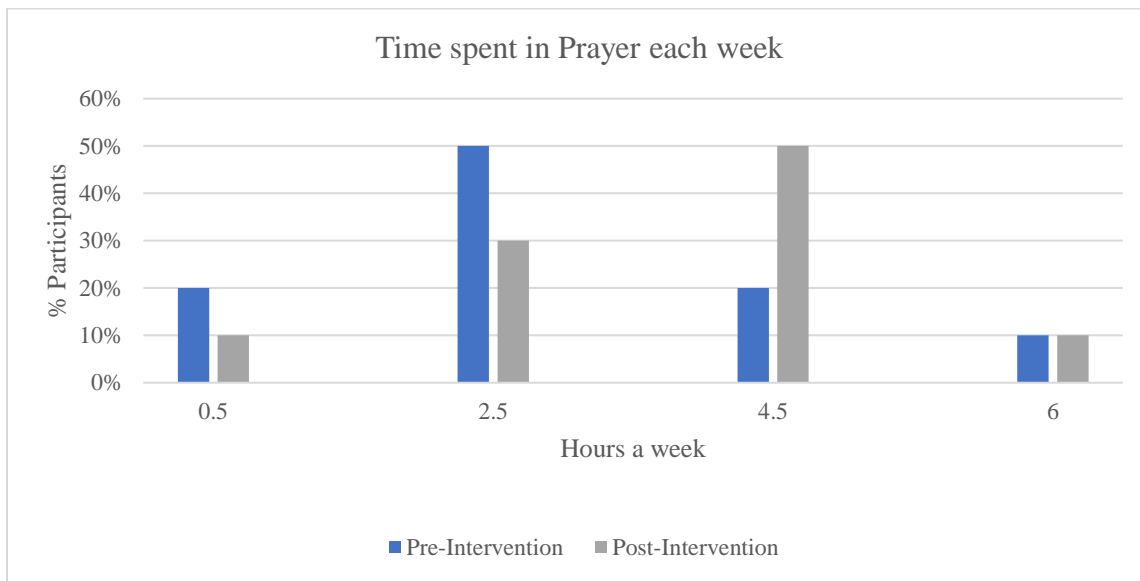


Figure 4. Prayer Comparison

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<sup>81</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:13, NAS

The data shows a significant increase in prayer time for 90% of the participants. The participant all agreed that the study helped them to understand the Lord much better. They all express a growing love for the Lord during the intervention implementation. They discussed that it was easier to pray because they felt they understood Him better. This response demonstrates the integration of systematic theology based on the Scriptures. As their confidence in the Bible expanded their understanding of God, Theology Proper directly impacted their intimacy with God personally.

### Spiritual Disciple Results: Church Attendance

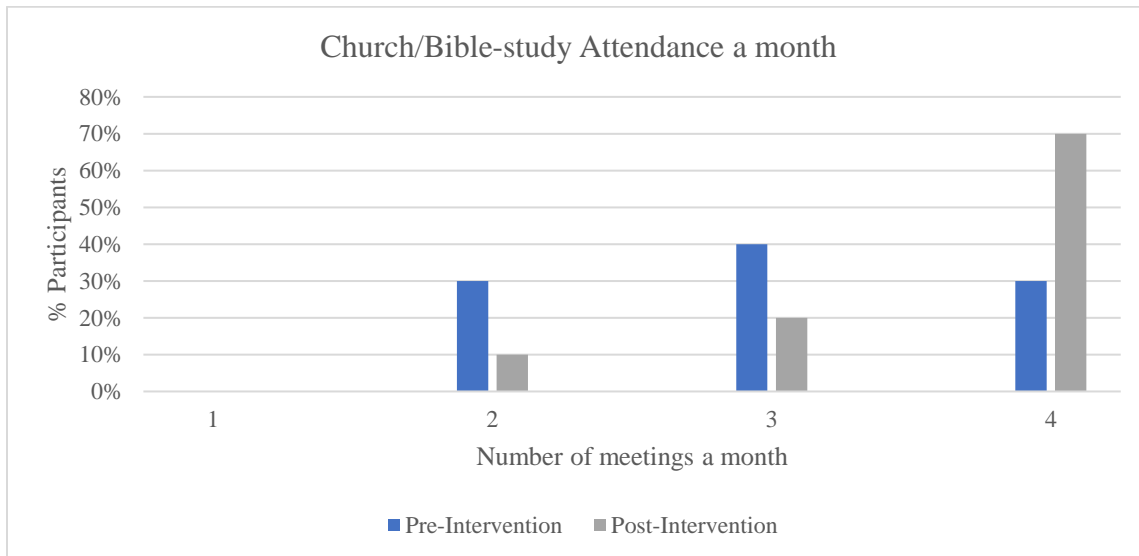


Figure 5. Church Attendance Comparison

The data shows a significant increase in time attending church for 90% of the participants. The participants are all members of Christian families who attend church regularly. However, the participants shared that many of them are more focused when they are at church. They recognized that attending church is not just routine, but their attendance makes them a part of a larger group of Christians worldwide. Some shared they started serving in some capacity within their local churches because of what they learned about the church.

## Spiritual Disciple Results: Evangelism

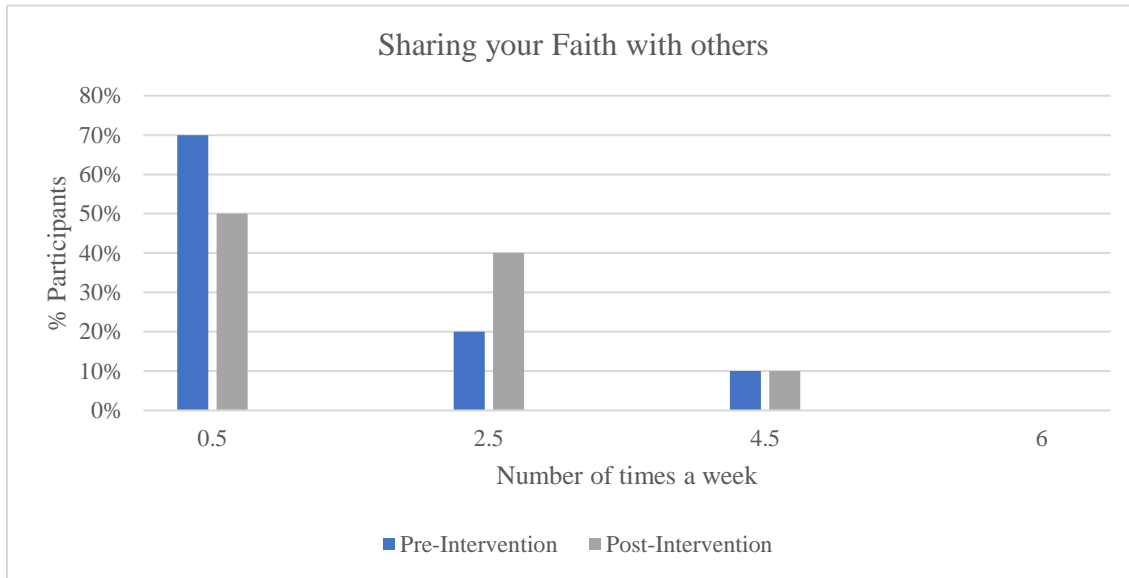


Figure 6. Evangelism Comparison

The data shows a significant increase in time sharing their faith for 50% of the participants. The participants are made up of public school and homeschooled teens. A few of the public-school students expressed their excitement about sharing Christ more effectively with friends. The homeschooled teens shared that they do not have as many opportunities to be evangelistic; however, all the participants expressed that they have more confidence when they talk about Jesus to other people.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to discover if providing Christian teenagers systematic theology would provide a biblical framework so that they are equipped to respond apologetically to secular critiques and anti-Christian arguments. Also, the researcher intended to demonstrate that training Christian teenagers in this manner will sustain their commitment to Christianity rationally and encourage participation in personal spiritual disciplines. This chapter includes a summary of the systematic theology intervention results and a summarization of the survey results demonstrating the effects of systematic theology instruction on the participants' engagement in personal spiritual disciplines. Also, this chapter includes implications for redefining and redeveloping Christian youth education and the necessity for further research so that the Christian Church can better prepare Christian teenagers to maintain fidelity to the faith and share His Gospel with the world until the Lord Jesus returns.

### **Summary Discussion of Intervention Results and Literature**

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews compared the Christian life to running a race. He wrote, Therefore, since so great a cloud of witnesses surrounds us, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us (Heb 12:1). This race is not a single competitor race, but it is a relay that requires each runner to pass the baton to the next runner so that the journey to the finish line may continue among the community of faith. There is an expectation that every generation will prepare the next generation to keep running for Jesus. Regretfully, the research in the last thirty years reveals

that Christianity is in danger of a lack of runners. The literature shows that Christianity is losing Christian teenagers and young adults rapidly.

Ken Ham wrote, "In England, two-thirds of young people now say they do not believe in God — in a culture where most people once went to church. In America, about two-thirds of young people will leave the church once they live on their own."<sup>82</sup> The literature consistently reveals, in most cases, the initial step away from the Christian faith is a result of unanswered Bible questions or rational arguments in opposition to Christian theology. Kinnaman explains, "we live in a time and a place characterized by rampant skepticism about Christianity and the Bible. Hyper-rationalism and pop-culture atheism undercut belief."<sup>83</sup> Regrettably, many young Christians cannot respond with confidence in defense of their faith in Jesus Christ based on the Bible because they do not have an adequate theological framework. The results of inadequate theological training create impotent Christian teenagers and young adults who are easily knocked off course when their faith is challenged. According to Barnett, "my own informal interviews with young-adults-raised Christian suggested that unresolved doubts and unanswered questions about Christianity are key factors in the movement of so many young adults away from Christianity."<sup>84</sup>

The results from this study show that Christian teenagers with limited theological comprehension are unable to respond accurately and with certainty when challenged about their faith. The participants completed a systematic theology assessment and an apologetic assessment covering: Bibliology, Theology Proper, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology.

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<sup>82</sup> Ham, *Ready to Return*, 172.

<sup>83</sup> Kinnaman et al., *Faith for Exiles*, 36.

<sup>84</sup> Larry Barnett, "The Need for Apologetics: What the Data Reveal about the Crisis of Faith among Young Christians in America." *Philosophia Christi* (2015), Vol. 17, no. 2.



The participants' incorrect response percentage on the theology assessment before theology instruction ranged from 30% to 80%. The data reveals that before the theology instruction, the participants' incorrect responses to the apologetic question ranged from 30% to 70%. The data shows that their low percentages in apologetics resulted from a limited systematic theology belief system. In his book, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*, Andrew Root writes, "there has been much conversation in the youth ministry world about how little young people actually know about the faith and how limited is their ability to articulate its central beliefs."<sup>85</sup> This lack of clarity and insufficient knowledge of theological truth makes them vulnerable to be influenced to stray from the faith when they are challenged to defend the "why" they believe. DiGiacomo wrote, "Good theology classes aimed at high school students can clear up some understandable but dangerous misconceptions about our relationship to God."<sup>86</sup>

There was no review of previous responses on either assessment after the first attempt or before the final attempt. The data produced reveals the direct impact of the intervention. After six consecutive weeks of systematic theology instruction over the assessed theology topics, the participants completed the same theology and apologetic assessment. The data showed significant growth in the participants' theology comprehension. The results revealed increases ranging from 20% to 60% for the correct response to theology statements and questions in five of the six topics.

The study intended to determine if systematic theology can provide the framework for Christian teens to respond apologetically to arguments that oppose Christian tenets. The data revealed significant growth in every apologetic topic assessed. The participants' correct

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<sup>85</sup> Andrew Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 65.

<sup>86</sup> James DiGiacomo, "Theology for Teens," *America*, Jan 2000. 12.

responses demonstrate increases ranging from 20% to 80%. For 10 of the 20 (50%) apologetic questions and statements, the participants' correct responses were 100%. The data strongly affirms the premise that systematic theology instruction provides the necessary training to support Christian teenagers' abilities to respond accurately and Biblically in defense of their Christian beliefs.

### **Summary of Intervention on Participation in Spiritual Disciplines**

Barnett wrote, "In addition to its effects on Christian identity, we found doubt is also a strong predictor of poorer spiritual health (for example, the centrality of faith, worship attendance, prayer frequency, perceived closeness to God, and so forth)."<sup>87</sup> It is contrary to logic to assume that a believer can grow in their devotion to Christ without answers to opposing ideas and doubts about major premises of the Christian faith. The goal for instruction in systematic theology is to educate the believer in Christian premises revealed in the Bible with the conviction that they will spiritually be developed through the learning process. Kinnaman states, "We propose that the goal of discipleship today is to develop Jesus followers who are resiliently faithful in the face of cultural coercion and who live a vibrant life in the Spirit."<sup>88</sup> However, the purpose of theological teaching is not to equip the believer to know doctrine or provide accurate responses to questions only. The primary purpose of theological instruction is to deepen the believer's conviction in the truth Scripture so that they may become a more devoted disciple to the Lord Jesus. To accomplish this goal, the church must ensure that a theological framework is developed in young believers' minds.

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<sup>87</sup> Barnett, "The Need for Apologetics," 481.

<sup>88</sup> Kinnaman et al., *Faith for Exiles*, 49.

Theology is a pursuit of knowing personally the one true God who has revealed Himself in human history. Root wrote, "at its core, theology is not doctrine; it is a reflection on the action of a God who encounters dead and impossible realities for the sake of life."<sup>89</sup> Systematic theology allows the believer to organize and comprehend the overwhelming truth claims from God and about God, which produces consistent growth, faith, and love for God. God intends for the believer to continue to mature and grow in depth of knowledge about God. As the believer continues to grow in knowledge, the moral and ethical will of God is revealed through their choices, desires, and actions. Peter wrote, "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love."<sup>90</sup>

Within the Bible, believers have been provided specific tools and activities to participate in so that they may know personally and encounter the eternal God in their time on the Earth. These tools and activities are often referred to as spiritual disciplines. The Lord commands and encourages all believers to engage in these spiritual disciplines to experience God and grow in their devotion to Him. Therefore, the secondary intent of this study was to discover the impact that systematic theology instruction has on the amount of time and quality of engagement the participants dedicate to the following spiritual activities:

- Scripture Reading – "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—." (1Pe 2:2)

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<sup>89</sup> Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*, 78.

<sup>90</sup> 2 Pet. 1: 5-7.

- Prayer – "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving." (Col 4:2)
- Church Attendance – "...let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Heb 10:24-25)
- Evangelism – "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." (Mat 28:19)

The data reveal an increase in participation in every spiritual discipline ranging from 50% to 90%. During the final group discussion, all the participants expressed a clear understanding of the Gospel and expressed feeling closer to God as each week passed. This clarity of the Gospel and greater intimacy with Him is probably the impetus for the increase in prayer. The majority of the participants shared that the intervention helped them understand the "big picture" of the Bible. One participant shared that the study helped to connect the intent of some of the stories in the Bible. This suggests that the intervention has helped motivate more personal Bible reading.

All the participants are members of Christian families. Therefore, church attendance was frequent for all of them before and after the intervention. Nevertheless, the participants demonstrated growth in the amount of time they spent in church, including small group gatherings and bible study. Some of the older teens noticed their desire to attend more bible study opportunities and meetings with other Christians. They expressed that they developed a better understanding of the importance of connecting with and building relationships with other Christians. Now, attending worship service is no longer a Sunday routine; rather, it has become a more mature act of devotion. They all affirmed an increase in their engagement and participation during church meetings.

The results of the study indicate that the importance of sharing the Gospel with others was significantly less understood than the other spiritual disciplines. A significant reason for this is that half of the participants are home-schooled. Therefore, the opportunity to share the company with non-Christians is not frequent. However, for the participants who attend public school, many of them express more confidence when sharing their beliefs with other students. In most public schools, it is difficult to practice and utter faith in Jesus without receiving some mockery, insult, or ideological challenges from other students and adults. Kinnaman explains: "Those of us who long to keep him at the center of our lives constantly fight the centrifugal force of a world spinning us away from him."<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, three out of five (60%) of the public-school participants shared that they have increased the frequency with which they talk about Jesus to other students.

### **The Implications for Redefining and Redeveloping Youth Ministry**

The ministry context for this study is Truth Community Church. The researcher, who serves as an Elder, was concerned with whether the teenagers in the church were being equipped to defend their faith in the current pluralistic and post-Christian culture. Kinnaman describes the current society, "top-to-bottom changes from a Christianized to a post-Christian society."<sup>92</sup> It is no longer acceptable in the many social contexts to be a biblical Christian. The exclusivity of Jesus and moral standards contrast with the current culture. Therefore, Christian youth ministry and training must ensure that teenagers can represent Christ with confidence in the world. Ham

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<sup>91</sup> Kinnaman et al., *Faith for Exiles*, 27.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

writes, "With our society immersed in secularism, it's essential that we learn how to defend the Bible and the Christian faith in that arena, and to do it for our sake and our children's."<sup>93</sup>

Truth Community Church elders believe the responsibility to better equip their teenagers is a component of the discipleship process for these young believers. The current trends in the church have separated youth ministry from biblical discipleship derived from the systematic theological teaching of Scripture and separation between theology and apologetics. The data from this study and the current cultural trends indicate that Christian youth ministry must be designed on Biblical theology. Youth ministry cannot be limited to social gatherings in the church's youth building. The youth ministry must be centered on theology because the data shows that theology informs apologetics. Subsequently, apologetics equips Christian teenagers to defend their faith accurately. Yet, it must be stated that apologetics is a benefit of systematic theology instruction, not the aim. Hübenthal wrote, "the primary goal of Christian apologetic communication is not missionary in the traditional sense of the word; it is not about making as many new Christians as possible. Rather it aims at bringing humans to a point where they can make a reflected and well-considered decision on how to deal with the fact that ultimate human fulfillment is possible only if God exists."<sup>94</sup> The aim is to deepen the faith and knowledge of God for the believer so that they will represent Him in the world with confidence, love, and fidelity.

Also, theology instruction for teens must be God-centered and not merely recitation of terms and definitions. Root argues, "youth ministry is theological. But it isn't theological because it uses footnotes and big words; youth ministry is theological because its very purpose is to

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<sup>93</sup> Ham, *Ready to Return*, 40.

<sup>94</sup> Christoph Hübenthal, "Apologetic Communication," *International Journal of Public Theology* 10, no. 1 (January 2016):22.

participate in the action of God."<sup>95</sup> Theology instruction exposes the believer to God and His purpose and actions in history so that he or she may know, love, trust, and live for Him. The Apostle Paul wrote, "the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Tim 1:5).

In addition, theological instruction should be taught and applied to human history, which informs life today. Theological systems are based on historical doctrines and are relevant to contemporary times. "It cannot be a collection of principles with no real connection to our lives. Theology may call us to think big thoughts, but these big thoughts are embedded in our very lives."<sup>96</sup> Theology instruction provides a lens for the believer to see God's actions historically and to be assured that God is still acting in the present. The believer comprehends that God has chosen to use him or her at this moment in human history to represent Him in the world. Therefore, believers must be prepared to engage the world with His truth. This is the connection that theology instruction has with apologetics. Thus, the following is recommended for Christian youth ministry and education:

- Pastoral Leadership should develop a Systematic Theology Curriculum for youth
- Systematic Theology Curriculum should include: Bibliology, Theology Proper, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology
- The Systematic Theology Curriculum should connect to common apologetic issues in history and contemporary culture

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<sup>95</sup> Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*, 57.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

- Systematic Theology Curriculum should be initial instruction for new converts
- All Biblical instruction should be congruent with and reinforce systematic theology beliefs

### **The Need for Further Research**

The data from this study demonstrate that systematic theology prepared the participants to respond to apologetic statements and questions accurately. However, some significant variables limit the capacity to determine the long-term impact of the intervention. First, the intervention occurred in eight consecutive weeks, with ten participants, all of whom had Christian backgrounds and provided testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ. A robust theological framework requires repetitive, consistent biblical instruction for increased understanding of theological premises. These young participants will require on-going biblical-theological teaching to continue to progress towards spiritual maturity. Nevertheless, the data demonstrate a positive progression in the right direction.

Secondly, all the participants still live with their parents and cannot choose their own degree of participation within the Christian community. Their parents still influence their attendance and participation in church activities. Therefore, this study cannot predict the long-term effects that the intervention will have on the participants' spiritual development for the next ten years. Within this time span, all the participants will be young adults; some of them will attend universities, some will join the military, and others will enter the marketplace. In some manner, each participant will no longer be under the spiritual guidance of their parents and possibly, the Truth Community Church. They will fully engage a culture that denies absolute truth, anti-Christian, and religiously pluralistic. Graham wrote, “we are constantly told that religion is marginal; that it is part of the problem, not the solution, and that faith is so far



removed from the realities of everyday living as to be irrelevant.”<sup>97</sup> Therefore, the progress monitoring of these participants after they become independent and are making decisions apart from the direct influence of their families will provide more data to support the study.

Thirdly, the intervention provided data that demonstrate that systematic theology instruction positively impacted the participants' engagement in the four spiritual disciplines. During the intervention, the participant spent more time in prayer, bible reading, and evangelism. Also, there are consistent testimonies of more engagement in worship service and bible study opportunities. The limitation of this data is that it summarizes their growth in these areas for eight weeks. More time would be necessary to demonstrate the intervention's long-term impact on their participation in these areas of Christian activities alongside other variables as they develop from teenager to young adults.

The researcher intends to continue to observe and participate in the continual spiritual growth of the participants since they are all members of the same local church where he serves. However, the data shows that the participants were provided with a theological framework, which will enable them to continue to grow in their spiritual lives. As Ham explains, "This is how ownership of one's faith is made strong. Before we can give an answer to others concerning our faith, we must first develop a personal apologetic."<sup>98</sup> With continual theological instruction and participation in the spiritual disciplines, these participants will become faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. The scriptures promise that " He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Phi 1:6) The “good work” is defined and described in the Bible in the

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<sup>97</sup> Elaine Graham, “How to Speak of God? Toward a Post Secular Apologetics,” *Practical Theology*, 11:3 (2016): 206-217.

<sup>98</sup> Ham, *Ready to Return*, 151.

context of divine objective truth that connects to form a belief system called Christianity.

Christianity is explained through systematic theology so that the believer can continue to mature in the “good work.” The system of belief is Christianity. Therefore, it is imperative for the Christian church to provide systematic theology instruction to the Christian youth intentionally to ensure they will be prepared to live for Christ with fidelity and to represent His kingdom until He comes.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**THEOLOGY ASSESSMENT (TS)**

1. The Bible is...
  - A. The words of men written about God
  - B. The ideas of men written about God
  - C. The words of God written by men
  - D. The belief of men written about God
  
2. The content of the Bible was...
  - A. Determined by the church
  - B. Discovered by the church
  - C. Decided by leaders in the church
  - D. Still being added the Bible
  
3. The men who wrote the Scriptures recorded...
  - A. What God told them to write
  - B. What they believed was true about God
  - C. Their interpretation of God
  - D. Their experiences with God
  
4. The Bible's validity (truth) and inspiration (from God) can be proven by...
  - A. No, it can't be proven objectively. It is based on faith only.
  - B. Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.
  - C. No, it is based on your religious traditions.
  - D. Yes, it can be proven by your personal experience

5. Inerrancy refers to...
  - A. The English translations do not have errors
  - B. The original manuscripts did not have errors
  - C. The interpretation of scripture does not have errors
  - D. The copies of the manuscripts do not have errors
  
6. The books of the Bible became authoritative when ...
  - A. They were added to the bible
  - B. The authors wrote them
  - C. The church leaders agreed they were scripture
  - D. King James commanded the Bible to be written
  
7. How many Gods are there in the universe?
  - A. One
  - B. Two
  - C. Three
  - D. Many
  
8. Which statement about God is true, according to the Bible?
  - A. There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit
  - B. There is one God with three different names... Father, Son, and Spirit
  - C. There is one God (Father) who has a Son (created), and Spirit (Created)
  - D. There are three Gods... A Father, Son, and Spirit
  
9. God has revealed Himself to humans through...
  - A. Creation, Jesus, Your feelings and experiences

- B. The Bible only
- C. Creation, the Scriptures, Jesus
- D. Jesus and Your Personal feelings and experience

10. Which statement about God is true, according to the Bible?

- A. God is in control of all “good” occurrences and results but is not involve when “bad” things occur in the world
- B. God is in control of most things that happen in the world and leaves the rest up to human choices and actions
- C. God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil
- D. God is in control of the Christians, but He allows the non-Christians to make their own decisions and choices about their actions

11. Which statement is true about Jesus?

- A. Jesus is 50% God and 50% human
- B. Jesus is 100% God and 100% human
- C. Jesus is 100% God and 50% human
- D. Jesus is 100% human and 50% God

12. According to the Bible, Jesus is...

- A. A divine being who was created by God to be His son
- B. An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature
- C. A partially divine being who is not equal with the Father
- D. A human being who believed that he was a divine being

13. According to the Bible, Jesus...

- A. Could not sin because he was fully God and man

- B. Was able to sin, but chose not to sin to please His Father
- C. Was able to sin as a human, but not able to sin as a divine being
- D. Could not sin because of His ability to switch between His divine nature and human nature when tempted

14. Concerning understanding Jesus's nature...

- A. Believing Jesus is God is most important
- B. Believing Jesus is human is most important
- C. Believing Jesus was a good person is most important
- D. Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important

15. Humans need to be saved because...

- A. They often make mistakes and bad choices that get them in trouble sometimes
- B. So that they can make better moral and ethical choices and live better lives
- C. They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment
- D. So that they can live a purposeful life, help others, and make better choices

16. Jesus's death on the cross...

- A. Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ
- B. Made the payment available if the sinner will trust in Jesus Christ
- C. Paid the debt for sinners if they repent and stop committing sins
- D. Almost paid the debt for the sinner, but is waiting on the sinner to "believe."

17. For a sinner to be saved from their sins, they must...

- A. Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and decide to stop sinning
- B. Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and get baptized, join a church, and evangelize others

- C. Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and commit to living a better life
- D. Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and nothing more

18. The church is a ...

- A. An organization started by men who believed in Jesus and wanted to teach others about Him
- B. An organization started by those who believed in Jesus so that they can start a new religion
- C. An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world
- D. An organization started by Jesus so that they can compete with the other religious beliefs in the world

19. Christian believe that Jesus will return...

- A. With the same physical body that was resurrected
- B. Without a physical body, but as a spirit being we can see
- C. With a body that he received after he returned to heaven
- D. Without a physical body, but as a spiritual being that we can only feel in our hearts

20. When Jesus returns, He...

- A. Will take all living believers to heaven and leaves the unbelievers on the Earth
- B. Will resurrect all dead believers, unite them with living believers, bring the believers with Him to heaven and, leave all unbelievers on the Earth
- C. Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell
- D. Will resurrect all New Testament believers who believed in Jesus, but not the Old Testament people because they did not know Jesus.

## APPENDIX B

### APOLOGETIC ASSESSMENT (AS)

1. There is no evidence for the existence of God.
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
2. Modern science can disprove some beliefs and ideas in the Bible.
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
3. God will accept worship from any religion if the person is sincere.
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
4. All religions teach the same basic ideas and beliefs about God.
  - a. Agree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Unsure
5. To be a Christian, you must believe that Jesus is God and man.
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
6. Worshipping alone or with family is a valid replacement for regularly attending church.
  - Agree

- Disagree
  - Unsure
7. Christianity teaches that all other religions are wrong.
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
8. Most people are good and want to have a relationship with God.
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
9. Religious beliefs are a matter of personal opinion.
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
10. Jesus was the first and greatest created being.
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
11. The Bible and evolution can both be true.
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
12. Jesus will physically return one day to judge every human being.
- Agree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure



13. The Bible is 100% accurate in all it teaches.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Unsure

14. The beliefs about the Trinity was made up by theologians.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Unsure

15. The Bible is authoritative for Christians only.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Unsure

16. A Christian does not have to attend church regularly.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Unsure

17. The Holy Spirit can tell me to do something that is not right, according to the Bible.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Unsure

18. God is right to judge people who have never heard the Gospel.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Unsure

19. Faith in Jesus Christ (His death and resurrection) is the only way a person can be right with God.

- Agree

- Disagree
- Unsure

20. Heaven and Hell are real places where people will spend eternity.

- a. Agree
- b. Disagree
- c. Unsure

## APPENDIX C

### PRE-SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY INTERVENTION - THEOLOGY RESPONSES

Systematic Theology	Questions	Participant 1 Pre	Participant 2 Pre	Participant 3 Pre	Participant 4 Pre	Participant 5 Pre
Bibliology	Inerrancy refers to...	The original manuscripts did not have errors	The original manuscripts did not have errors	The original manuscripts did not have errors	The English translations do not have errors.	The original manuscripts did not have errors.
	The Bible is...	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.
	The Bible's validity (truth) and inspiration (from God) can be proven by...	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.
	The books of the Bible became authoritative when...	The church leaders agreed they were scripture	The church leaders agreed they were scripture	They were added to the bible.	King James commanded the Bible to be written.	They were written by the authors.
	The content of the Bible was...	Determined by the church.	Discovered by the church.	Discovered by the church.	Determined by the church.	Decided by leaders in the church.
	The men who wrote the Scriptures recorded...	Their experiences with God.	What God told them to write.	What God told them to write.	What God told them to write.	Decided by leaders in the church.
	According to the Bible, Jesus is...	An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature.	An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature.	An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature.	An eternal being who was created by God to be His son.	An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature.
	According to the Bible, Jesus...	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.	C. Was able to sin as a human, but not able to sin as a divine being
	Concerning understanding Jesus nature...	Believing Jesus is God is most important.	Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important.	Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important.	Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important.	Believing Jesus is human is most important.
	Which statement is true about Jesus?	Jesus is 100% God and 50% human.	Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.	Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.	Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.	Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.
Ecclesiology	The church is a...	An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world.	An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world.	An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world.	An organization started by men who believed in Jesus and wanted to teach others about Him.	An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world.
	Christian believe that Jesus will return...	Without a physical body, but as a spirit being we can see.	With the same physical body that he returned to heaven.	With the same physical body that he returned to heaven.	With the same physical body that he returned to heaven.	With a body that he received after he returned to heaven.
Eschatology	Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell.	Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell.	Will resurrect all dead believers, unite them with living believers, bring the believers with Him to heaven and, leave all unbelievers on the Earth.	Will resurrect all dead believers, unite them with living believers, bring the believers with Him to heaven and, leave all unbelievers on the Earth.	Will resurrect all dead believers, unite them with living believers, bring the believers with Him to heaven and, leave all unbelievers on the Earth.	Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell.
	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and nothing more.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and nothing more.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and nothing more.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and nothing more.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and get baptized, join a church, and evangelize others.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and commit to living a better life.
Soteriology	For a sinner to be saved from their sins, they must...	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.	So that they can make better moral and ethical choices and live better lives.	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.
	Humans need to be saved because...	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.	Paid the debt for sinners if they repent and stop committing sins.	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.
Theology Proper	Jesus death on the cross.	God has revealed Himself to humans through...	God has revealed Himself to humans through...	God has revealed Himself to humans through...	The Bible only.	God has revealed Himself to humans through...
	How many Gods are there in the universe?	ONE	ONE	ONE	ONE	ONE
	Which statement about God is true according to the Bible?	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil.	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil.	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil.	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil.	God is in control of most things that happen in the world and leaves the rest up to human choices and actions.
	Which statement about God is true according to the Bible?	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God with three different names... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.

Systematic Theology	Questions	Participant 6 Pre	Participant 7 Pre	Participant 8 Pre	Participant 9 Pre	Participant 10 Pre
Bibliology	Inerrancy refers to...	The original manuscripts did not have errors.	The interpretation of scripture does not have errors.	The original manuscripts did not have errors.	The interpretation of scripture does not have errors.	The original manuscripts did not have errors.
	The Bible is...	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.
	The Bible's validity (truth) and inspiration (from God) can be proven by...	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	No, it can't be proven objectively. It is based on faith only.	Yes, it can be proven by your personal experience.
	The books of the Bible became authoritative when...	The church leaders agreed they were scripture.	They were written by the authors.	They were written by the authors.	King James commanded the Bible to be written.	They were written by the authors.
	The content of the Bible was...	Still being added the Bible.	Discovered by the church	Discovered by the church	Still being added the Bible.	Discovered by the church
	The men who wrote the Scriptures recorded...	Yes, it can be proven by your personal experience.	Yes, it can be proven by your personal experience.	What God told them to write.	What God told them to write.	Yes, it can be proven by your personal experience.
	According to the Bible, Jesus is...	A divine being who was created by God to be His son.	A divine being who was created by God to be His son.	An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature.	A divine being who was created by God to be His son.	A human being who believed that he was a divine being.
	According to the Bible, Jesus... Concerning understanding Jesus nature...	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.	Was able to sin, but chose not to sin to please His Father.	God and man.	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.
	Which statement is true about Jesus?	Believing Jesus is God is most important.	Believing Jesus is God is most important.	Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important.	Believing Jesus is God is most important.	Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important.
		Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.	Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.	Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.	Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.	Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.
Ecclesiology	The church is a...	An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world.	An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world.	An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world.	An organization started by men who believed in Jesus and wanted to teach others about Him.	An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world.
	Christian believe that Jesus will return...	Without a physical body, but as a spirit being we can see.	Without a physical body, but as a spirit being we can see.	Without a physical body, but as a spirit being we can see.	Without a physical body, but as a spirit being we can see.	Without a physical body, but as a spirit being we can see.
	When Jesus returns, He...	Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell.	Will resurrect all dead believers, unite them with living believers, bring the believers with Him to heaven and, leave all unbelievers on the Earth.	Will resurrect all dead believers, unite them with living believers, bring the believers with Him to heaven and, leave all unbelievers on the Earth.	Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell.	Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell.
	For a sinner to be saved from their sins, they must...	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and nothing more.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and commit to living a better life.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and nothing more.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and get baptized, join a church, and evangelize others.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and nothing more.
	Humans need to be saved because...	So that they can make better moral and ethical choices and live better lives.	So that they can live a purposeful life, help others, and make better choices.	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.	So that they can live a purposeful life, help others, and make better choices.	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.
	Jesus death on the cross...	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.	Made the payment available if the sinner will trust in Jesus Christ.
	God has revealed Himself to humans through...	Jesus and Your Personal feelings and experience.	God has revealed Himself to humans through.	God has revealed Himself to humans through.	God has revealed Himself to humans through.	God has revealed Himself to humans through.
	How many Gods are there in the universe?	ONE	ONE	ONE	ONE	ONE
	Which statement about God is true according to the Bible?	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil.	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil.	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil.	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil.	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil.
	Which statement about God is true according to the Bible?	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God with three different names... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.

## Post – Systematic Theology Intervention – Theology Responses

Systematic Theology	Questions	Participant 1 Post	Participant 2 Post	Participant 3 Post	Participant 4 Post	Participant 5 Post
Bibliology	Inerrancy refers to...	The original manuscripts did not have errors	The original manuscripts did not have errors	The original manuscripts did not have errors.	The original manuscripts did not have errors.	The original manuscripts did not have errors.
	The Bible is...	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.
	The Bible's validity (truth) and inspiration (from God) can be proven by...	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.
	The books of the Bible became authoritative when....	The church leaders agreed they were scripture	They were added to the bible.	They were added to the bible.	King James commanded the Bible to be written.	The church leaders agreed they were scripture.
	The content of the Bible was...	Determined by the church.	Decided by leaders in the church.	Discovered by the church.	Decided by leaders in the church.	Decided by leaders in the church.
	The men who wrote the Scriptures recorded...	What God told them to write.	What God told them to write.	Decided by leaders in the church.	What they believed was true about God.	What God told them to write.
	According to the Bible, Jesus is...	A divine being who was created by God to be His son.	An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature.	An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature.	A divine being who was created by God to be His son.	An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature.
	According to the Bible, Jesus...	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.	C. Was able to sin as a human, but not able to sin as a divine
	Concerning understanding Jesus nature...	Believing Jesus is God is most important	Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important.	Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important.	Believing Jesus is God is most important.	Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important.
	Which statement is true about the church is a ...	Jesus is 100% God and 100%. An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world.	Jesus is 100% God and 100%. An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world.	Jesus is 100% God and 100%. An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world.	Jesus is 100% God and 100%. An organization started by men who believed in Jesus and wanted to teach others about Him.	Jesus is 100% God and 100%. An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world.
Eschatology	Christian believe that Jesus will return...	Without a physical body, but as a spirit being we can see.	With the same physical body that was resurrected.	With the same physical body that was resurrected.	With the same physical body that was resurrected.	Without a physical body, but as a spirit being we can see.
	When Jesus returns, He...	Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell.	Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell.	Will resurrect all dead believers, unite them with living believers, bring the believers with Him to heaven and, leave all unbelievers on the Earth.	Will take all living believers to heaven and leaves the unbelievers on the Earth.	Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell.
Soteriology	For a sinner to be saved from their sins, they must...	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and nothing more.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and nothing more.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and nothing more.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and get baptized, join a church, and evangelize others.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and decide to stop sinning.
	Humans need to be saved because...	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.
Theology Proper	Jesus death on the cross...	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.	Made the payment available if the sinner will trust in Jesus Christ.
	God has revealed Himself to humans through...	Creation, Jesus, Your feelings and experiences.	God has revealed Himself to humans through.	God has revealed Himself to humans through.	God has revealed Himself to humans through.	God has revealed Himself to humans through.
	How many Gods are there in the universe?	ONE	ONE	ONE	ONE	ONE
	Which statement about God is true according to the Bible?	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and bad	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and bad	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and bad	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and bad	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and bad
	Which statement about God is true according to the Bible?	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.

Systematic Theology	Questions	Participant 6 Post	Participant 7 Post	Participant 8 Post	Participant 9 Post	Participant 10 Post
Bibliology	Inerrancy refers to...	The original manuscripts did not have errors.	The original manuscripts did not have errors.	The original manuscripts did not have errors.	The copies of the manuscripts do not have errors.	The original manuscripts did not have errors.
	The Bible is...	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.	The words of God written by men.	The words of men written about
	The Bible's validity (truth) and inspiration (from God) can be proven by...	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.	Yes, it can be proven using history, manuscripts, archeology, and continuity.
	The books of the Bible became authoritative when...	The church leaders agreed they were scripture.	They were added to the bible.	They were written by the authors.	They were written by the authors.	(B) They were written by the authors
Christology	The content of the Bible was recorded...	Decided by leaders in the church.	Discovered by the church	Still being added the Bible.	Discovered by the church	Determined by the church.
	According to the Bible, Jesus is...	Yes, it can be proven by your personal experience.	What God told them to write.	What God told them to write.	What God told them to write.	Yes, it can be proven by your personal experience.
	According to the Bible, Jesus...	An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature.	An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature.	An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature.	A divine being who was created by God to be His son.	An eternal being who is equal with the Father in nature.
	Concerning understanding Jesus nature...	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.	Could not sin because he was fully God and man.
Ecclesiology	Which statement is true about the church is a ...	Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important.	Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important.	Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important.	Believing Jesus is God is most important.	Believing Jesus is fully God and fully human is most important.
	Christian believe that Jesus will return...	Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.	Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.	Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.	Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.	Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.
	When Jesus returns, He...	An organization started by men who believed in Jesus and wanted to teach others about Him.	An organization started by men who believed in Jesus and wanted to teach others about Him.	An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world.	An organization started by men who believed in Jesus and wanted to teach others about Him.	An organization started by Jesus for those who believe in Him so that they can fellowship and mature as His people in the world.
		With the same physical body that was resurrected.	Without a physical body, but as a spirit being we can see.	With the same physical body that was resurrected.	With the same physical body that was resurrected.	With the same physical body that was resurrected.
Soteriology	For a sinner to be saved from their sins, they must...	Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell.	Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell.	Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell.	Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell.	Will resurrect both believers and unbelievers. The believers will spend eternity with Him in the new creation and unbelievers will spend eternity in Hell.
	Humans need to be saved because...	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and commit to living a better life.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and commit to living a better life.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and commit to living a better life.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and commit to living a better life.	Believe in Jesus Christ (the Gospel) and nothing more.
	Jesus death on the cross...	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.	They often make mistakes and bad choices that get them in trouble sometime.	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.	They have all been condemned by God and destined for eternal punishment.
	God has revealed Himself to humans through...	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.	Made the payment available if the sinner will trust in Jesus Christ.	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.	Paid the debt for sinners who trust in Jesus Christ.
Theology Proper	How many Gods are there in the universe?	God has revealed Himself to humans through.	ONE	God has revealed Himself to humans through.	ONE	ONE
	Which statement about God is true according to the Bible?	God is in control of the Christians, but He allows the non-Christians to make their own decisions and choices about their actions.	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil.	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil.	God is in control of most things that happen in the world and leaves the rest up to human choices and actions.	God is in control of all things that occur in the world both good and evil.
	Which statement about God is true according to the Bible?	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.	There is one God revealed in three distinct Persons... Father, Son, and Spirit.

## APPENDIX D

### PRE-SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY APOLOGETIC RESPONSES

Apologetics Topic	Participant 1 F	Participant 2 F	Participant 3 F	Participant 4 F	Participant 5 F	Participant 6 F	Participant 7 F	Participant 8 F	Participant 9 F	Participant 10 Pre
Bibliology	Christianity teaches that all other religions are wrong.	Agree	Agree	Unsure	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Unsure
	Modern science can disprove some beliefs and ideas in the Bible.	Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
	Religious beliefs is a matter of personal opinion.	Unsure	Agree	Disagree	Unsure	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
	The Bible and evolution can both be true.	Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Unsure	Disagree
	The Bible is 100% accurate in all it teaches.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Unsure	Agree	Agree	Unsure
	The Bible is authoritative for Christians only.	Disagree	Unsure	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Unsure
	Jesus was the first and greatest created being.	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Disagree
	To be a Christian, you must believe that Jesus is God and created being.	Unsure	Unsure	Unsure	Unsure	Unsure	Disagree	Unsure	Disagree	Agree
	A Christian does not have to attend church regularly.	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Unsure	Unsure	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
	Worshipping alone or with family is a valid replacement for regularly attending church.	Unsure	Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Unsure	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
Eschatology	Heaven and Hell are real places where people will spend eternity.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
	Jesus will physically return one day to judge every human being.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
	Faith in Jesus Christ (His death and resurrection) is the only way a person can be right with God.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Unsure	Agree	Agree	Agree
Soteriology	God will accept worship from any religions if the person is sincere.	Unsure	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
	Most people are good and want to have a relationship with God.	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
	All religions teach the same basic ideas and beliefs about God.	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
	God is right to judge people who have never heard the Gospel.	Unsure	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Unsure
Theology Proper	The beliefs about the Trinity was made up by theologians.	Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Disagree
	The Holy Spirit can tell me to do something that is not right according to the Bible.	Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
	There is no evidence for the existence of God.	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
		Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree





APPENDIX E  
THEOLOGY STUDY GUIDES

1

# What is Theology?

## MeSSAge overview

- I. What is systematic theology?
  - a. The word *theology* can be understood by dividing it into *theos* and *logos*. *Logos* means “word” or “reason” and *theos* means “God.” Theology concerns the application of logic to God.
  - b. R.C. spoke at a college and lectured to the faculty on the topic, “What is a Christian college?” On his tour of the campus, he noticed a revealing inscription. The study of theology, not the study of religion, is at the heart of what makes a Christian education.
  
- II. What are some aversions to systematic theology?
  - a. The word *systematic* is often very negative to people. Most are not biased against mechanical systems, but the idea of a systematic way of understanding reality has been opposed by several ideologies.
  - b. As people try to squeeze biblical ideas into preconceived, anti-biblical systems, it is no wonder the Bible does not appear coherent.
    - i. Existentialism
    - ii. Relativism
  
- III. What is the nature of biblical revelation?
  - a. Biblical revelation is the Word of God. It has diversity, but within it there is

order.

- i. Unity
- ii. Coherence
- iii. Consistency

- b. The systematic theologian depends upon the biblical scholar, for theology is rooted in the details of Scripture.
- c. Every detail of theology has an impact on every other detail of it.

## STudy QueSTionS

1. What is systematic theology?
2. Why is theology distasteful to many people? Tell of any experiences you may have had with people who were opposed to “anything but the Bible.”
3. What is the nature of biblical revelation?
4. What questions do you hope this series will answer about systematic theology?

## FurTher reAding

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, introduction  
Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, I:  
i–ii Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, I: 1–33  
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I: 1–54

# Inspiration and Authority of Scripture

## MeSSAge overview

- I. The material cause of the Reformation was the doctrine of justification by faith alone. But lurking behind the scenes was the question of authority.
  - a. The slogan *sola Scriptura* means that Scripture alone has the absolute right to bind our consciences.
  - b. Counsels and creeds do not have this same authority.
    - i. The authority and authorship of the Bible
    - ii. “Thus saith the Lord” shows the tension between the divine and human authors of Scripture.
    - iii. *Verbum Dei* and *Vox Dei*
  
- II. This leads us to the nature of inspiration.
  - a. Second Timothy 3:16 is the primary text that teaches this doctrine.
  - b. The English translation of 2 Timothy 3:16 and the way we use the term inspiration in theological language must be distinguished. The keyword is “theopneustos.” All of Scripture is breathed out by God—expiration.
  - c. How does God superintend the writing of Scripture by human authors?
    - i. We don’t know exactly how this happens from Scripture, but we know what it is not—mechanical inspiration.
    - ii. The Council of Trent and “dictate”
    - iii. The human writers’ personalities came through, but were carefully guarded by God from inflicting sin upon the texts.
    - iv. Verbal inspiration and “jot and tittle” inspiration
    - v. Liberal and neo-orthodox ideas
    - vi. The Bible as a witness to revelation, but not as revelation itself

## STudy QueSTions

1. What were the two main causes of the Reformation?
2. What is the relationship between authority and authorship of the Bible?
3. How much do we know about the way God-inspired Scripture? What are some examples of wrong ideas about it?
4. What is propositional revelation?

## FurTher reAding

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, I: vii  
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I:  
62–94 Warfield, B.B. *The Inspiration and Authority of  
Scripture*

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# Canonicity

## MeSSAge overview

### I. What is the Holy Bible?

- a. *Biblios* is the Greek word for Bible.
- b. How do we know that the right 66 books have been included? This is the question of canonicity.
- c. Canon is from the Greek word *kanon*, which means “measuring rod.”
- d. Scripture is the *norma normans et sine normativa*: it is the standard and has no peer.

### II. What is the scope of the canon?

- a. Of the thousands of possible books, says the critic, only 66 were chosen. Isn't it likely that mistakes were made? Not really. The overwhelming majority of the other candidates were obvious frauds.
- b. Only three books were given serious consideration for inclusion but did not make the canon: The Didache, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Epistle of Clement. Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, John's epistles, and Jude were not accepted by all immediately.
- c. Another misconception is that it took 500 years to decide on the canon. It was 398 a.d. when the process of canonization was completed. But from the beginning of the church, the New Testament books were used and had functional canonicity.
- d. The heretic Marcion created the first canon. He eliminated books that he did not like and kept those that fit his theology. This action, not any confusion in the church, made it necessary for the church to make the canon official.

### III. What was the three-fold test for the canonicity of books?

- a. Apostolic origin was important. To meet this criteria, a book had to be written by an apostle or by the direct sanction of an apostle. What about

Luke and Mark, neither of whom were apostles? The authority of Paul stood behind Luke, and that of Peter stood behind Mark. There was no debate about these gospels because of the oversight of the apostles.

- b. The second test was that the book must have been received gladly by the early church.
- c. The third test was whether the book in question was in agreement with the books already in the canon. The “core” books of the canon, the ones which were accepted without argument, stood in judgment of other books. For instance, Hebrews 6 was questioned as being out of sorts with apostolic teaching. This was resolved, however, when the early church concluded that Hebrews was written by Paul.

#### IV. Is the canon infallible?

- a. Did the Jewish canon include the Apocrypha?
- b. Did the Alexandrian canon (Greek-speaking Jews) have the Apocrypha?
- c. The Protestant view of the canon says that each book in the Bible is infallible. But the historic process that the church took was fallible. It appeared to be guided by the Holy Spirit, but the church was not (and is not) infallible in its pronouncements. So we have a fallible collection of infallible books.
- d. The Roman Catholic view is that we have an infallible collection of infallible books. The church could not (and does not) err in her official pronouncements.
- e. The church did the right thing. We have no reason not to be fully assured that we have a perfect canon.

## STudy QueSTionS

1. What is the definition of the word *canon*?
2. What grounds do we have for confidence in our present canon?
3. What were the criteria of canonicity used by the early church?
4. What is the difference between the Protestant canon and the Roman Catholic canon? How did this difference arise?
5. Is the canon of Scripture infallible? Explain.

## FurTher reAding

Bruce, F.F. *The Canon of Scripture*

Carson, D.A. and John Woodbridge, eds. *Hermeneutics Authority and Canon*

Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I: 95–106

*Westminster Confession of Faith*, I: 2–3

# One in Essence

## MeSSAge overview

- I. Pagans of all types lack an understanding of the unity of God. In the midst of many polytheistic cultures, Judaism fiercely clung to monotheism.
  - a. Some say the Jews were not monotheists, but that redactors have edited the Bible to make it appear so. But those critical theories do not handle the multiple evidences from multiple sources testifying of the religion of the Jews.
  - b. The Jews put great stress on the singularity of God. The *Shema*, found in Deuteronomy 6:4, is at the core of Jewish spirituality.
  - c. The Jews did not take the prescription in the *Shema* as hyperbole. They were so serious about their monotheism, they literally placed the message of it on their foreheads, doorposts, and arms. They regularly taught their children the command that they should “have no other God before Me.”
  
- II. The Trinity is a difficult, mysterious doctrine, yet it is taught in Scripture.
  - a. How can Christians be faithful to the religion of the Old Testament and hold an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity?
  - b. This question is not answered by a simple investigation of the history of theology. The New Testament is the key to unlocking much of the confusion surrounding the Trinity.
  - c. John 1:1 is a key text for understanding God’s unity and plurality.
  - d. The Greek word *logos* is translated as “word.” In the beginning, the *Logos* was with the Father. One person was with another person.
  - e. “With” is also a keyword in this text. There are three ways this English word is brought through from the Greek. In this case, the Greek word translated as “with” in this passage is *pros*, which means “face to face intimacy.” Jesus was intimately associated with the Father.



- f. The verse also says that Jesus not only was with God, but that He was God. The Word is differentiated from God, but is also identified with God. It was because of plain teaching like this in the New Testament that the church developed the doctrine of the Trinity.

### III. There are other references to the Trinity in the New Testament.

- a. The testimony of Thomas, who cried out “My Lord and my God!” as he witnessed his resurrected Lord, plainly shows that Jesus is God.
- b. Jesus stated several times that He was God, for instance when He said He was Lord of the sabbath or when He said He was given all authority. Also, for Jesus to say that He was the way, the truth, and the life was a clear testimony from Jesus’ lips that He believed He was God.
- c. The distinctions of each person of the Godhead do not destroy Their deity. Neither does emphasizing the deity of each person do away with Their distinctions.

## STudy QueSTionS

1. What does the term “polytheism” mean? What does “monotheism” mean?
2. How does the *Shema* illustrate the importance of monotheism to the Jews?
3. How does John 1 teach a doctrine of the Trinity? What other New Testament passages teach this doctrine, affirming the unity of God yet also affirming the distinctions in His persons?
4. Can someone be a Christian without believing in the Trinity? Why or why not?

## FurTher reAding

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 82–90

Letham, Robert. *The Holy Trinity*

Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, I: 181–183

# Incommunicable Attributes

## MeSSAge overview

- I. A form of identification usually is required for purchases on credit. When we identify someone we are looking for traits, and combined, these traits are the person's attributes. God is identified by His attributes, but they are broken into two groups.
  - a. Communicable attributes are those which also are found in humans, but to a lesser degree.
  - b. Incommunicable attributes are those which are found in God alone.
  
- II. What are the incommunicable attributes?
  - a. Is it possible for God to create another "god"?
    - i. No, because the new god would not be independent, uncreated; there are certain attributes that God cannot transfer from Himself.
    - ii. Simplicity of God
  - b. What are some of the differences between God and man?
    - i. We are human beings, but God is supreme. The real difference between God and man is that His being is very different from ours. He is independent, but we are entirely dependent on Him. What He creates, He sustains.
    - ii. Who caused God? John Stuart Mill erred in his understanding of the law of causality. Can He be self-creating? No. But He is self-existent.
    - iii. Aseity: self-existence of God
  - c. The one who is supreme deserves our worship and our awe.

## STudy QueSTionS

1. What are some examples of communicable attributes? Incommunicable?
2. In what sense is God “simple”?
3. In what areas are God and man fundamentally different?
4. What does “aseity” mean and why is it such an important theological idea?

## FurTher reAding

Bavinck, Herman. *The Doctrine of God*, pp. 113–172 Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 47–63  
Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, I: x–xii Charnock, Stephen. *The Existence and Attributes of God*, pp. 69–180 Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, I: 366–393  
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, pp. 191–206

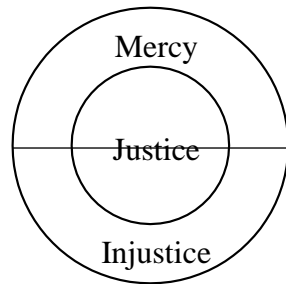
# Communicable Attributes

## MeSSAge overview

- I. There are communicable and incommunicable attributes.
  - a. Ephesians 5:1: “Therefore be *imitators* of God as dear children.”
  - b. We can imitate God only if there are certain things we share with Him, certain attributes that are communicable.
  - c. One attribute is debatable: holiness.
  - d. Why is the word *holy* attached to the third person of the Trinity?
  - e. Does redemption include deification, as stated by the Eastern Orthodox?
  
- II. What are the communicable attributes?
  - a. Paul confirms that love is shared by God and humans.
  - b. The goodness of God can be imitated.
  - c. God is just, and we are called to be workers of justice as well. Both internally and externally, God is just.
  - d. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.
  - e. God is wise, and we are instructed by books such as Proverbs, James, and Song of Solomon to be wise also.

## STudy QueSTionS

1. What is the main difference between communicable and incommunicable attributes?
2. Why is it debatable as to whether holiness is shared by humans?
3. Name five communicable attributes. How do humans obtain these attributes?
4. Notice the diagram. How does this help us understand how it is righteous for God to have mercy on some but not others?



## FurTher reAding

Bavinck, Herman. *The Doctrine of God*, pp. 175–251

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 64–81

Charnock, Stephen. *The Existence and Attributes of God*, pp. 181–182

Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 393–44

# The Christ of the Creeds

## MeSSAge overview

- I. The greatest concern for the early church was to establish a clear, biblical portrait of Jesus that revealed the unity and diversity of the Godhead.
  - a. The various councils during the fourth and fifth centuries are a result of that struggle.
  - b. The person of Christ is greatly assaulted during our time.
  - c. Throughout its history, the church has had to defend against attacks on the person of Christ similar to those of the Jesus Seminar today.
  
- II. Was the Council of Chalcedon a terminal council?
  - a. G.C. Berkouwer, a teacher of R.C.'s at the Free University of Amsterdam, believed it was the last council of church history to define the person of Christ. It was unimaginable that any council could go beyond those statements.
  - b. Chalcedon, the fourth ecumenical council (a.d. 451), was brought about because of errors concerning the two natures of Christ.
  - c. On the one hand was the error of Eutyches, the promoter of Monophysitism. He taught that the incarnate Christ had only one nature, called a thean- thropic nature. It was a hybrid, neither human nor divine.
  - d. On the other was the heresy of Nestorius, which was named after him. Nestorius did not deny that Christ had two natures, but he said Jesus also had two distinct personalities. Jesus was actually two persons in his view.
  - e. Chalcedon said, *Deum verum et hominem verum*. Jesus was truly God and truly man.
  - f. Four negatives also were established concerning the two natures of Christ.
    - i. Without mixture
    - ii. Without confusion
    - iii. Without separation

- iv. Without division
- g. Distinguishing the two natures is not the same as separating them.
- h. The mystery of how Christ can be truly God and truly man cannot be penetrated by creeds or reason. It is beyond our full understanding.
- i. We can only say so much positively concerning the person of Christ. If you try to think and write beyond Chalcedon, you might as well pick your heresy.
- j. Each nature retains its own attributes—a teaching that must not be ignored.

## STudy QueSTionS

1. What was the main theological goal of the first five centuries?
2. What were the two main heresies confronting the orthodox position on Christ's person?
3. Noting the text of Chalcedon printed below, what questions about Jesus' deity does it answer? What questions remain unanswered?
4. How can the church fight Christological heresy today?

## FurTher reAding

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 305–311; 321–330

Berkouwer, G.C. *The Person of Christ*

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, II: xii–xiv

Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, II: 387–454

Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II: 299–332

## The Creed of Chalcedon

We, then, following the holy fathers, all with one consent teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and body; coessential with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, *without confusion, without change, without division, without separation*; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the creed of the holy fathers has handed down to us



# The Offices of Christ

## MeSSAge overview

- I. Scholars have chosen to parse the person of Christ in several ways. The richness of His being is not easily summarized in a single formula. One excellent way to understand the person of Christ is to view Him through His offices.
  - a. Christ is called our *Mediator*. He is a go-between, someone who stands between two parties. In this case, God and man are in dispute and Jesus is the agent.
  - b. There are three kinds of mediators in the Old Testament. They are prophets, priests, and kings.
  - c. Christ fulfills all three of the Old Testament offices at once.
  
- II. What is the nature of Jesus' role as prophet?
  - a. The prophet was a spokesperson for God, an agent of revelation to mankind. God gave His word to the prophet, then he or she delivered it to the people. The prophet's words were prefaced by the idea, often the words themselves, "Thus saith the Lord."
  - b. False prophets often prove attractive to many. God said to Jeremiah that he should not be concerned about false prophets, but should focus on rightly proclaiming God's word.
  - c. Jesus was the perfect prophet. Most who met Him immediately knew they were in the presence of a great prophet (John 4). But He did not simply proclaim the word; He was the Word. In this sense, He was the fulfillment of the prophetic ministry.
  - d. Jesus was also the object of the prophetic teachings of the Old Testament.
  
- III. How does Jesus fulfill the role of the priest?
  - a. What Old Testament passage is quoted most frequently in the

New Testament?

- b. Answer: Psalm 110. This incredible prophecy begins, “The Lord said to my Lord.” The book of Hebrews gives much attention to this tremendous passage.
- c. The Old Testament priest came to make intercession for the people, ministering in the most holy of places as he did his work.
- d. In Psalm 110, both ultimate kingship and priesthood are promised to the Messiah.
- e. The writer of Hebrews affirms that Jesus is a greater priest than any other.
- f. Christ’s work as priest continues until now as He intercedes for His people at the right hand of the Father.
- g. Just as with Old Testament prophecy, Jesus is the subject and object of the sacrificial system.

#### IV. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the role of the king.

- a. Jesus manifested the justice and rule of God in a better way than the Old Testament kings. Even though they had been given authority by God, they failed.
- b. We never find a separation of state from God. Church from state, yes. But rulers are accountable to God as to how they exercise their reign. Only God can make a man a ruler.
- c. David is the closest we have to a perfect king. But even his rule makes us long for a perfected version of David. The promise to us is that Jesus is the newly born King of Israel, and His claims to Kingship were what put Him on the cross.
- d. Jesus perfectly fulfills the role of king by wrapping the other offices up into this one. He was a priestly king, a prophetic king, and a kingly king.
- e. Right now, Jesus is the King. He holds the highest office in the universe by being seated at the right hand of God today. There is no other office higher. And He shall reign forever.

## STudy QueSTionS

1. What are the three kinds of mediators in the Old Testament?
2. How does Jesus fulfill the roles of prophet, priest, and king?
3. How does seeing Him in these roles help explain His work in the economy of God's kingdom?

## FurTher reAding

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 356–366; 406–412

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, II: xv

Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, II: 455–468; 596–609

Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II: 391–417; 486–494

# Why did Christ die?

## MeSSAge overview

- I. The atonement of Christ is one of the most magnificent parts of theology. Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* or *Why the God/Man?* is one of the most famous works that dealt with Christ's death.
  
- II. The New Testament uses several metaphors to describe the Atonement. It is like a tapestry, with several strands woven through it.
  - a. Redemption or purchase
  - b. Ransom theories
  
  - c. Bride price
  
  - d. *Christus Victor*
  
  - e. Governmental theories
  
  - f. Satisfaction theory
  
- III. The satisfaction theory gets at the heart of the cause and need of the Atonement.
  - a. This theory is based on the justice of God. God's justice is closely related to His righteousness and goodness.
    - i. God's justice is perfect.
    - ii. Will not the judge of all the world do what is right?
  
  - b. We have both pecuniary and moral debt toward God, as illustrated by the boy in the ice cream shop.
  
  - c. God is both just and the justifier of the ungodly.

## STudy QueSTionS

1. List and describe the different theories of the atonement.
2. Why is the satisfaction theory more accurate than the others?
3. Using the Bible's logic, how can God be just and yet be the justifier of sinners who do not deserve mercy?

## FurTher reAding

Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 384–391 Hodge, A.A. *The Atonement*

Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, II: 563–591

Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II: 417–426

# Justification by Faith Alone

## MeSSAge overview

- I. Luther called election the heart of the church. But he is known primarily as the recoverer of *sola fide*, justification by faith alone.
  - a. The formal cause of the Reformation was the authority of the church, but the material cause was justification.
  - b. The doctrine of justification answers the question: What must I do to be saved?
  
- II. The divine justice of God seems to argue against a doctrine of justification at all.
  - a. You can't simply work harder (legalism), for no one is made righteous by good works.
  - b. The Gospel is good news because it delivers man from the judgment of God's law.
  
- III. Justification is God's way of declaring a person righteous.
  - a. *Simul iustus et peccator*: We are justified sinners.
  - b. Is this a legal fiction?
  - c. Justification is *by* faith alone.
  - d. The instrumental cause of justification, according to the Roman Catholic church, is baptism.
  - e. According to Reformed theology, the instrument is faith.
  - f. Mortal sin destroys justification in the Roman system, but through penance and the sacraments, it can be restored. So Rome has two causes of justification: baptism and penance.
  - g. The struggle of the sixteenth century came down to the difference

between infusion and imputation.

- h. The righteousness of Christ for us, not in us, is the key to our justification.
- i. Christ was being punished for our sins, not His, when He was on the cross. Imputation is the legal transfer of our guilt to Christ and then the transfer of Christ's righteousness to us.

## STudy QueSTionS

1. What was the formal cause of the Reformation?
2. What was the material cause of the Reformation?
3. What does the term *justification* mean?
4. What is the instrumental cause of justification, according to Protestants? According to Roman Catholics?

## FurTher reAding

Sproul, R.C. *Faith Alone*

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 493–509

Buchanan, James. *The Doctrine of Justification*

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, III: ii

Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, III: 41–113

Hoekema, Anthony. *Saved by Grace*, pp. 132–151

Kistler, *Justification by Faith Alone*

Murray, John. *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 106–116

Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II: 558–631

*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XIV

# Saving Faith

## MeSSAge overview

- I. Do Catholics believe that we are saved by works?
  - a. No. They call faith the foundation of justification. But it is not sufficient to justify us. There also must be works, at least the works of penance.
  - b. Rome believes we need grace plus merit.
  
- II. What is saving faith?
  - a. Luther was accused of teaching a cheap faith, antinomianism, or the freedom to live as you please as long as you intellectually affirm the right things.
  - b. If a man says that he has faith but not works, can that faith save him?
  - c. *Fides viva*, or “a living faith,” is what we must have for salvation. We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.
  - d. Our works do not form any grounds for our justification.
  
- III. What are the elements of saving faith?
  - a. *Notitia*, or knowledge, refers to the content of our faith.
  - b. *Assensus* refers to our emotional readiness to affirm the truth.
  - c. *Fiducia*, or trust, refers to our faith in God.
  
- IV. What is conversion and what are the other benefits of saving faith?



- a. Conversion is synergistic—we perform repentance as a part of it.
- b. *Metanoia* means “a changing of the mind.”
- c. Adoption is another benefit of saving faith.
- d. The fruits of justification mentioned in Romans 5 are peace with God and access to Him.

## STudy QueSTionS

1. Does Roman Catholic theology teach that we are justified by works? Explain.
2. What did Luther mean by the Latin phrase *fides viva*?
3. Name and define the three elements of Christian faith?
4. What is the meaning of repentance?

## FurTher reAding

Sproul, R.C. *Faith Alone*

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 510–526

Buchanan, James. *The Doctrine of Justification*

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, III: 11–18

Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, III: 114–212

Hoekema, Anthony. *Saved by Grace*, pp. 152–191

Kistler, Don. *Justification by Faith Alone*

Murray, John. *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 117–131

Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II: 633–688

*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XI

# Sanctification

## MeSSAge overview

- I. Sanctification is partial, but real.
  - a. When R.C. first became a Christian, he would listen to R.J. Lamont as he drove. “What’s on your partially sanctified mind?”
  - b. Justification is not partial. It is immediate.
  - c. It is bad news that our sanctification is partial, but it is real. By it the people of God are actually made holy. Sanctification begins immediately after regeneration.
  - d. The fruit of our sanctification is inevitable and immediate. People cannot be converted to Christ and never bring forth fruits. There are no “carnal” Christians.
  - e. We are not justified by the profession of faith, but the possession of faith.
  
- II. Our growth in sanctification is not a straight line. It has peaks and valleys. Sometimes we may enter very dark valleys. Maturity means the peaks and valleys are smoothed out a bit.
  - a. Some in the church teach perfectionism, an instantaneous infusion of God’s sanctifying grace.
  - b. Others believe in a “leap” corresponding to belief in certain doctrines or experiences. The error here is that one doctrine or experience cannot cause, mechanistically, a victorious Christian life.
  - c. It is a rare thing for a Christian to see immediate victory over some sin. Nothing happens fast. There are no three easy steps to growth.
  - d. In Philippians 2:12–13, Paul says we should work out our own salvation, but that God is working with us even more so.
  - e. Note that “fear and trembling” is a real part of the work of sanctification.
  - f. Sanctification is a cooperative process. It is synergistic, not monergistic. We are active at some points and passive at others.

- III. The errors of activism and quietism are evident in the theology of sanctification today.
- a. Being active without embracing activism is as simple as not being a legalist. Self-righteousness is the danger here, and activism teaches self-reliance that is deadly.
  - b. Quietism says that we should “Let go and let God.” There are times to be passive and depend upon God, no doubt. But the teaching that we can offer nothing to the work of sanctification is deadly.
  - c. Antinomianism and legalism are also distortions of the doctrine of sanctification. The legalist legislates where God has given us freedom. The antinomian gives freedom where God has given real direction. But we may not create new laws and we may not ignore the ones He plainly has given.
  - d. Avoiding these errors will go far to aid our sanctification.

## STudy QueSTionS

1. What is perfectionism? Is this doctrine dangerous? Why or why not?
2. What is quietism?
3. What is activism?
4. What is the difference between antinomianism and legalism? Why are both of these errors harmful to the body of Christ?

## FurTher reAding

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 527–544  
 Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, III: vi–x  
 Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, III: 213–258  
 Hoekema, Anthony. *Saved by Grace*, pp. 192–233  
 Kistler, Don, ed. *Trust and Obey*  
 Murray, John. *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 141–150  
 Piper, John. *The Pleasures of God*  
*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XIII

# The Church: One and Holy

## MeSSAge overview

- I. There are other metaphors used to describe the church.
  - a. The church is described as a body, with Jesus Christ as the head.
  - b. The church is also called the *Laos Theou*, or the “People of God.”
  - c. The church is described as a building, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the chief cornerstone. The rest of the church is made up of the individual stones.
  
- II. What are the chief characteristics of the church?
  - a. In the fourth century, the church was defined as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic in its character.
  - b. These terms are rarely used in Protestantism, but they remain an excellent description of the true church.
  
- III. What does it mean that we are “one”?
  - a. The church is a community of saints, or *communio sanctorum*.
  - b. The visible church always will be fragmented. The invisible church is necessarily one.

- c. Why should we split? Certainly not over minor matters. The error of schismatic behavior is as bad as remaining linked to a corrupt body.

#### IV. What does it mean that the church is holy”?

- a. No institution has been so gifted as the church of God. When we fail to obey the mission God has given us, relatively speaking, we are more blameworthy.
- b. So how can we say the church is holy? We appear to be very unholy.
- c. “Holy” means “set apart.” The church is holy in the sense that it has a sacred mission. And God has promised that the church will not fail in her mission. The gates of hell will not prevail against her.
- d. The church is subject to the concentrated ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- e. The church is where the saints (holy ones) are gathered, so this makes the church a holy institution as well.

### STudy QueSTionS

1. What are some of the biblical metaphors used to describe the church? What aspects of the church do each of these metaphors communicate?
2. What do we mean when we say we believe the church is “one”?
3. Why is schism such a serious sin?
4. What do we mean when we say we believe the church is “holy”?

### FurTher reAding

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 555–603  
Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, IV: i  
Clowney, Edmund. *The Church*  
Kistler, Don, ed. *Onward Christian Soldiers*  
Kuiper, R.B. *The Glorious Body of Christ*  
Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, III: 1–336  
*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXV and XXVI

# The Resurrection

## MeSSAge overview

- I. What is the meaning of the word *resurrection*?
  - a. The Greek word simply means “to rise again.” But the word takes on deeper theological significance in the way the New Testament uses it.
  - b. “We believe in the resurrection of the body,” the phrase from the Apostles’ Creed, does not refer to the raising of Christ but ourselves. In our case, we are confessing that our bodies, while undergoing the corruption of the grave, nevertheless will be raised and glorified in the Last Day.
  
- II. What is the biblical teaching concerning this resurrection?
  - a. In Romans 8:11, Paul says that since Christ has been raised from the dead, we will be changed. Is that change simply spiritual, or is this referring to our final resurrection? He goes on to make reference to the raising of Jesus’ mortal body, and then compares that raising to ours. This is not a reference only to the spirit—it is a reference to the body, as well.
  - b. The New Testament does not view the Resurrection as an isolated event. Jesus’ raising is the first of many.
  - c. Was Jesus the first to be resurrected? Yes, because all others who were raised from the dead eventually died. Jesus rose to never perish, and this points to the change that takes place at resurrection.
  - d. There are many similarities between the resurrection of Jesus and the raisings of others in the Bible—but the main difference is that Jesus’ body underwent radical changes to become a glorified body.
  
- III. The main doctrinal passage in the Bible concerning the Resurrection is 1 Corinthians 15.

- a. Following Zeno, Paul uses the *reductio ad absurdum* argument against those who oppose the doctrine of the Resurrection.
- b. Paul shows that you cannot have the Christian faith without the doctrine of the Resurrection. Some theologians claim that you can have Christianity without a supernatural emphasis, such as the Resurrection. Bultmann gives an excellent explanation of the doctrine as taught by Paul, but denies its truth.
- c. The apostle Paul does not base his case simply on the problems that come from not having a Resurrection. This method of argument is common today, but it proves nothing. Paul goes on to appeal to eyewitnesses, including his own account of seeing Jesus on the road to Damascus.
- d. In 1 Corinthians 15:35, the question is asked, “What will our bodies in heaven look like?” Paul says he does not know. But he makes an analogy to nature (following Plato) to argue that what we will look like will resemble our former bodies in the way a tree resembles the seed from which it grew. There will be some continuity, but there will be significant discontinuity.
- e. Will our bodies look like Jesus’ in the Upper Room? Was His the prototype, or did it have further glorification to attain when He ascended? We do not know.
- f. We will be immortal in heaven. But will we be inherently immortal? No. We will remain sustained by God. God guarantees our immortality, not our own strength.
- g. The highest form of life is not what we see now. The apex of human life is still in the future.
- h. We will be like Jesus, receiving the same glorious resurrection as He received.

## STudy QueSTionS

1. Summarize Paul’s argument for the resurrection of the body.
2. What is the relationship between Jesus’s resurrection and ours?

## FurTher reAding

- Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 720–727
- Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, III: xxv
- Craig, William Lane. *The Son Also Rises*
- Davis, Stephen T. *Risen Indeed*
- Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, III: 771–789
- Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, III: 561–582

# The Return of Christ

## MeSSAge overview

- I. Karl Barth observed in 1949 that Christians should be reading the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. This comment was sparked by the rise of the modern state of Israel.
  
- II. Jesus predicted that Jerusalem would be occupied until the “times of the Gentiles” were fulfilled.
  - a. In Romans 11, Paul uses this phrase as he discusses the question, “What about Israel?”
  - b. The events in this century have made some say that we are in the final days. The expectations of the return of Jesus are at a fever pitch.
  - c. This is something for us to place our hope in, but the questions of how and when Jesus will return is an ongoing debate.
  
- III. The Ascension teaches us much about the return of Christ (Acts 1).
  - a. “Men of Galilee, why do you stand staring up into heaven?”
  - b. The return of Christ will be personal, visible, and glorious.
  
- IV. The crisis of the parousia is caused by the apparent delay in Jesus’ predicted return.
  - a. According to nineteenth century critics, Jesus was disappointed that God did not vindicate His efforts.
  - b. “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”
  - c. Others, such as C.H. Dodd, have said that all the prophecies of the New Testament were fulfilled in the first century.



- d. "This generation will not pass away until all these things are fulfilled."
- e. It seems as if Jesus was correct that the temple would fall and that Jerusalem would not perish. But did Jesus return 40 years after His prediction?
- f. Evangelicals have responded to this by saying that the word generation does not refer to a time frame but to a type of people. "This kind of people will be around when I return," is a possible meaning, but unlikely.
- g. Other evangelicals have said that "all these things" refers only to the first two events.
- h. Full preterism teaches that Jesus' return occurred in a.d. 70. The Jewish age ended and the age of the Gentiles began. Many hold to a secret Rapture and a hidden resurrection that happened in a.d. 70.
- i. The return of Christ in a.d. 70 was but a typological fulfillment, though. It was a foretaste of His great future coming, just as many prophesied events are fulfilled typologically soon after the prediction, only to be fulfilled truly at a later date.

## STudy QueSTionS

1. What do we learn about the return of Christ from the record of the ascension of Christ in Acts 1?
2. What is the crisis of the parousia?
3. What are some of the explanations of Jesus' phrase "this generation" in Matthew 24:34?
4. What is the relationship between the judgment coming of Christ in a.d. 70 and His coming in glory at the end of the age?

## FurTher reAding

Berkouwer, G.C. *The Return of Christ*  
 Seraiah, C. *The End of All Things: A Defense of the Future* (full preterism)  
 Vos, Geerhardus. *The Pauline Eschatology*

# The Final Judgment

## MeSSAge overview

- I. Nietzsche announced in the nineteenth century that God had died. Humanism prepared the world to believe that we do not need God.
  - a. Civilization is divided into three phases, according to Comte—infancy, adolescence, and adulthood.
  - b. World War I was supposed to be the “War to end all wars.”
  - c. In all this was the “good” news that since God does not exist, we do not have to worry about facing divine judgment.
  - d. Life and death were both meaningless. Optimism was turned to gloom.
  
- II. The New Testament teaches that life and death are real and meaningful. But that means that accountability is a reality.
  - a. In Acts 17, Paul declares to the Gentiles a God who, in former times of ignorance, was more tolerant. But a critical change has occurred and all men everywhere will be judged in light of the coming of Christ. Since this watershed event has occurred, God will judge unrepentance much more harshly.
  - b. The Old Testament warned of the Day of the Lord, a day of great judgment.
  - c. Kant said that every human being has a sense of “oughtness” built into his or her mind. This sense is the foundation of his argument for the existence of God. His argument demands divine judgment.
  - d. Our own minds record our sin. But all our deeds also are located in the mind of God.
  
- III. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus ends His sermon on the Mount in a dramatic fashion.
  - a. “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

- b. We will be judged and rewarded or punished according to our works.
- c. In Matthew 25, Jesus teaches that He will judge men who pretend to love and serve Him. The parable of the ten virgins is used to illustrate this truth.
- d. These warnings concerning final judgment must be heeded. They are among Jesus' most fearful teachings.

## STudy QueSTionS

- 1. What does Acts 17 teach about the judgment of God?
- 2. What do we learn about God's judgment in the Sermon on the Mount?
- 3. What does Matthew 25 teach about the final judgment?

## FurTher reAding

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 728–734

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, II: xvi:17

Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, III: 844–851

Peterson, Robert. *Hell on Trial*

Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, III: 597–604

*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXXIII

# The Believer's Final Rest

## MeSSAge overview

- I. What happens at the end of the Christian life?
  - a. Each Sunday, we experience the Sabbath rest, which foreshadows the coming eternal rest.
  - b. Modernists deny the reality of heaven, asking on what basis we have any confidence as to the nature of the next life.
  - c. When Lazarus died, Jesus took the opportunity to teach by saying to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25).
  
- II. In John 14, Jesus teaches that we are not to worry about our future in heaven or the exact nature of the afterlife.
  - a. At the Last Supper, in the Upper Room, Jesus makes a point to address the fears of His disciples.
  - b. "If it were not so, I would have told you" (John 14:2).
  - c. Jesus has prepared a place for His people. We have every reason to be confident of its reality.
  - d. In 1 John 3:1–2, a key eschatological passage in the New Testament, we discover that whatever our exact nature in heaven, we will be, in important respects, like Christ in His glorified state.
  
- III. The beatific vision of God (*visio Dei*) is one of the great promises He makes to His people.
  - a. "Beatific" is not an ordinary word to us, but words like *Beatitudes* are. The message of Christ in Matthew 5 gave the hearers great blessings and promises, a degree of pleasure that transcends any happiness we could experience on earth.

- 
- b. The vision itself carries with it a great blessing. As John says, we don't know what we will be like, but by seeing God, we will be blessed to such a degree that we will be like Him.
  - c. The Old Testament says that there is a limit: No man can see God. Even Moses, who begged to see Him, was not allowed to see God. The intimate vision of God was forbidden.
  - d. One of the hardest things about the Christian life is that we serve an invisible God.
  - e. If God is invisible, how can we see Him in the first place? Notice the Beatitude that says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." When we receive the fullness of our sanctification, the barrier of sin will be removed.
  - f. But how can we see a spirit? Great thinkers have struggled with how the Christian will see God. The illustration of the difference between watching televised events and real events helps us understand this.
  - g. What we will have in heaven is spirit-to-spirit communication. We don't know how that will work, but it helps us understand how we can "see" an invisible, spiritual God.

#### IV. In Revelation 21, we get another vision of the nature of the afterlife.

- a. When the Bible talks about heaven, it focuses on some odd things, things that will be there and things that will not be there. We assume these are symbolic representations, given the nature of this kind of literature, but it should not surprise us if God does have a lavish place prepared for us.
- b. Why no sea? The sea represented violence and catastrophe.
- c. There will be no tears. In this case, this means there will be no sadness.
- d. In verse 22 and following, we learn that there will be no sun or temple or moon. Is this a dark place? Or a place without a church?
- e. God's heaven will be full of Him. He will fulfill everything that was just a shadow of Himself.

## STudy QueSTionS

1. How does the Sabbath act as a foretaste of heaven? How does that give us direction on how to “keep the Sabbath”?
2. What is the beatific vision? How is it a blessing?
3. How can we “see” an invisible God?
4. According to Revelation 21, heaven is filled with things we would not expect, but absent of things very common to us today. What is the final image we get of heaven from Scripture? What about it surprises you?

**APPENDIX F**

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**

**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 27, 2019

Terrance O'Neil

IRB Approval 4012.112719: Preparing the Next Generation for a Pluralistic World: The  
Need to Teach Systematic Theology to Christian Youth

Dear Terrance O'Neil,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Your study involves surveying or interviewing minors, or it involves observing the public behavior of minors, and you will participate in the activities being observed.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project. Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
**Research Ethics Office**

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## **APPENDIX G**

### **PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM**

*“Preparing the Next Generation for a Pluralistic World: The Need to Teach Systematic Theology to Christian Youth”*

This research study is being conducted by Terrance O’Neil, a doctoral candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University. Your child has been selected as a potential participant because he or she is professing Christian by faith in Jesus Christ, a teenager between the age of 13 and 18 years old, and a member of Truth Community Church.

#### ***Why is this study being done?***

The purpose of this study is to discover the effects of teaching systematic theology to Christian youth (13-18) at Truth Community Church. The study seeks to demonstrate that teaching systematic theology to Christian teenagers may increase their comprehension of biblical knowledge, support their ability to respond apologetically to common critiques of Christianity, and increase their time in personal devotion, prayer, private Bible reading, and prayer. The growth in each of these doctrinal areas will further establish them in the Christian faith, decreasing the possibility that they will leave the Christian faith in belief and practice as teens and young adults.

#### ***What will my child/student be asked to do?***

If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, [he or she] will be asked to do the following things:

1. Write a testimonial of their conversion or acknowledge faith in Jesus Christ, complete pre-assessment and post-assessment on theology and apologetics, and complete a survey before and after the project describing their time spent in spiritual disciplines, such as Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, and evangelism.
2. Attend eight consecutive sections for two hours each on Sunday afternoons.
3. Verbally participate with other participants, and the researcher about their understanding of the theological content studied each week.
4. Document their learning on the study guide provided by the researcher.

***What are the risks and benefits of this study?***

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risk encountered in everyday life.

**Direct Benefits:** The direct benefits that participants should expect to receive from participating in this study are: in-depth Christian theological instruction, the opportunity to interact with other Christian teenagers about their understanding of Christian theology and the impact it has on their world view.

***Will my child be compensated for participating?***

Your child **will not** be compensated for participating in this study

***How will my child's personal information be protected?***

The records of this study will be kept private. If any sort of report is published, no information will be included, which makes it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. The data collected from your child for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if any data that is collected is shared about your child, any information that could identify him or her will be removed, if applicable, before the data is shared.

- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. [**Note:** Per federal regulations, data must be retained for three years upon completion of the study.]
- Each participant will be assigned a generic identity tag such as, “Participant #1” to ensure that their data, including their written testimonials, and hard copies of their responses in the study guide will remain confidential.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

***Is study participation voluntary?***

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect [his or her] current or future relations with Liberty University or Truth Community Church. If you decide to allow your child to participate, [he or she] is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

***What should I or my child do if I decide to withdraw him or her or if he or she decides to withdraw from the study?***

If you choose to withdraw your child or if your child chooses to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should your child choose to withdraw, any data collected from or about [him or her], will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

***Whom do I contact if my child or I have questions or problems?***

The researcher conducting this study is Terrance O’Neil. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at 713-304-5439. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty advisor, Reginald Weems, at [rdweems@liberty.edu](mailto:rdweems@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

***Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.***

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Signature of Parent Date

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Signature of Investigator Date

## APPENDIX H

### PERMISSION TO USE MATERIALS

----- Original message -----

From: Legal <legal@ligonier.org>

To: O.TERRANCE@ATT.NET

Subject: Ligonier Ministries Copyright Response

Dear Terrance Jermayne ONeil:

Thank you for reaching out to us.

We received your request to present videos related to Systematic Theology to a group of teenage participants for your dissertation. From your request it is unclear if you are referring to the *Foundations: An Overview of Systematic Theology* teaching series that has 60 lectures. In any case, we allow you to present the content live to the group of participants for the purposes you have described. Please credit Ligonier Ministries for the content.

Thank you.

Blessings,

Adriana Feliz

Contracts Administrator | [Ligonier Ministries](#)