Christian Education and the Examination of Apologetics Curriculum

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by

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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The purpose of this action research project was to evaluate the ability of Christian high school students to explain and defend their faith. The main focus of the project was to compare the current apologetics curriculum used by Cedar Park Christian School to a new curriculum designed for the sake of this study. The new curriculum sought to provide grade-level resources as source material for each student. Additionally, it approached the course with the expectation for students to articulate their learned knowledge conversationally. There were forty-nine total participants, all who were either a junior or senior at the start of the 2021 fall quarter. There were twenty-two students in the control group and twenty-seven in the test group with the new curriculum. Every student was given the same theological assessment on both the first day and the final day of the quarter so that growth could be measured. Students also ranked their level of confidence in discussing their faith at both the beginning and end of the quarter. The assessments were then coded and graded anonymously according to a pre-determined grading scale. This researcher did not know whether it was a control or test group assessment being graded. Once the assessments were graded and sorted, results yielded significant differences in the scores between the groups. Those who had received training from the new curriculum were much more successful in explaining and defending the Christian faith. They also recorded higher confidence levels.
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DMIN Doctor of Ministry

ACSI Association of Christian Schools International

PDP Purposeful Design Publications, a division of ACSI

BJU Bob Jones University Press

GPA Grade Point Average

CPCS Cedar Park Christian School
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The Bible is clear that children are to be instructed in the ways of truth. Parents are told to train their children (Prov 22:6) and to press the truth of God into the daily life of the family (Deut 6:7). The responsibility of training children in truth and godliness is primarily the role of the parent, however, the modern institutions of the church and the Christian school exist to support and partner with parents in this essential endeavor.\(^1\) While there is perhaps much that could be said about the structure and effectiveness of both of these ministerial organizations, the focus of this action research project is directed toward that of the Christian school, and specifically the arena of Bible curriculum.

A Christian school relies on age-appropriate and comprehensive Christian curriculum, and this is particularly true for the Bible classroom itself. Bible curriculum that is to train the thinking of increasingly developed minds, must be both systematic and apologetic in nature. However, many of the Bible curriculums available today are overly simplistic, story-driven and lacking in the heart-level and missional impact of gospel truth. The minds of Christian young people, if only entertained at youth group and presented stories in the classroom, will be woefully unprepared to engage in culture, especially one that is often hostile to Christian orthodoxy and contrary to Christian orthopraxy. The first assault on the faith of Christian young people often comes in college. Christian Apologist Frank Turek comments on this problem noting that it is “not so much that Christian minds are lost at college – it’s that Christian minds

\(^1\) Christians schools, historically, were a response to the failure of public educations and institutions. Biblically, the church exits as a place of doctrinal teaching, fellowship as well as gospel proclamation and ministry (Acts 2:42-47).
rarely get to college.”² This is why such an action research project is needed in the current Christian educational community. While illumination and the Holy Spirit’s work is paramount, there also needs to be an assessment regarding the tools which are employed to further develop the Christian mind. It is true that individuals must choose for themselves what they will do with the gospel of Jesus, and this is certainly the case for every student attending a Christian school. Furthermore, there will always be some who, even with the best Christian instruction, still reject Christ in their own free will. This reality, however, does not excuse the need for better curriculum in the pursuit of preparing Christian minds. If Christian schools are to fulfill their role in equipping students in their faith, then there must be a serious conversation and course correction regarding current Bible curriculum.

**Ministry Context**

The ministry context for this action research project is Cedar Park Christian School, located in Bothell, Washington. The school was founded in 1982 as a ministry of Cedar Park Assembly of God Church.³ Over the years it has expanded to a multi-school district with schools ranging from preschool through high school. While it is affiliated with the Assemblies of God, its staff and faculty represent a wide range of evangelical denominations. Even with multiple campuses, the Cedar Park Christian School District operates under one centralized school board and superintendent.⁴ Each campus has a grade-level administration, and “all campuses utilize a common curriculum guide and scope and sequence, as well as discipline and administrative

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⁴ Ibid.
policies.” In terms of its spiritual model, traditionally the school has operated as a discipleship model, meaning that, for students to be accepted, they must sign a commitment form indicating their identification as a Christian and adherence to the behavior code. In light of this, the starting place for all classroom and chapel teachings have been with the assumption of shared belief. Currently, in actual practice, there is a recognition that those who sign this form, may identify as Christian, but that the label itself has culturally widened in recent years. Thus, there are many who may not actually possess a genuine, biblical faith. This change is reflected in the current mission statement for the school which reads: “Our desire is that each student would accept Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. A goal of our mission is to nurture and train children so that they will grow in godliness of character and action.” In reality then, the demographic of the school requires a hybrid between discipleship and evangelistic approaches. This presents a particular challenge for the Bible classroom, where gospel truths are being taught to a very mixed audience. This is especially notable in the current year due to the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. Public schools in western Washington have been learning online, while CPCS was able to reopen in the fall of 2020, and has continued in-person learning for the entire year. This has caused an influx of families to seek in-person education for a variety of reasons, and has brought students of varying worldviews into the classroom.

It is important to note that in addition to the spiritual motivations of CPCS, as a private school, it carries with it the connotation of affluence. While there is a certain portion of the demographic that would fit this description, at the heart of Cedar Park’s admission philosophy is the desire to make Christian education available to every family. Accordingly, in addition to the

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wealthy families who do fit the traditional mold of private school education, there are also many enrolled students coming from families dispersed along a wide financial spectrum. This includes many who are enrolled through the availability of scholarship and aid.7

In further understanding the demographic of Cedar Park’s secondary students it is important to note that the majority come from two-parent households who live in Bothell, Washington and the surrounding area. Out of nearly eight hundred students, one hundred and twenty-five are bus riders with routes between ten to fifteen miles from the school. Within the student body there is also a significant range of faith traditions represented. Nearly half, forty-seven percent to be exact, of secondary students identify as Non-Denominational church attenders, and thirty-percent come from some sort of Pentecostal background. Only five percent of students report that they do not have a church home, and this is often due to the fact that families are new to the area at the time students are enrolled. This leaves eighteen percent of the secondary student body coming from other varying faith traditions: Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Messianic Judaism, Catholic, Orthodox and Seventh Day Adventist.

School Life

In terms of daily school life, there are several instrumental aspects that shape Cedar Park’s secondary students, which range from sixth to twelfth grade. Primary among these activities is the required Bible class. Middle school students take a year-long Bible class. In sixth grade the focus of the curriculum is character development, and then seventh and eighth grade cover the Old and New Testaments respectively. High school students are required to take one semester of Bible each year. These semesters operate as a survey-style rotation of the Life of

7 For the 2020-2021 school year nearly 20% of secondary families are attending on some sort of tuition scholarship.
Christ, Old Testament, New Testament, and Apologetics. Additionally, the weekly chapels align with the content being learned and discussed in the high school Bible classrooms. The chapels are fairly indicative of the tension between the discipleship and evangelistic models. Many students who, possessing a genuine belief in Christ, desire to participate and want to glean from this community experience. Others, lacking demonstration of any fruit of faith, approach this time with engagement ranging from apathy to disdain. This is the same for the Bible classroom as well, although there is more opportunity for engagement in the form of discussion and questions in classroom environments as classes focus on groups of students.

Another central activity to CPCS is the Missions Week that is built into each calendar year. This is a week of service that is modeled after Jesus’ instructions to his disciples that the gospel would go to Jerusalem, then to Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Similarly, during Missions Week students serve at home, away, and abroad. At home service is daily in the community, during the normal school day hours. The category of serving away is comprised of domestic missions trips somewhere in the United States, while the abroad trips are international. Students apply for a type of service in the fall, and then, throughout the year leading up to the trip, students and teacher-leaders meet and prepare for their particular ministry. The student’s ability to articulate his or her faith, as well as the demonstration of that faith on campus, both play a part in what trips the student is permitted to participate in and what type of service he or she is sent out to do.

Cultural Influences

Since this study deals with the demographic, it is important to also highlight the predictable cultural influences that are of particular impact. First, there are the internal factors typical to youth. This would be aspects such as peer opinion and pressure. Embedded in this
layer of influence, there are the normal teenage dynamics of popularity and ridicule. This is true of any high school, and especially in a Christian context where there is a spiritual reality at play as well. If the popular students do not have a personal relationship with Christ, then it is increasingly difficult for those students with a firm faith, but little peer influence, to lead school culture directionally towards Christ. Another internal factor is the tendency of students to pretend or play Christian at school because it is expected within this particular Christian context. Many students have grown up in various Christian communities and know the language and culture of the faith. They know the Bible stories and the “right answers,” even if they do not have an actual faith of their own. They also know the expected behavior and what violations, if caught, would lead to disciplinary action. This is coupled with the idea that many students also want the good opinion of their Christian teachers.

What may have the largest influence is the fact that all students have signed the Christian commitment form. This becomes a factor because when the rules of the school are broken there are consequences, administratively and socially, for not adhering to Christian practice, but this is also a difficult tension to navigate. If a student were to admit that he or she was struggling with particular sins, this would frequently require admission of breaking the school behavioral code. So the student who sincerely seeks help with a struggle has traditionally had to be willing to also face suspension, or even expulsion, as a result. Additionally, students usually break rules together, so, if a student did want to come clean, it could mean also outing the guilt of friends who are not wanting to face consequences. Clearly creating quite the moral and social dynamic, these factors combined can lead to a dynamic of pretense where sin is hidden and questions are ignored. When this occurs, it inhibits actual spiritual development and can potentially create an opinion among students that Christianity is fake and hypocritical. It should be noted that this
dynamic would still be an issue even if the school held to a strict discipleship model. However, it
is certainly magnified in the approach that attempts to blend both discipleship and evangelism.

In addition to the internal factors there are the obvious external factors of culture as well. Teenagers, who live constantly in the worlds of entertainment and social media are inundated
with the cultural dogmas of moral relativism and the progression towards personal choice in all
matters of gender and sexuality. On the general topic of worldview, author and Professor of
Apologetics Nancy Pearcey writes, “Many people who identify as religious or Christian are
being co-opted by the secular worldview, often without realizing it.”8 If this is true for Christians
in general, how much more for Christian teenagers? In fact, Pearcey points out that Christian
young people are especially conflicted regarding the issues of cohabitation, homosexuality and
transgenderism.9 In these creeds of culture, objective truth that teaches some choices are wrong
is seen as unloving. Many students, even from among those who have grown up in Christian
homes, see God’s love as permission to be any way that feels right. Apparently, many think,
even if they do not voice it, that the Bible is indefensible in this area. After all, as culture asks
repeatedly through Netflix and TikTok, how can loving someone be wrong? This canon of
culture is one that creates tension in students and must be, and is, addressed in Christian
classrooms and other community settings.

The Role of the Researcher

In considering the ministry context, it is also important to highlight the fact that this
researcher has a strong and unique relationship with the student body due to the many relational
settings included in her role. As a teacher it is easy to develop a relationship with students

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8 Nancy R. Pearcey, Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality (Grand Rapids,

9 Ibid., 11.
because they are daily in the classroom where discussions, both personal and academic, transpire. Additionally, as the Campus Ministry Director, this researcher has the opportunity to develop relationships with students outside of the classroom through settings such as chapel, missions and service trips as well as in discipleship groups. Furthermore, and beyond any official capacities, this researcher is involved in the life of students. Attending school functions and sporting events to support students has allowed for increased relationship and the opportunity to speak truth into the lives of Cedar Park students. Additionally, this relationship does not just exist with students, but also extends to the majority of Cedar Park parents as well.

Relational teaching is important because it is the number one resource that will make this action research possible. In light of this researcher’s role at the school, and her relationship to students, it will be easy to facilitate a particular class of selected students, with the participating agreement of their parents, in which to compare the proposed curriculum changes and to measure the effectiveness of the changes. Since students are required to take a semester of Bible, there are no extra time constraints put on participants. As private school students, these families are also familiar with the protocols of purchasing class-specific materials, and any materials that students will need for this course will not pose any unusual or increased difficulty. On the whole, this ministry context is the perfect setting for this action research. What is even more beneficial is the fact that the findings of this research possess the potential to enact lasting change and greater impact for the ministry in the long-term.

With all that said, however, the other side of the relational coin is the potential for students to feel like they need to impress the researcher, or desire not to let her down. While this is an area for potential bias that exists within the ministry context, since it is known, there can be measures taken to counterbalance this concern. These measures will be discussed in detail in a
later chapter. Thus, while the influence should be noted, the impact of relationship with students is not a concern, and is actually of greater benefit within the ministry context itself.

**Problem Presented**

The problem is that Cedar Park students professing faith in Christ can graduate from Christian education without the ability to articulate or defend their faith. All Christian schools will have to wrestle with the many factors that influence the spiritual development of their students. However, despite the array of internal and external difficulties, there are many Cedar Park students who do possess a genuine faith in Christ. While this may seem positive at first glance, upon deeper examination it becomes clear that many of these same students, who have been enrolled in Christian education for consecutive years, are still unable to discuss that faith with others. They know biblical stories and they have certain “Cliff-Noted” understandings of key events, but there is no grounded understanding of how the Christian narrative fits together systematically.

They also seem to have very little practice actually articulating their thoughts. Many curriculums focus on presenting information for students to absorb. Students then demonstrate their consumption of knowledge through tests and other non-verbal modes of assessment. However, even when the students who did well on tests are asked to explain, conversationally, the truth that they learned, many are unable. Moreover, many students do not know how to answer the simple types of questions that non-believers would pose to them. All of this reduces to a reality where Christian students do not fully understand why Christianity is true, which seems to suggest that there is a doctrinal deficit in the Christian curriculum used to equip Christian youth. This deficiency is resulting in young adult believers who lack a comprehension
of their faith, and thus cannot defend that faith against common objections.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose for this DMIN active research project is to study how a specific apologetic curriculum increases student’s ability to understand and defend their faith. While there may be other variables which influence this result, content is the foundation of knowledge, and since content is found in curriculum, it is the bedrock. In thinking about curriculum, if it is to fully equip Christian youth, it must first lay the groundwork of doctrinal comprehension, and then install the equipment necessary to defend that truth against counter-cultural ideologies and objections.

In this process of layering and building, the curriculum must also instill the value of a mission mindset. In other words, it must emphasize the fact that while this specific training will benefit the young person receiving it, its primary function is to equip him or her in the mandated commission of all believers, which is to announce truth so that others might be reconciled to God (Matt 28:18-20). It should not be the goal of the curriculum, the teacher or the student to either give or gain a collection of knowledge in order to pass a class. The goal must be for students to understand that the learning is not for individual isolation, but so that as they move into adulthood they will be prepared to fully participate in God’s kingdom work.

**Basic Assumptions**

There are a few basic assumptions that apply to this active research project. The first of these is the premise that the new curriculum will be significantly more effective in equipping students in understanding their faith as well as being able to explain and defend it. Embedded in
this assumption is also the belief there will be an adequate number of students who wish, and are allowed, to participate in this study, and that it will occur in a traditional classroom setting.

The second assumption is that Cedar Park, as an organization, does exist for the purpose of equipping students in the truth. It is essential to recognize this is Cedar Park’s chief aim as a ministry because the organization is also a business. There has been previous mention around differing school models, discipleship and evangelism, and the latter is certainly more beneficial to the school from a business perspective. However, even though this may be the case, it is paramount to point out that the number one aim of the school is to ensure that students know the truth and grow in their faith. A letter from Superintendent Blair Bryant on the school’s website confirms: “The primary basic tenet is teaching from a Biblical worldview in which every aspect of education is screened through the filter of God’s word.” A distinction must be drawn, however, between the fact that the school desires this outcome and the reality that students may not be equipped due to various factors. Additionally, since the organization is comprised of its faculty, it is also assumed that the staff who teach at Cedar Park share this goal, and that a Christian worldview is emphasized in every classroom. Again, this is demonstrated in the letter from the superintendent on the school’s website: “Equally important is hiring teachers who are called by Christ to teach young people and who attempt to live their lives in accordance with His purpose for them. And finally, teaching from a personal perspective which establishes and affirms faith, encourages growth, and provides worthy role models for youth.” Included in this assumption then, is the necessity that every teacher at Cedar Park is a Christian who is mature enough in his or her faith to disciple others.


11 Ibid.
The next assumption pertains to the parents who enroll their student in the course pertaining to this action research. The assumption exists that they desire to see their student grow in his or her faith and ability to articulate that faith. As such, it can also be assumed that they will support their students in the purchase of any extra materials for the class. This may not be the assumption for every parent who has their child enrolled at CPCS, as there are many motivations that lead parents towards private education. However, for those parents consenting and decisively enrolling their student in the course for this study, it is assumed to be true.

The final assumption is that every student enrolled in this apologetics course possesses a genuine faith as well as a desire to grow in his or her ability to represent Christ and articulate the truth of Christianity. This delineation is needed as a parent could desire to enroll his or her teenager in this course, while the student does not fit these parameters. For this course, only those students who self-identify these criteria to be individually true will be contributing to this study. This also means, from a student perspective, that they will approach the course dutifully, including faithful attendance, as well as accomplishing any and all assigned work, even though the grade for this work is not a part of the study.

**Definitions**

This DMIN action research project examines Christian education as well as certain affecting elements pertaining to its efficacy. Thus, it is important to set forth definitions of key terms that will be discussed throughout the proceeding exposition. These terms include Christian education itself, as well as authentic faith and apologetics.

*Christian Education.* This is obviously an expansive concept. Towards a particular definition of this essential idea, the founder and headmaster of Stony Brook School in New
York, Frank Gaebelein, writes, “God’s truth is of universal scope,” and “This being the case, every aspect of education must be brought into relation to it.” While there are many institutions which, generally speaking, may play a part in the process of Christian education, this action research project is using the term, *Christian Education*, in reference to Christian education within the context of the Christian school. As the *Handbook of Christian Education* points out: “The work of the Christian school is an extension of the Christian educational ministries of the Christian home and the church. Its purpose, therefore, is the development of the student in the image of God.” Thus, while the Christian school does not stand alone in the effort of Christian education, it is the sole focus of this research project.

*Authentic faith.* On such a topic, it is important to allow Scripture itself to speak first, and it clearly teaches that to be saved, one must believe in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31). However, it is extremely important to consider what all that belief entails. To be saved an individual must possess an understanding of who Jesus is and how he made salvation possible (Rom 3:23, 5:10, 6:23 and John 3:16). Beyond merely understanding the details, however, this person must also assent to those details about Christ and his Word as the truth (1 John 1:9, Eph. 2:8-9 and John 14:6), and then make the choice to trust in him (Gal 2:20). In other words, salvation is an act of intellectual and willful surrender and submission to Christ. While sanctification is a life-long process (1 Thess 5:23), *authentic faith* leads to noticeable fruit in the life of the believer (John 15:5, Gal 5:22). Thus, while this fruit is not an element of salvation, it is confirmation of it. On this point, University of Notre Dame Professor Matthew Bates emphasizes the Greek word, 

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pistis, usually translated as faith, with the concepts of allegiance and fidelity.\textsuperscript{14} Authentic faith then is belief put into committed practice.

Apologetics. As Professor of Christian Apologetics at Biola University, Sean McDowell point out, apologetics “refers to the defense of what you believe is true.”\textsuperscript{15} Thus, generally speaking, many beliefs have apologetics and apologists, whether formally or informally. In this project, however, the term is used solely in reference to Christian apologetics, defending the truth of Christianity. Many instances throughout the New Testament use the Greek work, apologia, and one of the key texts for this is 1 Peter 3:15 which carries an exhortation to explain why the Christian belief is true.\textsuperscript{16} The expectation is that believers know why they believe in Jesus. The concept of apologetics, as it is referred to in this project, also contains a qualifier of making a defense for Christianity in the most effective way possible. Apologetics then, is inherent to the gospel principle of possessing the willingness and ability to share the truth of Jesus with others. As Professor of Philosophy and Apologetics, Paul Gould recognizes that, when the Apostle Paul was presenting the case for Christianity among the Athenians, he first observed their culture before outthinking them and confronting their wrong belief and idolatry.\textsuperscript{17} Apologetics then, is not only the ability to know the arguments for Christianity, but the ability to contextualize them in culture.


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., xxxii-xxxiii.

Limitations

There are certain limitations to this action research project that need to be addressed. First, this project will gather results only from current Cedar Park students. While it would be advantageous to conduct the study across a wide scope of Christian school students, the only students included are from this one particular school and campus. Thus, the results will be intrinsically linked to the demographics of students and families at Cedar Park.

Another limitation for this action research project is the nature of the school year during the global COVID-19 pandemic. While Cedar Park students are currently learning in-person, public schools in the state of Washington are predominantly online. There is a possibility that this course would transfer to on-line learning, which is not as effective of a learning environment. Additionally, even for in-person learning, the safety requirements make the educational environment dramatically more challenging than a normal classroom setting due to the fact that wearing masks makes it more difficult for students to contribute to discussion or read aloud. They are also cumbersome for many students, and teachers, especially after wearing them all day. Furthermore, while social distancing is necessary, it has changed the feel of the classroom. To accommodate the space requirements, the extra furniture that often made a classroom inviting, is removed to maximize floor space. When everything is so spread out, and intentionally marked off for distance, it impacts the relational dynamic of the class. While this scenario is still more effective than online learning, it is certainly still less effective than the pre-COVID classroom that students and teachers remember.

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18 This is due to the fact that in-person learning is more engaging and thought-provoking. Class discussion over Zoom is often limited due to a variety of factors. These would be considerations such as, internet connection, the varied environments that students are learning from, as well as the distractions that can exist in those separate spaces. Additionally, Zoom discussion lacks the personal connection and generally operates differently than a face-to-face discussion.
Delimitations

In addition to the limitations listed above, there are also several delimitations that should be noted. The first of these is the topic itself. Within the scope of Christian education, and curriculum specifically, there are many avenues which could be appropriately pursued. Several Bible courses at Cedar Park could have their curriculum evaluated for effectiveness, but this research project is erecting parameters around the apologetics course. While not all of the content of the course curriculum will be original to this researcher, the approach and materials will be new to Cedar Park Bible classes.

Second, this researcher will be working with a convenient sample. This convenient sample brings with it two very particular challenges. One is the nature of the researcher’s relationship to the students. In light of the fact that this researcher is relational, and generally well-liked, as well as very involved in campus life, it is possible that students could be influenced in their self-reporting. The possible desire to self-report in a favorable way could influence the results. Another lurking variable with this convenient sample is that those who select to take the course associated with this project may not represent their peers as a whole. It is possible that they will be more spiritually developed and academically advanced than the majority of their teenage counterparts.

Another delimitation is the population for the project. Since students taking the class will be juniors and seniors, this means that some will still be minors and others will have already turned eighteen. Additionally, students electing to take the class associated with this project must also assent to the fact that they have an authentic Christian faith, as well as a desire to grow in their ability to articulate that faith. Students who simply enjoy the teacher’s classes, but bear no fruitful evidence towards the validity of the criteria, will not be permitted to participate.
The final delimitation for this project is the school term selected in which to run the study. The class will run for nine weeks, which is the entirety of the first quarter of the 2021-2022 school year. There are elements that impact each quarter of the academic year, such as sports and holidays. Even with this being the case, however, the first quarter is usually one least impacted by these other influences, and thus should provide a reliable context for the study.

**Thesis Statement**

High school Bible curriculum for Christian schools needs to be seriously examined and improved. That is why this DMIN action research project, presenting a new apologetics curriculum, is necessary. Beyond merely instructing students in doctrinal knowledge, and even preparing them to engage with secular mindsets, this curriculum will be a tool that the Holy Spirit can use to impassion students toward their kingdom callings. Instead of fearing if they will be the minority who retain their faith in college, they will know they are ready to live out their faith wherever life’s journey takes them. If CPCS implements a specific high school apologetics curriculum, then graduates will possess the ability to better articulate and defend the faith.
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

The concept of Christian education is quite broad, and for Christians, all subjects across the humanities and sciences can, and arguably should, be examined and then taught from a Christian perspective. Again, long time headmaster and educator, Frank Gaebelein writes that Christian education fundamentally centers on “God’s truth and the matter of integration.” In the same vein, professor of Christian education, Robert Pazmino, points out, “God as creator is the educator from who all the content of education issues.” Thus, in a general sense Christian education is the transmission of truth in all subjects, allowing students to see how all disciplines point back to God. More specifically, chief among all subjects within the context of Christian education would be that of a student’s biblical instruction. The literature review contains the relevant aspects of Christian education in terms of purpose, content, and desired effect of that biblical instruction.

The Purpose of Christian Education

As previously highlighted, the main thread that runs throughout the literature is that the bedrock of Christian education is truth. On this Pazmino writes: “The pursuit of truth undergirds all education worthy of the efforts of both teachers and students.” In fact, this is one of the

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22 Robert W. Pazmino, *By What Authority Do We Teach?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 120.
distinguishing factors of Christian education itself.\textsuperscript{23} As Gaebelein agrees when he writes, “the seat of truth is God’s revelation, contained primarily in the inspired Word but manifest also in creation.”\textsuperscript{24} To be Christian is to identify with Christ, the embodiment of truth (John 1:14), and accordingly, Christian education must also keep Christ at the center of all its teaching. Any institution that seeks to educate without keeping Christ and his truth as its foremost focus should not label itself as Christian.

Furthermore, this means the purpose of Christian education is that students would know the truth by knowing God and his Word; and thus, their knowing of God would result in them living to make this truth known to others. This is what Gaebelein calls being “rooted and grounded.”\textsuperscript{25} He goes on to define what he means when he writes: “Such a basis for living means much more than doctrinal correctness; it implies increasing knowledge of divine truth, a desire to communicate it to others, and practicing it in daily life.”\textsuperscript{26} Pazmino discusses the same result when he argues that “the student is called to understanding, growth and obedience in relation to God’s revealed word.”\textsuperscript{27} The synthesis here is that the resulting consequence of Christian education is the student’s awareness that beyond belief, commitment to the truth must also be lived out.

**The Mandate for Christian Education**

In this biblical reality of instructing the young in truth, it may be relevant to note that


\textsuperscript{24} Gaebelein, *The Pattern of God’s Truth*, 29.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 55.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.

while the Bible does not specifically use the phrase *Christian Education*, it does repeatedly emphasize ‘the moral and spiritual instruction of believers in general and of children in particular.’ Additionally, this godly education “is to begin in the home,” as the Bible clearly “makes parents responsible for their children and charges them with an educational task.” Pazmino underscores the point with the exhortation from Deuteronomy chapter six, from which he extrapolates that the “content of God’s revelation is to be taught or impressed upon students” at all times. So, Christian scholastic education does not stand alone, but partners with parents and the body of believers in the task of teaching truth to the next generation.

**Christian Education and Curriculum**

In the endeavor of teaching the truth to students, Christian school education must be concerned about curriculum. While there are many considerations to be made on this topic, in order to be effective, both “the content and form of a curriculum” should be “aimed at practical training.” Thus, while curriculums can vary in style and content, the universal purpose should be to train students, not just inform them. Other educators also hone in on this idea of training. One such educator and instructor, Glen Schultz, even goes as far as saying that *training* and *education* can be used interchangeably. Sean McDowell, another long-time Christian school teacher and Bible department head, also focuses intently on the idea of education as training.

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29 Ibid., 8.
31 Peterson, *With All Your Mind*, 95.
32 Ibid., 111.
Together with Christian apologist J. Warner Wallace, they write: “Training – to put it simply – is teaching toward a challenge.”34 They go on to make the analogy that athletes train for a specific event, and that students benefit when their biblical education, or training, is approached the same way.35 If, as previously highlighted, Christian education is fundamentally about truth, then the instrumentation of teaching that verity, curriculum, must motivate towards practice. Christian education must not merely allow students to consume truth, but instead must help them see they are being equipped for a purpose. When this is accomplished, Schultz makes the argument that Christian education really becomes kingdom education.36 The challenge here, is that much of the data collected by the Barna Group suggests that students are not receiving effective training in the truth.37 In studying these same results, apologetics author Natasha Crain suggests the problem is “a lack of robust spiritual training has resulted in a featherweight faith for many of today’s young adults, and that faith is being blown away by attacks from our secular culture.”38 This is why it is imperative to examine the training that Christian youth are receiving.

Curriculum is the vehicle for training students. As Pazmino writes: “A curriculum embodies values in relation to understandings, attitudes, skills, and behaviors chosen to be shared with students.”39 So, if there is a deficit in the training, then it follows that there is a deficit in the

35 Ibid.
36 Schultz, Kingdom Education, 23.
Curriculum. Accordingly, if the goal for students receiving Christian education is to know truth, graduate, and then continue living the Christian life, the content of the curriculum must equip them to that end. This is why Pazmino reiterates that “curricular decision making and planning” must enable Christian students to “own and live out the values they profess.”\footnote{Pazmino, \textit{Foundational Issues in Christian Education}, 243.} Schultz agrees and adds that kingdom education is what shapes an individual.\footnote{Schultz, \textit{Kingdom Education}, 47.} He spells it out this way: “At the foundation of a person’s life, we find his beliefs. These beliefs shape his values, and his values drive his actions.”\footnote{Ibid.} Christian education, and with it the curriculum used, will contribute to a student’s worldview and the lifestyle that is the consequence of it.\footnote{Ibid., 49.}

**Curriculum, the Christian Teacher and the Role of Discipleship**

If curriculum is the vehicle of Christian education, then it is also important to discuss the matter of who is driving it, namely the teacher. Albert Greene, the co-founder and long-time superintendent of Bellevue Christian School, argues, “The Christian school teacher is concerned primarily with helping students become true disciples of Jesus Christ.”\footnote{Albert E. Greene, \textit{Reclaiming the Future of Christian Education} (Colorado Springs, CO: Purposeful Design, 1998), 269.} While Greene is correct in the idealistic sense that this \textit{should} be the aim of every Christian school teacher, the question remains as to whether or not Christian school teachers generally understand this to be their mission. The question must be addressed on two levels. First, and hopefully obviously, Christian teachers must themselves be Christian.\footnote{Gaebelein, \textit{The Pattern of God’s Truth}, 37.} Accordingly, this means their worldview is biblical.
This is a point that Howard Hendricks, a longtime chairman of the Center for Christian Leadership at Dallas Theological Seminary, also makes: “You cannot impart what you do not possess. If you don’t know it – truly know it – you can’t give it.” ⁴⁶ In other words, how can a non-Christian teacher teach Christian truth? How can someone who has not been discipled disciple others?

Next, included with, but beyond mere instruction in truth, Christian teachers must see their role as one of spiritual discipleship. There is an inherent connection here that must be established. Mark Dever, the president of 9Marks, an organization focused on Christian ministry and leadership, contends that “at its core, discipling is teaching.” ⁴⁷ He goes on to develop this argument by pointing out, “We teach all the words that Jesus taught his disciples, and all the words of the Bible,” but, “Interpersonally, teaching occurs as people learn to have spiritually meaningful conversations.” ⁴⁸ In other words, students learn from teachers in a very real and interpersonal way. It is the spiritual life on display in the life of the teacher that allows students to gain a picture of what living for Jesus looks like. While discipleship may typically be considered in the contexts of the home and the church, Christian teachers must be aware that their role extends beyond only the transmission of truth, into the personal, spiritual development of their students. Even the best curriculum will fail if it is placed in the hands of a teacher who does not understand this responsibility.

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⁴⁶ Hendricks, Teaching to Change Lives, 17.
⁴⁷ Mark Dever, Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 38
⁴⁸ Ibid.
Critique of Current Christian Curriculum

The reverse, however, is also true. Poor curriculum, even in the hands of a good Christian teacher, can still fail to teach students to understand their faith and how to articulate it. While there is plenty of poor curriculum out there, what is most helpful in this conversation is to actually highlight two curriculums from leading Christian educational publishers. It stands that if they are at the top of the field, and are still deficient, then what is being observed in this review is accurate. The two curriculums chosen are, *Timeless Truth*\(^{49}\) from the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), and *Biblical Worldview*\(^{50}\) from Bob Jones University (BJU), both of which are presented as high school level curriculum. One important, general comment about Christian curriculum should be made upfront. Neither one of these curriculums claims to be comprehensive. Instead, each has a particular focus. This is not a problem in these curriculums individually, however, it does represent a larger issue within the category of Christian education. Although these organizations publish so much of the Christian curriculum in education today, neither provide any sort of systematic theology teaching across the whole of their Bible curriculums. In fact, the topical nature of curriculums in general is one of the greatest challenges that schools and teachers face. Topics and general surveys of both the Old and New Testament dominate the structure of curriculum, and there is nothing by way of instruction about core doctrines of Christianity. However, putting that universal challenge aside, while both of these curriculums have some merits, they are both inadequate in three essential areas: (1) Actual material, (2) Articulation and (3) Application.

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Actual Material

In speaking of the actual material, there are shortfalls on many levels for both curriculums. For the ACSI curriculum, the material consists of a Teacher’s Resource Guide and a Student Worktext. The first unit on the reliability of the Bible contains about six pages in the Teacher’s Guide that contain very little content for the teacher to actually disseminate to the students. The content itself lies heavily on the student workbook pages which contain no reading, but are merely worksheets. Additionally, these worksheets require only a middle school level of thought as they necessitate little to no critical thinking. For instance, one student page in this same unit is simply a list of Bible verses with the lines provided for students to copy them onto paper. No high school class in any other subject would consider these types of worksheets adequate learning. Each unit ends with options for enrichment and assessment, but again, these are geared for students closer to the maturity of middle schoolers, not students about to go off to college. For example, one of the suggested assessment options is to have students video their own television commercial about truth, and another is to survey people about their opinion regarding truth and experience. These may be single samples, but they are reflective of the entirety of the resource. This is curriculum for the sake of having a curriculum, but it is not effective for any high school classroom, and certainly not a well-educated, young mind. Furthermore, it falls dramatically short of its own aim: “As the publisher of textbooks, trade books, and other educational resources within ACSI, Purposeful Design Publications strives to produce biblically sound materials that reflect Christian scholarship and stewardship and that address the identified


needs of Christian schools around the world.” While the material covered in this curriculum is provided by a Christian scholar and is biblically sound, it falls drastically short in the aim of stewarding the needs of the Christian school and its students.

In terms of actual material, the BJU curriculum also provides a Teacher’s Guide as well as a student book. In the Teacher’s Edition of this curriculum there are actual learning objectives as well as a Scope and Sequence. There is also more content for the student to read in the student book, and it contains review questions at the end of the reading. However, similar to the ACSI curriculum, it is not written at an encompassing high school level. The fact that it is meant more for an eighth grade level is demonstrated in the following sample: “This viewpoint is called evidentialism. **Evidentialists** tend to think that the way to persuade unbelievers that Christ died for them or that God created the universe is to list all the evidence.” The simple sentence structure, the bolded key word and simplistic language are evidence that this is obviously not written for the same grade level as those individuals reading Brontë and Hawthorne or taking Anatomy and Physics. Even the highest thinking question at the end of the chapter, as noted with a lightbulb to the side, asks: “What is the worldview apologetics approach to using evidence?” The answer to this question is simply a sentence found verbatim earlier in the reading. What this demonstrates is a lack of required evaluation, analysis and application. In this way, there is absolutely no critical thinking needed, and barely any thinking in general.

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54 Eckel, *Timeless Truth, Teacher’s Resource, i.*
57 Ibid., 22.
58 Ibid., 21.
Articulation

The second area where both of these curriculums fail is in the area of articulation. Both lean heavily on pen and paper work. While this can be useful to some degree, there is absolutely no focus or emphasis on getting students to actually share and articulate what they are learning. Both of these curriculums lack conversational encouragement or practice in speaking truth with others. For Biblical Worldview in particular, it is clear that the importance of discussing faith in the classroom is of little importance, as it is not listed in any of the over-arching course objectives.59 To be fair, there are discussion prompts listed as one of the suggested teacher strategies.60 However, these are often not prompts that will inspire actual discussion. For instance: “What do secularists see as the source of human value?” and “What do Christians see as the source of human value?”61 These do not actually inspire discussion, they merely ask for simple, verbal answers that are found in the reading. With the BJU text then, where there might be some recognition towards the importance of getting students to articulate truth, the execution still fails. Students are not being equipped for real-world interactions.

With the ACSI text, again there are no overall learning objectives, but there are unit learning goals, and while most of those goals have nothing to do with speaking or discussing, there are a few units that include the skill of summarizing. There is an example of this in the unit entitled, “Show Me What Ya’ Got,” which states: “Students will summarize the importance of God’s Word to someone who has no Christian or religious background.”62 Summarizing can be a helpful, verbal processing tool, however, further into the explanation of how to achieve this

60 Ibid., vi.
61 Ibid., 186.
objective, students are given time to creatively write a letter. This exercise is not bad in itself, as a first step towards articulation, but again it indicates that the actual practice of becoming comfortable vocalizing truth is simply not on the agenda of this curriculum. Without this sort of practice in a safe and supportive environment, it is unlikely that Christian young people will be fully prepared to engage in real life conversation scenarios.

Application

The final criteria where these curriculums fall short is in the area of application. This is where the curriculum should move the student beyond the intellectual understanding to the resulting purpose in his or her own life, and how that plays out in the Kingdom of God. In all of the Timeless Truth curriculum there is only one small unit on the illumination and interpretation of Scripture that even hints at this. There are four assessment options for the teacher to choose from: (1) Writing a poem or song about illumination, (2) Designing a choral reading about the work of the Holy Spirit, (3) Debating the value of questioning authority and obeying authority, and (4) Researching cult leaders. This again demonstrates the elementary nature of this curriculum and also the reality that it is missing any real application opportunity.

The Biblical Worldview curriculum does at least contain a unit on Redemption, in which it discusses the Kingdom of God and concepts of mission and vocation. While it is good that the curriculum at least includes a discussion of these important elements, it is disappointing that the conversation is limited to one unit in the middle of the curriculum. Furthermore, the major concern is that what little conversation the curriculum does include is significantly lacking and

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64 Ibid., 110 – 116.

65 Ibid., 116.

muddled. In talking about the kingdom of God, the curriculum rightly points out that believers have a place in God’s ongoing story, but then, as the unit progresses, the conversation shifts to discuss the culture war in American society, the prosperity gospel and living counter-culturally in terms of sex. The discussion then moves to the issue of matter, technology and language, in which students are warned of materialism, social media, and the importance of our language. None of the things are untrue; instead, the shortcoming is that the essential message of the reading becomes entirely unrelated to God’s story. The overall take away from this reading becomes: Don’t be consumeristic, watch out for technology, use good language and don’t have sex before marriage, and if you behave this way you are a good Christian. It is woefully misguided. Where there was an opportunity to encourage students in their gifts and talents and to explore how those could be used within the Kingdom of God for his glory, students just receive a list of things not to do.

While there are certainly other curriculums that could be discussed, the two critiqued here are popular resources from leading Christian education publishers. As such, they provide a top sample of what is available to Christian schools for biblical education. It is likely that the goal of both the publishers and the authors for these particular curriculums is to teach and equip Christian youth, however, in examining the actual products it is clear that there are some absolutely glaring gaps. It is important to address these failings, because where there are gaps in

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68 Ibid., 161-162.
69 Ibid., 162.
70 Ibid., 163.
71 Ibid., 164-165.
curriculum, there will most definitely be gaps in understanding and worldview. This is why there is a need for a new type of curriculum altogether.

**Christian Education and Worldview**

In considering the importance of curriculum, the formulation of worldview emerges as another theme to be examined. According to veteran teacher and educational consultant Joy D. McCullough, worldviews are “perceptual frameworks – ways of seeing.” So, as Christian education trains a student from Scripture, through the use of proper curriculum, the direct result should be that he or she builds a biblical framework. Recent data and analysis, however, does not seem to confirm this. Kenda Creasy Dean, Professor of Youth, Church and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary, makes an important observation about the worldview of teens when she discusses the data from the National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR): “More than 75% of U.S. teens between the ages of thirteen and seventeen call themselves Christian.” However, this identification of belief seems to also vary significantly from traditional Christianity. Dean explains, “Teenagers tend to espouse a religious outlook that is distinct from the traditional faith commitments of most U.S. religious traditions – an outlook we might call ‘Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.’” This phenomenon was first extrapolated and analyzed by Notre Dame Professor of Sociology, Christian Smith, and Assistant Professor of the same from Clemson, Melinda Lundquist Denton, who in their conversations with youth noted, “The vast majority of the teenagers we interviewed, of whatever religion, said very plainly that they simply believe

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74 Ibid., 204.
what they were raised to believe; they are merely following in their family’s footsteps and that is perfectly fine with them.” These authors put forth the term Moralistic Therapeutic Deist, as used by Dean above, and they explain that it is first “about inculcating a moralistic approach to life. It teaches that central to living a good and happy life is being a good, moral person. That means being nice, kind, pleasant, respectful, responsible, at work on self-improvement, taking care of one’s health, and doing one’s best to be successful.” Second, it is not about the traditional tenets of the faith, but rather it “is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people.” Finally, it is “about belief in a particular kind of God: one who exists, created the world, and defines our general moral order, but not one who is particularly personally involved in one’s affairs – especially affairs in which one would prefer not to have God involved.” It would seem these youth are not opposed to being identified as Christian, but that identity no longer looks the way it used to.

Christian Smith, this time with Patricia Snell, the Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Notre Dame, also analyzing the same data, report similar findings: “Most religious traditions experience declines in the number of their youth who definitely believe in God as they grow out of their teenage years and into emerging adulthood, although those decreases vary widely by religious tradition, with mainline Protestant and Jewish youth undergoing the largest declines.” Smith and Snell go on to summarize that for

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76 Ibid., 163.

77 Ibid., 164.

78 Ibid., 164.

emerging young adults the “vast majority continue to identify as Christian,” while at the same time “most sociological measures of religious practice, salience, and belief also decline over these years.”\(^{80}\) This is in line with the findings of others as well. In another study researching the impact of the college years it was found that: “For some students, new intellectual ideas and development during the college years conflict with spiritual beliefs or convictions, leading to a period of spiritual struggle, uncertainty, and doubt.”\(^{81}\) Lifeway Research also notes that two significant reasons prompting young people to leave the faith were in regard to the “church’s stance on political or social issues.”\(^{82}\) David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins record that their research “shows that most young people lack a deep understanding of their faith.”\(^{83}\)

All this data points to the reality that self-identifying Christian youth emerge into adulthood without a fully developed Christian worldview. To be clear, this does not mean that students have not learned what they have been taught. Rather, the more likely scenario is that what was presented as Christianity, was merely a list of moral behaviors and general niceties and not an actual biblical worldview. This was certainly true in the curriculum previously assessed. Furthermore, it is a stark possibility that a Christian worldview does not denote an actual biblical worldview. On this reality McDowell and Wallace emphasize the importance of intentionality:

“One thing we know about equipping youth with a biblical worldview is that it will not happen


by accident.”\(^{84}\) They go on to say, “If we hope to ready students with a Christian worldview, we need to be intentional.”\(^{85}\) Biblical instruction is key, which is why there needs to be a course correction to the curriculum employed within the walls of Christian education.

Christian Education and the Need for Apologetics

After considering the challenges of worldview, the need for apologetics becomes clear. If Christian education is going to equip students with a biblical worldview, then apologetics is essential for every believer, especially young people still in the process of forming their views. Groothuis and Scott point out that “apologetics is offered not only in response to the doubts and denials of non-Christians. It also fortifies believers in their faith, whether they are wrestling with doubts and questions or simply seeking a deeper grounding for their biblical beliefs.”\(^{86}\) In fact, according to Groothuis and Scott, “conversion is necessarily intellectual and involves cognitive assent to propositions taken to be objectively true. For this to occur, we must understand what the gospel requires of a person and on what basis it requires it.”\(^{87}\) Essentially, there can be no true faith without true understanding.

Professor of Philosophy, JP Moreland adds to this conversation when he writes: “A belief’s strength is the degree to which you are convinced the belief is true. As you gain evidence and support for a belief, its strength grows for you.”\(^{88}\) In this way, apologetics helps students

\(^{84}\) McDowell and Wallace, *So the Next Generation Will Know*, 91.

\(^{85}\) Ibid.


\(^{87}\) Ibid., 39.

hang on to their faith: “Young people have genuine intellectual questions.” It is important to understand that, in this context, apologetics consists of both doctrine as well as answers to common objections. The former President of Southern Evangelical Seminary, Norman Geisler, along with apologetics author Frank Turek explain even further: “While religion certainly requires faith, religion is not only about faith. Facts are also central to all religions because all religious worldviews – including atheism – make truth claims, and many of those truth claims can be evaluated through scientific and historical investigation.” Helping students wrestle through difficult questions and truth claims will not push students away from faith, but rather will reinforce and strengthen their faith. In fact, “Challenge and deconstruction, when coupled with support, can help students grow in their own understanding and internalization of faith.”

Christian students are looking for substance in order to understand their faith.

The lack of comprehension is made clear in the lack of ability to explain a faith for which students claim to identify. Smith and Denton write, “In our in-depth interviews with U.S. teenagers, we also found the vast majority of them to be incredibly inarticulate about their faith, their religious beliefs and practices, and its meaning or place in their lives.” They go on to conclude that: “We do not believe that teenage inarticulacy about religious matters reflects any general teen incapacity to think and speak well…Rather, our impression as interviewers was that

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89 McDowell and McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, xxxiv.
90 McDowell and Wallace, *So the Next Generation Will Know*, 124-125.
92 Hermann et al., *A Faith for the Generations*, 47.
93 Ibid., 47-48.
95 Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 131.
many teenagers could not articulate matters of faith because they have not been effectively educated in and provided opportunities to practice talking about their faith.” Young people then are not at fault here, rather it is the fault of the incomplete education they received. This is why the insufficiencies in Christian education, and specifically curriculum, need to be addressed. Students need to be encouraged and required to discuss what they are learning. When they can discuss it, not only does it evidence a true comprehension, but it also prepares them for actual conversation. Where the data shows young adults unable to articulate, Moreland points out the converse scenario that “when people learn what they believe and why, they become bold in their witness and attractive in the way they engage others in debate or dialogue.” While generally speaking in regard to all believers, it is no less true when specifically focusing on youth. This is what Christian education, and its curriculum, must strive to do.

**Christian Education and Missional Emphasis**

The idea of a true biblical worldview leading to Gospel witness brings about the final theme to be discussed. In all that has been examined in the literature, mission-mindedness is the final and essential theme that emerges. Christian youth need to see the importance and feel the weighty call of the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20). Arguably, this is missing for most of today’s Christian youth: “American young people are unwittingly being formed into an imposter faith that poses as Christianity, but that in fact lacks the holy desire and missional clarity necessary for Christian discipleship.” When students lack a biblical worldview, their life goals will align with and define success from a worldly perspective. However, when they truly

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96 Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 133.

97 Moreland, *Love your God with All Your Mind*, 31.

understand the gospel, students can see their faith and their callings as ways to serve a broken world.\textsuperscript{99} Students need a greater understanding of the Gospel and the awareness it brings that faith is not meant to be lived in isolation, but rather that their participation in the Kingdom of God matters. Michael Gorman, the Chair of Biblical Studies and Theology at St. Mary’s Seminary has this to say about the \textit{Missio Dei} of the Christian life: “The mode by which that salvation is \textit{received} is best described not as \textit{faith} in the sense of intellectual assent but as faith in the sense of full \textit{participation}, a comprehensive transformation of conviction, character, and communal affiliation.”\textsuperscript{100} The goal of Christian education is not merely to teach students about God; rather, the goal is that they would come to know Him and that knowing would include lifelong participation.

In agreement, but pointing out the consequence of the deficit, Christian researchers and authors, Kinnaman and Hawkins explain that the majority of Christian youth do not get a sense of that calling, which fuels their decision to walk away from a faith that, to them, seems empty.\textsuperscript{101} The authors go on to say, “Callings may include science, math, medicine, business, congregational ministry, art, music, or any number of other vocations,” but that “all of these factors must be wedded to a strong sense of mission.”\textsuperscript{102} Knowing God, understanding the gospel and participating in the kingdom should lead Christian young people excitedly into their career paths, knowing that they will be missionaries and ambassadors in the public square. All the truth that is learned will then be put into practice, which is why McDowell and Wallace encourage

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{99} Hermann et al., \textit{A Faith for the Generations}, 136.
\item \textsuperscript{100} Michael J. Gorman, \textit{Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation and Mission} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 23.
\item \textsuperscript{101} Kinnaman and Hawkins, \textit{You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church}, 68.
\item \textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 92.
\end{itemize}
Christian educators to: “Provide young Christians with an opportunity to put truth into action,” and allow them “options to serve others and share truth.” Hendricks puts it simply that in all education there is a “direct correlation between learning and doing.” All of this means that Christian students need to understand that when they do not live out their faith, the kingdom of God suffers. What they believe and how they live that out has eternal consequences not only for them, but also for the world around them. They must understand that Christianity is not an outdated set of moral practices and political positions, but it is the truth that is still changing the world.

The other aspect of missional emphasis that students need to see is in their own teachers. The necessity of Christian teachers possessing Christian belief was previously discussed, however, the point being made here is that students must also see the reality of the Christian life also evidenced in the example of their teachers. This is The Law of the Teacher in any subject, but especially in biblical instruction. A teacher cannot emphasize the missional importance within Christianity, if he or she is not serving and living missionally. This is why Pazmino states, “First and foremost, Christian teachers must have a personal faith encounter with Jesus and a commitment to follow Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives and teaching ministries.” In another work, he explains the responsibility for Christian teachers to an even greater extent: “Just as Jesus incarnated God in his very earthly presence, Christian teachers are to represent the very life

103 McDowell and Wallace, So the Next Generation Will Know, 115-116.
105 Ibid., 17.
106 Pazmino, By What Authority Do We Teach, 65.
and spirit of Jesus in their persons and teaching practices.”107 Dever agrees and emphasizes, “We communicate not merely with our words but by our whole lives.”108 The takeaway here is that students must see the legitimate truth being taught evidenced in the life of the one who is teaching. McCullough claims that Christian teachers are called to make disciples of their students, who then “become faithful disciples of God.”109 So again, the missional life that students are being called to is in correlation to the missional way teachers are living out their own calling and role in the body of Christ. In light of this The Handbook of Christian Education refers to the teacher as the “visible pattern” for the student to follow.110

Additionally, after seeing this fruit in the lives of their teachers, students must also know that those instructing them care deeply for them.111 Lifeway’s research concluded, “Relationships are often the glue that keep people in church or serves as the attraction to begin attending again following a period of absenteeism.”112 Hendricks makes the same case for the Christian classroom by arguing that teaching is not passive; rather teachers have an active responsibility to not only convince their students, but to impact them.113 Teachers, and especially those who teach Bible, must demonstrate the reality of Christ in their own lives, and make enough connection with students for that witness to be personally seen and experienced.

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108 Dever, Discipling, 39.
109 McCullough, Kingdom Living in Your Classroom, 62.
111 Ibid.
113 Hendricks, Teaching to Change Lives, 55.
Conclusion

The literature has clearly spoken. There is a disconnect between the Christian worldview that students possess and an actual biblical worldview. The result is an inarticulate, moralistic faith. One of the major factors for this disconnect is the current Christian education curriculum. While speaking to different aspects of the faith, there is nothing that lays a solid foundation of true Christian belief in a way that students can understand and articulate it. Furthermore, within the curriculums that currently exist, there is no integration of practical articulation and no context for why this matters to the world. The emphasis has been placed on students keeping their faith, instead of encouraging them to share it with a dying world. Until this is corrected, self-identifying Christian young people will continue to live a poor substitute of confused moralism, while remaining unattached and disenfranchised from other Christian institutions.

Theological Foundations

The scriptural mandate for instructing the young in truth has already been briefly discussed. This section will continue in that vein and more fully unpack the theological imperative of instruction and discipleship by looking at prominent examples from both the Old and New Testaments. It is particularly valuable in this study to also note that many of these discipleship relationships existed outside of the biological parent-child relationship.

The Old Testament

While God’s direction to teach the truth to the next generation (Deut 6:7) is clear, the significance of the command is made further by Israel’s failure to carry it out. The context of this
passage is the instruction of godly practice for Israel when they cross into the promised land.114 This is confirmed by the first verse in the passage: “These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess” (Deut 6:1).115 Moving forward in the narrative, Joshua succeeds Moses in leadership and at the end of his life issues the same command to the Israelites now that they are in the Promised Land. This is seen when Joshua tells the Israelites to “be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left” (Josh 23:6). The command from each leader at the end of his life is almost identical.116 What is interesting is that Joshua’s final address to the Israelites also includes the exhortation to “Throw away the gods your ancestors worshipped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord” (Josh 24:14). Apparently, the temptation of the surrounding nations was still a very real threat to Israel. This adds weight to the instruction of Joshua to consistently remember the Word of the Lord. Furthermore, there is also a connection that emerges between remembering the teaching of Moses and a call for undivided loyalty to the Lord.117

In the example of Joshua, an important question is raised regarding the events that transpire after his leadership. The book of Judges speaks clearly about the generation to follow: “After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel” (Judg 2:10). As the story of Israel progresses, this lack of knowing the Lord is confirmed by both the evil and destruction that


115 Unless otherwise notes, all biblical passages referenced are in the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).


117 Ibid., 326.
abounds. In fact, Victor Hamilton, Professor of Bible and Theology at Asbury Seminary, notes that “just about everything ‘after the death of Joshua’ is downhill.”\textsuperscript{118} Even a cursory reading of the turmoil recorded in the book of Judges confirms that the failure to know God led to moral decline. When God’s ways are not followed, what is left in the ruins is a subjective morality that leads to chaos. This is reiterated by the final line in Judges: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit” (Judg 21:25). In other words, everyone elevated their way of doing things to the point that they were their own ultimate authority.\textsuperscript{119} Thus, the example of transition from Joshua to the judges is a stark warning about the importance of transmitting faith to the next generation.

The above explication may represent the importance of training youth in the faith, but the groundwork for theology and apologetics as the foundation of instilling truth must also be addressed. It is fair to point out that what Joshua was encouraging people to remember was the Word of the Lord (Josh 23:6), and that likewise, Scripture is what today’s young people need to know. This research project is not contradicting the sufficiency of Scripture, but it is proposing that the best approach for instilling both an understanding and application of Scripture in young people is through the disciplines of systematic theology and apologetics. Research professor of Bible and theology, Wayne Grudem, argues that “systematic theology focuses on summarizing each doctrine as it should be understood by present-day Christians…Thus a doctrine under consideration is seen in terms of its practical value for living the Christian life.”\textsuperscript{120} Systematic theology then, allows students to come to a consistent understanding and application of what the


\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 155.

\textsuperscript{120} Wayne Grudem, \textit{Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 23.
Bible does teach. Grudem further contends that “the task of teaching all that Jesus commanded us is, in a broad sense, the task of teaching what the whole Bible says to us today. To effectively teach ourselves and to teach others what the whole Bible says, it is necessary to collect and summarize all the Scripture passages on a particular subject.” Thus, systematic theology is the framework through which Scripture is taught and applied.

Individuals, and students in particular, do not live in a Christian vacuum. Even when Scripture is understood and applied personally, it must then be lived out in the real world. The temptation of Joshua’s generation to serve other idols (Josh 24:14-15) is no less a temptation today. In fact, Christian apologist, philosopher, and professor, William Lane Craig writes, “In high school and college Christian teenagers are intellectually assaulted with every manner of non-Christian worldview coupled with an over-whelming relativism…It’s no longer enough to teach our children Bible stories; they need doctrine and apologetics.” This is fitting given the context of the Israelites already discussed during the period of the judges. The responsibility of Joshua’s generation was to pass on the truth, grounded in their knowledge and experience of God, to the next generation. Even if the succeeding generation had heard of the stories of the past, they did not know them in a way that assented to them personally. In other words, it is likely that they saw those stories as simply part of their heritage, and, because they failed to own the truth for themselves, they became a generation of apostates. This is confirmed by later verses speaking of how Israel forsook God to worship idols from lands around them (Josh 2:11-

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121 Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 27.
124 Ibid., 110-111.
12). This should be a very real caution to the Christian church today. Familiarity with the truth does not translate to a personal ownership of that truth. Furthermore, the alluring idols of culture still entice hearts and minds today. Again, this is why theology and apologetics are such relevant tools for teaching truth to the next generation. Both disciplines reinforce the truth of Christianity, and apologetics extends even further, working to tear down the idols of modern secular culture.

Finally, as already noted at the beginning of this section, both Moses and Joshua share an almost identical address to the people of Israel to encourage their faithfulness. What should be further noted is that the relationship of Moses to Joshua is a picture of discipleship. In Deuteronomy 31:7-8 and 34:9, Moses is seen installing Joshua as a leader which is the end result of his discipleship. Leading discipleship authors and senior pastors, Jim Putman, Bobby Harrington, and Robert Coleman outline five stages of discipleship, the final one being the role of a spiritual parent. They go on to define the idea of spiritual parents: “People who are involved in raising up others to join God’s kingdom mission.” Moreover, they emphasize the importance of sharing life in the role of discipleship. This is certainly the case between Moses and Joshua and can be witnessed when Moses brings Joshua with him as he goes to speak with God (Exod 24:12-13). The battle with the Amalekites (Exod 17:8-15) is another demonstration of this, as is the exploring of the land of Canaan (Num 13:8, 14:5-11), where Moses gives increasing amounts of trust and responsibility to Joshua. Professors Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey of Liberty University point out that in biblical times the nature of discipleship consisted of following a rabbi with unmitigated dedication: “They would have to memorize His

126 Ibid., 70.
127 Ibid., 153.
words and replicate His lifestyle. By following Him, they were choosing to be with Him, to learn from Him, and to become like Him.”\textsuperscript{128} This is certainly consistent with what is seen even earlier in the pages of Scripture between Moses and Joshua. When Moses died, Joshua remained faithful and led his generation in the ways of the Lord. This form of discipleship is still needed today; and it is crucial for spiritual parents to teach and to train the next generation by sharing their own lives with them and creating spaces for those younger in the faith to learn and live out their own callings.

The New Testament

This same approach to discipleship is witnessed in the New Testament as well, and is demonstrated significantly in the lives of Paul, Barnabas, Mark and Timothy. Professor and scholar Gordon Fee writes, “Paul often uses parent-child imagery to reflect his relationship to his converts (e.g., 1 Cor. 4:14-15; Philem. 10).”\textsuperscript{129} While neither Mark nor Timothy are necessarily direct converts of Paul, this relational imagery is indicative of the pattern of discipleship observed in the New Testament and thus becomes the design that should continue to be patterned in the faith community today.

To begin, it is easy to think of Paul only in terms of who he himself discipled, but it is important to remember that Paul was a spiritual orphan himself at one point. From the tribe of Benjamin, he had been raised in a devoutly Jewish context (Phil 3:5-6), and had risen in the ranks of the Pharisees after studying with Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). In Acts 23:6 Paul clarifies even further that he is “descended from Pharisees.” While the reader of Scripture is never given

\textsuperscript{128} Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, Disciple Making Is... How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 68.

\textsuperscript{129} Gordon D. Fee, 1 & 2 Timothy Titus, Understanding The Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988), 36.
detailed information regarding Paul’s parents, it is clear that upon his conversion (Acts 9) he has stepped away from the Judaic religion of his family. Thus, it fell to established believers to walk with Paul in the process of his spiritual development. The first is obviously Ananias, who obediently approached Paul in his physical blindness and addressed him as “Brother Saul” (Acts 9:17). Professor and author F.F. Bruce comments on this Damascus experience saying, “There he was visited by Ananias, one of the local disciples of Jesus, who greeted him as a brother and fellow-disciple…The man who had set out for Damascus to work havoc among the disciples there now found himself welcomed into their fellowship.”

Those who are more mature in the faith are clearly responsible for shepherding new converts. At this time in Paul’s life he was dependent on older and more mature believers for spiritual direction, and this is further demonstrated in Paul’s life by his relationship with Barnabas. When Paul went to Jerusalem, and the believers were afraid of him, it was Barnabas who acted as bridge so that Paul might be received (Acts 9:26-27). Bruce again makes the point that Barnabas “acted as Saul’s sponsor and encouraged them to receive him.” There is one final, yet more obscure, passage that is also worth observing in the example of Paul’s life. In Romans 16:13, Paul greets a brother in Christ named Rufus and then turns his attention to Rufus’s mother, saying she “has been a mother to me, too.” In reference to this verse, Bruce states, “The implication is that there was a time when the mother of Rufus had proved herself a mother to Paul.” It is important that readers neither make more or less of this passage than it deserves; however, in light of Paul’s background and conversion experience, a Christian mother treating Paul as her own son, is significant. It also sets the stage for how we see Paul interacting with Timothy. In Acts 16, Paul meets Timothy, a

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young believer with only one believing parent, his mother. Paul decided to take him along in his ministry journey, and later in Scripture we see Paul referring to Timothy as his “dear son” (2 Tim 1:2). Thus, the pattern of discipleship comes full circle. This type of sponsoring between older and younger believers is the narrative framework that has been established throughout all of Scripture. While it is always intended for the young to be discipled, the example of discipleship is not restricted to age alone. Those who have walked with Christ longer should mentor, train and disciple those who are newer in faith.

While the influence of Barnabas in Paul’s life has been highlighted, it is also beneficial to see the impact of his discipleship in Mark’s life. This young disciple and cousin to Barnabas (Col 4:10) initially traveled with Paul and Barnabas in their missionary endeavors. Mark then deserts them part way through the journey (Acts 15:37), and eventually becomes the reason that Paul and Barnabas part ways in future ministry efforts (Acts 15:36-41). When this split occurred, Barnabas took Mark and continued on in his ministry (Acts 15:39). This is significant because later in Paul’s life he actually calls for Mark to come to him. In 2 Timothy 4:11 Paul writes, “Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.” On this point Bruce comments: “Mark developed unsuspected qualities of character and usefulness under his relative’s encouragement, and Paul himself at a later stage was to voice his appreciation for Mark’s presence and help.”¹³² It is not an intellectual leap to believe that Mark’s maturity if the faith was in large part due to the relational and ministry impact of Barnabas. This example again provides the picture of a parent in the faith discipling a child in the faith, and shows the growth of that child into mature, fruit-producing adulthood.

In conclusion, it is clear that Scripture commands the truth to be passed to the next

¹³² Bruce, Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free, 212.
generation and bears witness to the consequences that come when a generation fails to do so. The loss of truth leads to moral confusion, so the young must be intentionally and specifically taught the knowledge and ways of God. Thus, in the example of Moses teaching, mentoring and discipling Joshua, there is pattern set for spiritual parents to invest in the next generation. The same emphasis is seen in the example of Paul who, after being discipled himself, discipled Timothy and Barnabas who, in turn, discipled Mark. While this biblical pattern (Deut 6:7) was initially for the biological family, the full counsel of Scriptures demonstrates that discipleship exists beyond the nuclear family. This type of discipleship must also occur in the church and, by extension, the Christian school. There must not be an assumption that proximity to truth is enough; there must be intentional instillation of truth in young believer.

**Theoretical Foundations**

In terms of practically teaching the truth to the next generation, in the context of the Christian school, there are two common models by which most function. Mentioned in chapter one, these are the discipleship and evangelistic models. A Christian school operating from a discipleship model approaches the admission process with the narrow lens of accepting only students who profess a personal faith in Jesus Christ. In its strictest form, this could even prevent the admission of students from Christian homes who do not personally profess Christ. However, it may be rare in this particular context for a teenager to willingly take that resolve of a stand. The evangelistic model, on the other hand, widens the scope of admitted students to those who are willing to be a part of a Christ-centered education, while not necessarily possessing a personal faith. This model, in its widest form, may not even require that the parents or guardians are professing believers. A perceived goal of this model is to win the students to Christ.
decision that must be made by both models is whether to require students to sign an admission form, sometimes called a commitment form. The form references the code of conduct, and it possesses a challenge in either approach. First, on the discipleship model, if a family is set on their child(ren) attending the school forms can be signed simply because it is expected. Factored into this situation is also the reality that, Christian, has a variety of very casual cultural meanings. With the evangelistic model, on the other hand, students can openly admit they are not Christian, even though they are still required to behave as if they are. Therefore, it is clear that neither model is perfect or without challenges.

These realities raise questions for both approaches. First, as it applies to the discipleship model, there is a possibility that an unbelieving student can still sign the faith commitment form. Whether out of a desire to choose the path of least resistance or from a lack of understanding as to what it truly means to be a Christian, the form itself does not necessarily ensure a true, personal faith. Whatever the circumstance, the question lingers as to the danger of this unsaved student receiving such biblical training. Without a personal belief, an unmoved heart merely accumulating biblical knowledge could lead to a counterfeit faith. In this scenario, Christian education then wrongly becomes knowing Christianity instead of knowing Christ. This may lead to a false security that is spiritually detrimental to the student, as it does not ultimately lead to repentance and salvation. On the other hand, the evangelistic model must question the potential danger of influence from an unbeliever in the community. The tension is one that the church has often wrestled with. Churches have to decide what roles and service opportunities are fitting for a seeking unbeliever. Similarly, parents may decide for or against certain privileges depending on the spiritual maturity of their child. Likewise, the Christian school must also entertain the idea that there may be certain leadership roles or classes where the demonstrated fruit of maturity is a
determining factor. While this of course can lead some to put on a false pretense, this is true of every situation mentioned for all of the above institutions. At some point, there will be anomalies to the safeguards put in place. What must be evaluated is if the safeguards are thorough and consistent. Despite these various models and the practical challenges and realities of the modern Christian school, clearly the biblical mandate is to instruct the next generation in truth. To assess the effectiveness of an apologetics curriculum itself, however, the lurking variables need to be mitigated as much as possible. That is why for this action research project, only students who profess a personal faith and desire to grow will be considered.

Another important observation is that faith is not static. Bruce Lockerbie, a long-time educator at The Stony Brook School on Long Island, states the reality that regardless of which approach is taken, there will be students of varying faith commitments within the walls of each classroom.133 It is also the case that, regardless of how a student enters the school, over the course of years spent learning and growing spiritually, academically, socially, and emotionally, his or her beliefs can change over time.134 Functionally speaking then, the Christian school operates in much the same way that the Christian church and family both operate. For the church, there will be those who attend who are not saved, but the hope is that through attendance and participation those individuals eventually come to faith. Additionally, as parents raise children there may be a time when those children are not believers, but parents teach and train in the hope that their children will accept the truth of the gospel. This is no less true for the Christian school.

One other aspect of the Christian school model that should be discussed is that it is at once both a ministry and a business. According to Lockerbie, this means, “It is a service to

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134 Ibid., 111.
parents and their children and at the same time a marketplace competitor that must succeed in attaching and retaining its clientele.”135 This can impact the motivations and decisions of the school on every level, ranging from who is admitted, to which programs are pursued, to how chapel services are conducted. One of the greatest challenges presented by this ministry-business is the hiring of faculty. To be an alluring school, there needs to be a wide range of athletics and extra-curricular activities as well as specialized courses such as foreign languages and the arts. It is a difficult task to hold to the standard of Christian maturity in hiring faculty when these courses demand an instructor with such specialized training. On the other hand, it is also too easy for some Christian schools to fill their classrooms with pastors from an attached church who have no gifting to teach.136 These are all factors that influence the model of the Christian school.

Personal Philosophy

In exploring the different models of the Christian school, it is important that the position of this action researcher, and thus this action research project, be made clear. After all that has been presented, there can be no doubt that the biblical mandate is first and foremost given to parents to instruct their children in the truth, and that the purpose of ministries outside the home, such as the church and the Christian school, is to support parents in this responsibility. In light of this, it is necessary to approach Christian education as a discipleship model. With this, however, the decision of school admission should focus its consideration primarily with the parents and secondarily with the student. If the Christian school is going to support parents in the task of training their children, then there must be at least one professing Christian parent in the family unit. A family that has neither professing parents or a professing student is not a family who is

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135 Bruce Lockerbie, Christian Paideia, 158.

136 Ibid., 158-159.
truly seeking Christian education, but rather they have some other motivation. Similar to the way non-believers would not be made members of a church, it should be observed that private education and Christian education are not the same entity. The necessary exception, however, for a student to be admitted when parents are unbelievers is if the student has come to faith individually, and the parents are willing to provide a Christian education based on the student’s faith.

While Christian education fundamentally necessitates a discipleship model, that is not to say that there is no place for evangelistic realities in the daily life of the Christian school. As previously mentioned, simply because one or both parents is a believer, does not mean that their student is a believer. This is especially true for students who begin at a Christian school in their formative grades and continue at the same school while they grow. Additionally, as highlighted above, there are a variety of reasons and motivations for parents to claim Christianity, in order to secure their student’s admission. The perfect admission process that would prevent this entirely simply does not exist. Thus, even within a discipleship model, there is still a need for educators to be evangelistically minded. That said, the primary function of the teacher in a Christian school is to disciple students and equip them in their walk with Christ.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The problem has been clearly presented: Professing Christian students can graduate from CPCS without understanding and possessing the ability to articulate and defend their faith. This active research project proposes that one of the key reasons for this deficiency is the reality that Christian school Bible curriculum is itself deficient. While it is noted that there are multiple variables interwoven in this problem, if it is true that the largest factor is curriculum, then it stands that implementing a better curriculum will produce better results in student knowledge and ability.

In order to evaluate the outcome of the action research project, there are two main criteria that need to be assessed. The first is how successfully a student can explain key elements of the Christian faith. The second is how well he or she can defend Christianity from common objections. In order to accomplish this evaluation and gather meaning, this researcher will use coded questionnaires. This will allow the researcher to gain an accurate understanding of what students know and what they can express. The intervention plan for this proposal is to offer a course to juniors and seniors at CPCS that will use a specified apologetics curriculum. The Equipped curriculum is specifically designed to cover the categories of doctrine, defense and delivery, and will require students to purchase two specific textbooks.137 This curriculum will necessitate that students not only understand the material but also possess the skill to articulate it. At the end of this course, students will have grown in their ability to speak about and defend their faith. The option will then remain for the school to offer this course in an ongoing fashion.

The apologetics curriculum being tested in this project is designed by this researcher, with three pillars: Doctrine, Defense and Delivery. The first section, Doctrine, covers certain essential elements of Christianity. The next unit, Defense, provides evidence for the reasonableness of Christianity. The aspect of Delivery is woven throughout each unit, emphasizing the ability to share the learned knowledge conversationally. This emphasis also serves to relate the importance of the commission each believer carries to share the gospel.

The content of the curriculum is not all original to this researcher but also relies on age appropriate resources on these subjects. The aim of this particular curriculum is to engage both the mind and the heart of the student so that he or she may be fully equipped to live for Christ (Eph 4:12).

**Intervention Design**

After IRB approval was granted, this researcher first sought the participation of the Cedar Park community via an email to all the families who would have junior and senior students in the Fall 2021 quarter. This included nearly 150 families. The project was also promoted directly to students who fit the criteria in both Cedar Park Bible classes and chapels. The involvement
process included three tiers of completion. At the ground level, there was the general interest sign-up, produced by the email that was sent out, as well as from the announcements given directly to current students. From this pool of generated interest, candidates were then reviewed by this researcher to evaluate if they fit the parameters of the project, namely that they profess an active faith and personal desire to learn. Next came the second tier of the process where students and parents could ask questions and make decisions about enrolling in the class attached to this study. At this stage there was also a consent form that needed to be signed by the parent and the student. This form was even required of students who were already eighteen, as they were still students. When the consent form had been submitted the third and final tier could be completed. This entailed the student’s registration for the corresponding Cedar Park Bible course connected to this action research project and the curriculum being presented.

All this took place in the spring of 2021. Over the summer the school counselor worked to arrange the schedules of students wanting to participate in the project so that this course would fit with their other academic requirements. There were some students who signed up for the test group whose schedules could not accommodate the second period time slot of this project. Some of those students then signed up to be part of the control group, and some ended up not participating at all. Additionally, in the fall of 2021, this researcher promoted the control group opportunity to juniors and seniors in the regular apologetics courses that would be taught from the curriculum normally used by the school. Students who were interested took home a parent form and had to return it after getting it signed by a parent.

Both the test course and the control course began with a theological assessment to quantify what biblical knowledge students possessed, as well as how well they responded to some general objections to the faith. The assessment also included a self-ranking question
regarding how confident the students felt discussing their faith with others. After the theological evaluation was given, the coursework for both groups was taught according to the nine-week scope and sequence for each. At the end of the quarter, students in both the test and control groups were given the same theological assessment to complete again.

Both the test group and the control group classes began class on August 31, 2021 and finished on November 3, 2021. During the course of the project, seemingly significant observations that would not be captured on the questionnaires or represented in the numerical data were documented in a research journal. These notes were then weighed and revisited after the data had been collected and relevant factors were included in chapter five.
At the end of the course, the data from the questionnaires was compiled for both the test and control groups. This allowed the researcher to tangibly compare the results and accurately assess the effectiveness of this new curriculum. The data clearly speaks to the level of the student’s knowledge and ability to discuss what he or she knows with peers. While this intervention design proved effective, there are two particular ethical issues that do need to be addressed. The first is that within this convenient sample, students already had a very strong relationship with this researcher, so it is likely that this relationship produced a greater desire to learn than may typically be present in a regular academic class. It is also possible that this relationship caused students to overstate their confidence which impacts honest reporting. Both the test and control group were impacted by this relationship, but the bias is most likely greater in the test group. The nature of the theological assessment inherently limits this condition in that all questionnaires require students to demonstrate their knowledge. The only subjective question was the final question on the assessment that asked students to assess their personal confidence. While the assessments were graded blindly, meaning that during the grading of the evaluations this researcher did not know the name of the student or whether he or she was from the test or control group, the student names were unmasked after the fact. This allowed the researcher the opportunity to adjust for any student who may have ranked their confidence higher than what their skill and knowledge could support. In evaluating the scores and marked confidence, however, this researcher did not find any outliers in the test group. There was one outlier in the control group, but that will be discussed further in the next section.

The second ethical factor that this project had to account for is the fact that students are not usually allowed to switch classes once the semester is underway. The option to leave a study,
however, is something that needed be available to all participants.\textsuperscript{138} The resolution to this was securing a special administrative allowance that a student may switch classes out of the class attached to the study and into a non-involved class at any point in the semester. This became a moot point, however, in that no student involved in any part of the study had a desire to withdraw over the course of the quarter. While these factors, if left unchecked, could present ethical issues, the awareness and proactive action discussed above nullified any influence they may have had on this project.

**Implementation of the Intervention Design**

This action research project was implemented exactly as the intervention was described in the above section, but there were two minor challenges and adjustments made over the course of the quarter due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The first challenge was that of student absences due to either contracting Covid-19 or being a close contact of someone who tested positive for the virus. Quarantine, and thus distance learning, was required for students in both of these cases. This challenge impacted students in the test and control group fairly equally over the course of the project. The test group had two more students than the control group who had to quarantine over the course of the quarter. Additionally, the second challenge was school wide. Due to the number of positive cases on campus, the entire secondary campus transitioned to online learning for a short period between October 20, 2021 and November 1, 2021. This again, affected both the test and control group equally. It did, however, change the dates of the project. The final date of the quarter was originally supposed to be October 29, 2021; however, due to the difficulty and

impact of online distance learning on students, the quarter was extended until November 3, 2021 on which date the final theological assessment was given.

Once both theological assessments were complete for both groups, this researcher took steps to ensure they would be graded as blindly as possible. All the assessments for both groups were numbered “1,” for the assessment at the beginning of the quarter and “2” for the final assessment at the end of the quarter. The ungraded assessments were then given to the Math Department Head who used a calculator to create random numbers. These numbers were used to create a coding system where each student, in both the test and control group, was assigned a random number, and then that same number was listed on both of their evaluations. Once the random number had been assigned and each assessment labeled, the math teacher took blue tape and covered the name on every assessment. To ensure absolute anonymity from this researcher, he also used a dark pen to color over the tape so that even if held to the light, there was no possible way to see or read the name on the evaluation. The math teacher then kept the master list in his possession so that this researcher had no access to it while grading the assessments.

The evaluations from both groups were then combined so that all first assessments from both the test and control group were in one pile, and all final assessments from both groups were in another pile. This researcher then graded all of the first assessments and then all of the final assessments. All the evaluations were graded on the same day to ensure a consistent application of the grading system. This researcher then sorted the evaluations so that both assessment “1” and “2” with the same coding number were together and the scores could be compared. When the grading was finished, this researcher was given the coding key so that scores could be sorted into the correct categories for the test and control groups. In light of all this, attention can now be turned to the results from this action research project.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Before looking at the collective results of this action research project, there is some specific ground work that must to be laid, namely how to understand the scoring of the theological evaluations. To do this, the next section will highlight and dissect one question from the category that assessed how well students understood their faith and then one question from the category that assessed how well students could defend their faith. In the process of looking at these two questions, there will be an explanation of how the scoring worked, as well as a micro-comparison between the control group and test group. After this foundation is in place, the results as a whole will be analyzed.

Scoring the Evaluations

All of the theological and apologetics questions on the assessment could be scored with a zero, one, two, or three. A score of zero was given when there was no answer or it was completely wrong. A score of one was given when the answer was fair, containing basic elements of the correct answer, but remaining incomplete and possibly including some information that was incorrect. A score of two was given for answers that were good, meaning they contained important information, were mostly complete and had no incorrect explanations. An answer with a score of two could even include some theological language. Finally, a score of three was given for excellent answers that were thorough, contained theological language, examples and possessed a solid amount of content from class discussion.

Micro-Comparison on Question Four

The best way to practically understand the scoring system is by way of real answers from the evaluations. Here is an example from question four, which is part of the category of questions assessing how well students understand components of their faith: “Explain, as thoroughly as
you can, what Christians mean by Trinity?” On the second evaluation student 81335393 wrote: “The word Trinity is theological but it refers to God being three persons in one. He is one in essence but also three persons, like a triangle where there are three distinct angles that make one triangle.” This answer received a score of three because it provided both an excellent definition and an applicable example. Furthermore, it demonstrated an understanding that the word Trinity is a theological term used to describe God as He is. For the difference between a score of one and two, the following answers from student 51313251 can be compared. On the first theological assessment this student answered the same question in the following way: “God is 3 in 1 Father, son, Holy Spirit.” This answer received a score of one as it is the most simplistic understanding of the Trinity. On the second evaluation, this same student answered question four more specifically: “God is 3 in 1 (father, son, Holy Spirit) 3 distinct persons who are all equally and fully God.” This answer received a score of two as it demonstrated an element beyond the most basic, but still could have been more thorough. In terms of answers that scored zeros, most were a result of unanswered questions. This was the case for student 23326241 who left question four blank on the first assessment.

In a micro-comparison looking at questions four specifically, it is actually interesting to note that on the first theological evaluation a majority of students in both the test and control groups answered question four in a similar fashion. Out of forty-nine total study participants, thirty-six received a score of one on question four in their first assessment. This means that 80% of total participants possessed only a fair or extremely basic understanding of the Trinity. Their answers were typically limited to the fact that God is three in one or Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What heightens the significance of this statistic is the fact that, again, out of forty-nine total participants, forty of these students have been at CPCS since at least their freshman year of high
school, although many have attended much longer. Since participants were either juniors or seniors, this was at least the third or fourth Bible course for 82% of the students in the class attached to this action research project, and yet their understanding of one of the fundamental aspects of God’s nature was still incredibly minimal.

The starting base of knowledge with question four on the first assessment is where the similarity between the control and test groups end. When the growth of knowledge on this particular question regarding the Trinity is examined, there is a significant difference between the groups. For the control group, on the first assessment there were three evaluations that received a score of zero. There were eighteen that received a score of one, and there was one assessment that received a score of two. For the same question on the second assessment, there were two assessments that received a zero, sixteen that received a score of one, and four that received a score of two. There were no scores of three in the control group on either assessment.

On the first evaluation in the test group, there were two scores of zero and similar to the control group there were also eighteen scores of one. In addition, there were seven scores of two and no scores of three. On the second assessment though, there were no scores of zero and only two assessments received a score of one. Furthermore, there were ten scores of two and fifteen scores of three. The results are displayed in the tables below:
While both groups started with the same amount of assessments receiving a score of one, the above tables demonstrate that there was very little movement for scores in the control group, as the grey and blue lines of each assessment stay relatively the same. In the test group, however, there is much improvement in score. The blue color, representing the second assessment, moves to represent higher scores on the second assessment in the test group. It is clear that, whereas the control group’s knowledge of God’s nature remained mostly the same, the test group’s understanding grew significantly.

**Micro-Comparison on Question Sixteen**

From the other category of questions that required students to respond to a common objection to Christianity, here is an example of the scoring. On the first exam student 93418221 gave no answer for question sixteen: “How would you respond: The New Testament is myth and story?” Thus, this answer received a zero. On the second evaluation the same student answered, “Myth needs a lack of eyewitnesses and a long time to develop. Many of the NT authors claimed to be eye-witnesses and it only took about twenty years between events being recorded and some of the earliest recordings to take place.” This answer received a score of three because it relayed an understanding of what myth is, and the specific parameters surrounding the New Testament that contradict it being labeled as myth. For the same question, on the second evaluation, student 23236362 received a score of two for the following answer: “There is a very short amount of time between when it occurred and when it was recorded.” This is a fundamental aspect of the correct answer, it contains no incorrect information, but it is not thorough enough to be scored as a three. Finally, on the second evaluation for this question, student 61539362 answered: “The New Testament has many historical findings and evidence that proves it to be true.” This answer
received a score of one, as it understood the historical nature of the New Testament, but failed to highlight any specifics or explain any of the evidence that it mentioned.

For the first assessment given in the control group, there were sixteen scores of zero and six scores of one on this question. There were no scores of either two or three. On the second assessment, there were only eight assessments that received a score of zero, twelve assessments scored a one and two assessments scored a two, although there were still no scores of three earned. In the test group the overwhelming majority, twenty-four of twenty-seven students, scored zero on the first assessment. The other three students scored a one. On the second evaluation, however, the results were much different. There were no scores of zero and only four scores of one. Additionally, there were eleven assessments that scored a two and twelve that scored a three. The comparative data between the two groups is represented in the tables below:

It is clear from the movement reflected in these tables that while there was some growth in the control group, the scores between the first and second evaluation remained relatively the same with scores towards the bottom of the chart. In the test group, however, scores improved dramatically as is reflected by the movement to the higher scores on the top of the table.
Points Possible

Both questions four and sixteen serve as selective examples of the types of questions on the theological evaluation and the way they were scored. There were twenty-four questions on the assessment that required this grading scale, meaning that a student could score anywhere from 0 to 72 points on the evaluation. The final question required students to rank their confidence in discussing and defending their faith. This confidence ranking ranged from zero to five. A rank of zero indicated that a student had no confidence. A rank of one meant that he or she had very little confidence. A rank of three was selected if the student felt he or she possessed average confidence and a rank of four signaled above average confidence. Finally, a rank of five indicated a level of extreme confidence. In terms of the practical handling of the numeric data, it should be noted that all numbers were rounded to the nearest whole number. This researcher used the principle that any number with a remainder of .4 or lower was rounded down to the nearest whole number, while a number with a remainder of .5 or higher was rounded to the next highest whole number. With this understanding of the scoring in place, attention can now be turned to the specific data from this action research project.

The Collective Results

While looking at the scoring and examining particular questions has provided beginning insights, looking at the collective results will paint a more holistic picture. For the first assessments of the control group, the total number of points earned was 205. There were twenty-two students in the control group, so the average starting score for this group of students was nine points out of the possible seventy-two. The total amount of confidence points was forty-five, and thus the average starting confidence for this group was a score of two. At the end of the
quarter, the total amount of points earned on the second evaluation for the control group was 421, bringing the average score up from nine to nineteen. This is an average growth of ten points. The total number of confidence points rose to seventy-one, and, out of twenty-two students, this brought the confidence average up one point from an original comfort of two to a final confidence of three.

For the test group, the first assessment had a cumulative point value of 282. With twenty-seven students in this group, the average starting score was ten, and this was out of seventy-two possible points. The total points for starting confidence was fifty-one, meaning that the starting confidence for this group was also a score of two. At the end of the quarter, the total points earned when the evaluations were added together was a score of 1,346. Again, with twenty-seven students in the test group, this means that the average score on the second assessment was fifty. This demonstrates an average growth of forty points. The total amount of confidence points for the test group at the end of the quarter was ninety-seven, which made the average ending confidence a score of four. In comparing the results between the two groups, it should be observed that, while the test group started with an average grade of one point higher than the control group, in the context of seventy-two possible points, the scores of nine and ten equate to nearly identical starting points in terms of knowledge. At the end of the quarter, however, the test group had increased their knowledge by four times the amount as the control group, and the confidence of students in the test group had increased doubly when compared to students in the control group. The results are easily observed in the following table.

Table 3.1 - Group Averages Assessment Questions 1 -24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Test Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starting Score</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ending Score</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is also interesting that both the control group and the test group started with the same average score of confidence in discussing their faith. The average score from every student at the start of the quarter was a two. At the end of the semester the average confidence level in the control group rose to a three, while in the test group the confidence doubled to a four. This is displayed in Table 3.2.

While every student in this action research project increased in knowledge and grew in their confidence level, the results clearly show far more significant improvement in the test group.

It is also helpful to examine the individual results on questions one through twenty-four within in each group. While the group averages provide one aspect of the collective results, the individual growth of students in each group is also important to analyze. After analyzing the data at the individual level, it becomes clear that student scores in the test group reflect a more consistent and universal growth. This data is reflected in the tables below, and it is clear that the blue lines, which represent the starting scores for both groups are relatively the same. In the control group, though, there were several individuals who did not greatly improve. This fact is somewhat obscured if only analyzing group averages. Since there were certain students in the control group who did score higher on the assessment, it in turn drove the average higher as well. On the other hand, in the test group, significant growth is observed from every student.
### Table 4.1 Individual Results
Questions 1-24 - Control Group

| 32718223 | 61746323 | 23423273 | 31216243 | 51227363 | 51816373 | 74612142 | 32423262 | 21428233 | 61539362 | 43426353 | 51635361 | 52318241 | 41712181 | 22733253 | 23716361 | 73744381 | 94422173 | 51914232 | 63526221 | 61227321 |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|

*Assessment 1* | *Assessment 2*

### Table 4.2 Individual Results
Questions 1-24 - Test Group

| 53416332 | 81222173 | 73217381 | 23612323 | 41532161 | 32622152 | 23236362 | 32226374 | 61232173 | 51215353 | 21714243 | 23326241 | 22236362 | 51313251 | 21213211 | 81335393 | 51218222 | 23748132 | 93418221 | 31612173 | 21942123 | 22225363 | 62334332 | 41914353 | 21237321 | 22528321 | 62528321 |

*Assessment 1* | *Assessment 2*
In addition to the individual results for questions one through twenty-four, it is also imperative to look at the individual results on question twenty-five where students scored their own confidence level. While there are several students in the control group who reported the same confidence level at both the beginning and end of the quarter, there is only one student in the test group who personally assessed a higher confidence level. Again, the tables below display a more universal growth for students in the test group in contrast to the more sporadic growth evidenced in the control group.

Table 5.1 Individual Results - Control Group

| 32718223 | 33743273 |
| 61746323 | 23423273 |
| 31216243 | 51227363 |
| 51816373 | 74612142 |
| 32423262 | 21428233 |
| 61539362 | 43426353 |
| 51635361 | 52318241 |
| 41712181 | 22733253 |
| 23716361 | 73744381 |
| 94422173 | 51914232 |
| 63526221 | 61227321 |

Table 5.2 Individual Results - Test Group

| 53416332 | 81222173 |
| 73217381 | 23612323 |
| 41532161 | 32622152 |
| 23236362 | 32226374 |
| 61232173 | 51215353 |
| 21714243 | 23326241 |
| 22236362 | 51313251 |
| 21213121 | 81335939 |
| 51218222 | 23748132 |
| 93418221 | 31612173 |
| 21942123 | 22225363 |
| 62334332 | 41914353 |
| 51237321 | 22528321 |
| 62528321 | 61227321 |
So, while the group averages reflect growth for both the control and test group, the increase was more individually consistent in the test group. This is true for both the assessment questions as well as for the student’s confidence rankings.

Lurking Variables

In the endeavor to apply these results and fully understand the effectiveness of the curriculum being tested, there are two lurking variables that should be addressed. The first is the incentive to perform well that is intrinsic to the pre-existing relationship between this active researcher and the student participants. This variable is mitigated, to some degree, because a similar relationship existed in both the test and control groups, and because students in both groups wanted to perform well on the second evaluation. There did, however, seem to be a heightened sense of this desire in the test group. While the evaluation instructions to both groups were the same, the test group knew that their class was a trial for a new curriculum designed by this active researcher. As a result of this knowledge and the nature of the relationship with the researcher, there seemed to be an overall greater sense of focus and weightier impulsion to display everything they had learned when the test group took the second evaluation. While it is not a quantifiable aspect of the research project, the desire to perform well seemed stronger in the test group, and thus it is a factor that should be considered. It should be noted though, that this desire and focus is not something that existed throughout the duration of the course. Students in both groups came to their respective classes as teenagers do, often tired or distracted, and the general day-to-day life in both groups was relatively the same. The only difference in the tone of the groups was on the last day when the second evaluation was given.

The second variable that must be highlighted is the intelligence and ability levels between the two groups. This was not a variable that this researcher had considered going into the project,
but, in light of the significantly different scores between the test and control group, data was gathered retrospectively to compare grade point averages (GPA) between the two groups. After the data had been collected, blindly assessed and the results had been established, this researcher pulled the GPA data from the student database used by the school. A cumulative GPA is not always an accurate or comprehensive reflection of a student’s intellect or ability, as a very intelligent student can also be extremely lazy, and missing work can impact a grade. Additionally, the opposite can also be true. A student who possesses only an average intelligence can earn a high GPA because of the depth of his or her work ethic. Those nuances noted, a GPA does provide a basic point of comparison between the groups. In the control group, the average GPA was a 3.0, whereas the test group had an average GPA of 3.5. Since it appeared that the higher average in the test group may have impacted the results, it became important to compare answers and growth between the two groups with students who had the same GPA.

Accordingly, this researcher compared the GPAs of each group selecting students who had either the same or a similar GPA, and then compared their overall growth. In the control group the following students were selected: Student 74612142 with a GPA of 2.4, student 22733253 with a GPA of 3.0 and student 43426353 with a GPA of 4.0. In the test group the following students were selected: Student 21213121 with a GPA of 2.4, student 6233432 with a GPA of 3.0 and student 32622152 with a 4.0. These students were selected solely on the criteria that there were exact matches in GPA from both the test and control group. When the results for each of these individual students was compared, what became clear was that regardless of the GPA, every one of the test group students performed better than their counterpart with the same GPA in the control group. For the students with the 2.4 GPA, the control group student 74612142 grew by eight points between the first and second evaluation. In the test group, student
21213121 demonstrated growth of twenty-six points. For the students with the 3.0 GPA, student 22733253 from the control group increased by nine points between the evaluations. In the test group, student 62334332 increased by twenty-nine points. As for the students with the 4.0 GPA, in the control group student 43426353 greatly improved, showing a twenty point increase on the second evaluation. However, in this same GPA bracket in the test group, student 32622152 improved even more significantly with a forty-five point increase from the first evaluation. From this comparison it would seem that GPA is not a factor that affected the results.

While the direct GPA comparison between overall results seems to be clear, there is one additional and more specific set of data that could still be reviewed: a direct comparison between students with the same GPA between groups, on the specific questions from the evaluation where both curriculums attempted to teach the same concepts. These were questions fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen which required students to explain the origin and reliability of Scripture. If there were a section of the evaluation where the control group curriculum could close the gap, it would be reflected best in these three questions. Results are recorded in the table below:

Table 6.0 - GPA Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Control Group Score GPA 2.4 / Eval 1 Student 74612142</th>
<th>Control Group Score GPA 2.4 / Eval 2 Student 74612142</th>
<th>Test Group Score GPA 2.4 / Eval 1 Student 21213121</th>
<th>Test Group Score GPA 2.4 / Eval 2 Student 21213121</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control Group Score GPA 3.0 / Eval 1 Student 22733253</td>
<td>Control Group Score GPA 3.0 / Eval 2 Student 22733253</td>
<td>Test Group Score GPA 3.0 / Eval 1 Student 62334332</td>
<td>Test Group Score GPA 3.0 / Eval 2 Student 62334332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control Group Score GPA 4.0 / Eval 1 Student 43426353</td>
<td>Control Group Score GPA 4.0 / Eval 2 Student 43426353</td>
<td>Test Group Score GPA 4.0 / Eval 1 Student 32622152</td>
<td>Test Group Score GPA 4.0 / Eval 2 Student 32622152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This comparison of answers between students with the same GPA reinforces the conclusion that GPA was not a significant variable. This was proven by student 21213121 from the test group. This student had a GPA of 2.4 and yet earned a total of five more points on questions fifteen, sixteen and seventeen than student 22733253 from the control group with a GPA of 3.0. Furthermore, student 62334332 from the test group had a GPA of 3.0 but scored the same amount of points on these questions for the second evaluation as student 43426353 from the control who had a 4.0. In light of this, it does not seem that GPA was a contributing factor in the success of the test group’s growth over that of the control group.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this action research project was to evaluate the success of a new apologetics curriculum. The need for this curriculum was forged in the reality of Christian students who were graduating ill-equipped to explain and unable to defend their faith. This project was then built on the conceptual bedrock that professing Christian young people want to understand their faith and possess the skill to defend it, but that the tools they are being provided are dull and ineffective. This project hypothesized that, if students were provided instruction from a better curriculum, which at its core possessed a better approach, then student knowledge and capability would improve. As seen in the previous chapter the results of this action research project speak to the validity of this contention. With those results in place, further implications can now be extracted as the project is collectively reviewed and evaluated. To accomplish this the original assumptions, confidence reports, current literature and options for further study must considered, after which a final conclusion can be made

Assessing Assumptions

While the results of this research both prove the foundational premises of this project to be true and prove the curriculum to be successful, it is valuable to appraise the study as a whole in order to draw conclusions and apply them correctly. In stepping back to consider the entirety of what has been learned, the most effective starting place is the initial assumptions that were made about this project in order to measure legitimacy and gauge the implications of their explanatory power. After this consideration adjustments could be made for future study. There were four original assumptions leading the construction of this project that now require reflection: (1) Curriculum successfulness, (2) Cedar Park Christian School’s mission, (3) Parent
support and (4) Genuine faith of students. Each of these areas provide insight into the gleaned results and have bearing on further exploration of the same topic.

Curriculum Success

Within the main assumption that the curriculum would be successful, there were several, co-dependent factors. The first of these factors was the assumed intentionality that the project would take place, which it clearly did. Embedded in this basic belief, however, was the thought that the Cedar Park Bible classes attached to this project, for both the control and test groups, would be taught in a traditional classroom environment. What could not be known prior to the start of the fall quarter was the rise in school enrollment coupled with the delay of a new building’s readiness for use. The existence of these two circumstances led to space challenges for the entire school and for this project in particular. Previously possessing one of the larger classroom spaces, this researcher was moved to a gym that had been altered into temporary learning spaces. This occurred so that two teachers could share the other larger classroom space. Shortly after the start of the quarter, however, another teacher offered to exchange spaces, and the classes attached to this project were relocated to a commons space, an extension of the main floor landing space off of the foremost hallway. To convert this space into an academic environment and to keep the visible distractions to a minimum, mobile dividers were used to create a wall between the hallway and the large alcove. A teaching smart board was also brought in so that technology could be used for presentations and notes during class discussion. While the commons environment was certainly more productive than the gym had been previously, it was still far less effective than a traditional classroom. This was, in large part due to the difficulty hearing students during a class discussion, as well as the difficulty of hearing the media used in such a loud open space. Additionally, while the dividers were helpful there were still many
distractions in this location, and despite significant efforts to mitigate these challenges, there was no way to diminish them completely. To some degree, both the control and test groups were impacted equally since both groups shared the gym and commons space for the same amount of class time. The difference in impact arises in the fact that the control group curriculum was not designed to be as discussion oriented as the test curriculum, and thus the test curriculum bore the weight of this inconvenient location in a greater way. Even though it does not appear that the classroom situation had a large bearing on the outcome, it is worth noting that this was an unanticipated scenario that strayed from the expected assumption. It also raises an important question: If this project were to be completed again, in a traditional academic environment, would the second set of results differ from those found in this project? Since the design of the test curriculum depends on discussion and articulation to a greater capacity than the control curriculum, if the results varied upon a second trial it would seem likely that a better space would favor the test group. However, to truly confirm this hypothesis, the project would need to be conducted a second time.

Another challenge to the assumed environment of this project was a two week period where the classes containing both the control and test group had to transition to on-line learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Again, this deviation impacted both groups to the same degree in terms of time away from the classroom, but this time of distance learning had a far greater impact on the test group because of the class’s discussion based approach. While classes with a higher extent of verbal interaction thrive in an academic, in-person setting, they are extremely difficult to implement through an online interface, such as Zoom. This is partly due to the impersonal nature of not being in the same space, but it is also heightened by Wi-Fi issues of speed and connectivity that create delays as individuals attempt to participate in discussion
together. For CPCS, this time of remote learning took place towards the end of the first quarter as both groups were preparing for final unit assessments. In the control group, students were reviewing notes and working from a study guide to prepare for a written assessment. The test group was preparing for their panel assignment, which, out of all elements of the test curriculum, required the most verbal interaction with their peers. If there was a group whose performance on the second evaluation would have been impacted by this short disadvantage, it would have been the test group. So, while this factor did not derail the project, it was an unexpected development that ran contrary to the assumption, and there is no way to know for sure how it may or may not have impacted the results without a second round of study. That said, however, it is likely that the impact was minimal.

While the classroom environment was an inherent factor to the initial assumption, in the context of the project as a whole, it played only a supporting role, whereas the curriculum was the main focus of the project. Consequently, the greater results in the test group can be attributed to the different design and approach of the Equipped curriculum purposed for this study. The previously reviewed control group curriculum\(^{139}\) was designed with a teacher text and student workbook. For clarity, the workbook did not include any actual text for the students to read and thoughtfully engage with, but was instead pages of activity sheets and desk work called Interacts.\(^{140}\) Additionally, even though CPCS only purchased this curriculum five years ago, the curriculum itself is twenty years old, and thus much of the writing style was no longer germane to a contemporary teenage audience. This is an important aspect of the curriculum to discuss as


\(^{140}\) Eckel, *Timeless Truth, Student Worktext*, 1.
CPCS relies on Christian publishers for its resources, and even though this curriculum is from two decades ago, ACSI has no newer apologetics curriculum available for high school juniors and seniors. Unlike the control group, the test group curriculum was composed with two underlying principles. The first principle was the core belief that students needed to read and learn from grade-level source material that was then used as the anchor of class discussion. The second principle was the conviction that students should be required to verbally articulate their learned knowledge. This oral response demanded more than simply class discussion, as it is impossible for all students to comment on all the questions raised during class conversations. Instead, this approach required the apologetics class to be approached similarly to a foreign language class where the expectation of communicative ability is paramount. From the beginning, students were expected to articulate as much as possible. These were the two motivating forces behind the test group curriculum.

In evaluating the effectiveness of these principles, both observations from the course of the study and the results themselves confirm the efficacy of this methodology. Requiring grade-level source material that was to be read prior to class discussion greatly improved the quality and quantity of student questions and comments. Generally speaking, at CPCS, when classes have books for students to read, there is often either only a class set or students are checked out a book to use that will later have to be returned to the school. This means that students cannot write or mark in the resource. In the apologetics class for the test group, students were required to buy their own books, and part of the assignments for the class were chapter annotations, which had very specific components. These components, such as including at least one thoughtful question per page, highlighting only main points, and writing side summaries for a certain amount of paragraphs, made it difficult for students to fake annotations which in turn created a
more substantial assurance that students were actually reading and thinking about the material. Hearing and discussing the material during a lecture unattached from any assigned reading, as is usually the case in Cedar Park’s apologetics classes, did foster some learning. This was proven by the control group’s evaluations, but it was also clear to see that the extent of that learning was significantly less then when students were required to discuss what they had read and annotated. The ability to have students read and think about the material prior to class discussion proved extremely more profitable to the discussion and produced measurably better results. In fact, in light of this project, CPCS is making the transition to student-owned texts for its higher level Bible courses. This transition is a shift away from their traditional Bible curriculum model, comprised of a teacher’s guide and classroom set of student workbooks, and toward individualized source material that students can use and then keep with them when they leave for college.

While the grade-level source material was a large reason behind the curriculum’s success, of even greater importance was the emphasis placed on verbal articulation. The entire curriculum was built around the panel assessment that required students to verbally communicate their knowledge. Students did not know what questions they would be asked during their panel, and this required them to not only understand the course material, but also be prepared to explain it. Many of the students in the test group did not enjoy the public speaking aspect of the class, and many found this particular exercise nerve-racking. However, after the first panel was complete, students admitted that the panel assignment did require them to be prepared in a way that a written test did not. In discussing this panel with the test group, this researcher presented the analogy of an athlete on a sports team with teammates who were unbelievers. This forced students to consider a specific scenario where, even if they knew the answer or wanted to share
the gospel, they would find it difficult to articulate the truth clearly and convincingly if they had never practiced beforehand. Many students in the class had encountered this scenario in some way or another, and not only did discussing this situation create buy-in for this new, unwelcome assignment, but it also kept students pointed towards evangelism. Assessments in an academic setting are typically only about a student’s grade, but this verbal requirement kept the attention pointed toward kingdom living and the expectation that students should be participating in the gospel calling of sharing their faith even now. Additionally, even though students were responsible for more content in the unit two panel, after completing the first one, students were generally a little less nervous and many spoke with more confidence. This study proved that there is a direct correlation between incorporating verbal articulation, as done through the panel requirement in the test curriculum, and increased knowledge and ability to explain and defend the Christian faith. It is also reasonable to connect this approach to the doubled confidence scores among test group participants. The conclusion to be drawn in light of the success of this curriculum component is that all apologetics curriculums should incorporate this spoken criteria. This also implies that Christian schools can aid this change by being mindful that not all curriculum is the same and providing detailed feedback about curriculums. If schools truly desire to teach and prepare their students, there must be a change in how they go about that mission. Christian publishers depend on Christian schools, so there is a responsibility on these schools to demand better materials.

Cedar Park Christian School’s Mission

At the beginning of this project, it was assumed that the mission of Cedar Park Christian School is to equip students in truth. The number one way this is accomplished is through the
hiring of teachers who share this goal. This assumption became both a proven and needed reality during the course of this project. In the middle of the quarter, as the test group was advancing through the curriculum, there was a unit on faith and science. As the class read the assigned chapters and progressed through the discussion, many students had questions on the material. There was one particular student for which this unit was incredibly important and of weighty interest. Initially raised in an atheistic context before coming to faith and attending CPCS, this student was still ingrained with an evolutionary worldview. As a newer believer, and an incredibly intelligent individual with aspirations for a future in the field of science, this student had very complex questions. Some of these inquiries extended far beyond the scope of this curriculum and to a depth that exceeded the full knowledge of this researcher. This could have become problematic, not for the project itself, but more significantly for the student who was seeking to understand. However, because the school endeavors to hire teachers who can carry out its mission, both teaching and discipling its students, the Science Department Head made himself available to engage with this student. He answered rounds of questions that responded to the detailed nature of the science itself and were also wrapped with the intentionality of discipleship in a way that pointed to God’s existence and wisdom.

The questions and content exchanged between this teacher and student were beyond what would have been recorded on the theological assessment, so in that way, it did not have bearing on the numerical data this project yielded. It does, however, speak to this project in two relevant ways. The first, as already mentioned, is that it confirms the assumption about the mission of CPCS. This by implication should encourage all Christian schools to ensure that they are hiring teachers equipped to teach and disciple students. While the major components of the Literature Review will be discussed again shortly, it is appropriate to reiterate here the exhortation of
Howard Hendricks, the Chairman of the Center for Christian Leadership at Dallas Theological Seminary, that teachers cannot pass on what they do not possess.¹⁴¹ Not only do Christian school teachers need to be highly knowledgeable about their subject, but they must also be mature believers possessing the ability to disciple those younger in the faith.

The second inference that can be made from this student-teacher exchange regards the depth of questioning that arose from the grade-level source material that the students were reading in the test group curriculum. When students have actual resources to read, annotate and interact with, it deepens their thinking and heightens their engagement. The rudimentary approach of workbook-driven curriculum, often still employed in high level Bible curriculum, does not encourage this type of reflection. Bookwork can too easily become busy work. They type of work generates grades quickly and is generally an easier format for a teacher when compared to a lecture or discussion format, but, as demonstrated from the results of the control group, it is not as effective. Schools who want to fulfill their mission of training young people need to put actual resources in the hands of biblically-minded high school students. No other core subject class in high school would routinely operate without a textbook, and it should not be the case for a Christian apologetics course as well.

Parental Support

In addition to the classroom setting and the mission of the school, there were also two assumptions regarding parental support within this action research project. The first was the basic agreement that parents would support the purchasing of the required materials, which equaled a fee of twenty-five dollars. All the materials were purchased prior to the start of the quarter so that source material could be available and in the possession of students at the

¹⁴¹ Hendricks, Teaching to Change Lives, 17.
immediate beginning of the project. All students brought the money to purchase their materials within the first few days of class. At a private school where there are fees for many items at the beginning of the year, this was not an unusual occurrence, and while it does indicate a basic level of parental backing, the second assumption is where this support becomes even more visible.

The second assumption spoke to the parental motivation for wanting their student enrolled in the test group, specifically the supposition that parents desired their student to possess an understanding of Christianity and an ability to defend it against common objections. Simply stated, parents should have agreed to allow their students to participate out of a desire for their student’s faith to grow. There was no tangible goal for quantifying parental support at the outset of this project, as the curriculum was being tested and not the family dynamic. However, very early in the project parents of a student in the test group were on campus and made a point to find this researcher in order to express excitement at how much their student was learning. Additionally, these parents were encouraged by the excitement for learning the test group student was demonstrating. By way of example they explained that conversation at the dinner table almost nightly revolved around the content being learned in the apologetics class attached to the test group. This was encouraging, initial feedback, and even though there was no guarantee that additional, similar encounters would occur, this researcher decided to keep a tally in the project’s journal notes for every time a parent in either group offered feedback about a student learning. Over the course of the quarter-long project, fourteen parents of students in the test group provided unsolicited feedback of this nature. This equates to 52% of parents whose students were in the test group. Conversely, zero parents provided feedback of this nature for students in the control group.

While this data is simplistic and somewhat tangential, it is relevant since neutrality of
opinion does not usually lead to the effort required to make a comment. The excitement from parents of those in the test group does seem to safely convey that a majority of these parents possessed a desire to see their students grow in their faith. It is important though to heed caution in extending this data too far or placing too much weight upon it. The fact that parents from the control group did not comment on what their students were learning does not mean that (a) those students did not learn, (b) that they did not discuss what they learned at home, or (c) that parents of students in the control group are indifferent to their learning. Safe conclusions in light of this information seems to be that first, there was nothing noticeably different in the parent perception of those in the control group that warranted a unique response to the teacher. Conversely, many parents of those in the test group did make observations of increased learning that resulted in increased interest on behalf of their student that resulted in discussion at home. From this, a second deduction is also reasonable, parents of students who demonstrated heightened interest were excited by the growth they saw. Since it is the case that they were excited by this, it lends support to their assumed motives for wanting their student in the test group. This could easily lead to a subject of further study, but that will be discussed in the appropriate section below.

Genuine Faith of Students

While parental support was important, the final assumption to be reviewed was the faith of the participants themselves. The first step in assessing this assumption was to see which students were interested in participating. While student interest did not necessarily denote faith, it was a pivotal point of initiation. There were originally thirty-five students interested in being part of the test group, and with a class that potentially contained a greater amount of work than the alternative, it is a dynamic worth considering. In addition to the quantity of the initial sign-ups was the speed at which students wanted to enroll. Twenty-five out of thirty-five of the initial
test group sign-ups were submitted within forty-eight hours of their availability. These facts seem to confirm that there are Christian teenagers who sincerely want to understand their faith and possess the skill to defend it. Another element that confirms the faith of these students is the fact that several of those students who did end up participating in the test group had to relinquish select or advanced elective classes such as drama and choir to do so. This desire, and at times sacrifice, speaks to the value of this class from a student perspective. Once the parent consent forms were returned, each student who wanted to participate was asked two questions. The first sought to determine their motivation for wanting to participate, and the second asked about their testimony and current relationship with Christ. From the responses to these questions, thirty-two of the thirty-five student names were submitted to the school counselor in the spring of 2021. Once their class schedule and other academic requirements were considered, there were five students whose schedules could not accommodate their participation. This is how the test group arrived at a final roster of twenty-seven. In the fall of 2021, twenty-two students followed the same process and signed up to participate in the control group.

This researcher assumed that the criteria questions each student had to answer would ensure that only students possessing a genuine faith and true desire to learn would be able to participate in either project group. What became a troubling realization is that every student who answered the criteria questions, gave responses that satisfied this researcher. In retrospect, however, it is possible that a few students knew their Christian school context well enough to know what the expected answer would be, regardless of genuine conviction. Normally, knowledge of the students and observation of how they had demonstrated engagement on campus could have played a greater role in deciding whether or not students could participate. Due, however, to the Covid-19 pandemic and the reduced amount of in-person learning the year
and half leading up to this project, this type of interpersonal knowledge was limited. So, while gauging a teenager’s faith is never easy, it was made increasingly more difficult by these factors. To be exact, there are two students in the test group, and one student in the control group who, while initially believed to be sincere, over time created some uncertainty as to the genuine condition of their faith. There was never any drastic evidence or pointed interaction that caused concern, but rather subtle and subjective attitudes that raised yellow flags by the end of the project. Ultimately, these students remained as participants since there was nothing drastic or verifiable to justify the removal of their data. This, however, is an area of the study that could be fortified in future study. If the project was completed again, the addition of a recommendation requirement submitted from a ministry leader or former teacher would be beneficial. While there is no way to absolutely know someone’s heart condition, this extra layer would have been one more tool in evaluating the fruit of a student’s faith.

**Confidence Assessments**

In addition to the project assumptions that have now been reviewed, there are other conclusions from both the process and the data that should be drawn. One of these findings is in regard to the self-awareness of the participants. The self-assessed confidence rating brought to the surface an issue of concern: while these rankings were subjective, what emerged from the data was a picture of Christian teenagers in the control group who, on the first evaluation lacked awareness, and on the second became over-confident. There are a few considerations on this point that are worth mentioning before the findings themselves are discussed. The first is that the context of the evaluation was directed at assessing student growth, and this could have unintentionally prompted students to report themselves with more confidence than they truly felt.
Second, it is also possible that since students could answer a question on the second evaluation, which they had previously left blank on the first, they actually did feel more confident. Despite these factors, the data should be taken into account in order to sound an alarm to the potential consequences that exist if the confidence scores are indeed a true reflection of how students feel about their faith comprehension.

Despite the potential hidden variables just described, the first evaluation within the control group marked a noticeable lack of awareness. This data is represented by Tables 5.1 and 5.2 in chapter four. In the test group, students very consistently ranked themselves with below average confidence on the first evaluation. In fact, twenty-six out of twenty-seven students marked themselves with a score of two or lower. The initial confidence ranking in the control group was much more sporadic. While the overall average on the first evaluation in the control group indicated a below average starting point, this was not the case for every individual student in that group. Out of twenty-two participants in the control group, ten students ranked themselves with at least average confidence. This means that 45% of the control group felt reasonably confident to defend the Christian faith. The reason this is alarming is the fact that, out of those ten students, the highest score on the first assessment was fifteen out of seventy-two. Additionally, six students who ranked themselves with average or higher confidence scored less than ten points out of seventy-two. It is difficult to understand how students felt so confident when they scored so low and had so many unanswered questions. One is left to consider whether proximity to Christian truths and familiarity with Christian culture bred a false confidence.

While the lack of awareness is weighty, when the confidence scores from the second evaluation in the control group are factored in, the robustly increased confidence becomes problematic. While the average growth in the control group was a one point increase, there were
several individuals who reported a wider growth margin. For instance, student 51227363 marked a zero confidence in the first evaluation but indicated a confidence of three on the second evaluation. This student’s score on the first evaluation was a thirteen, and the score on the second evaluation only increased to an eighteen. This is only a five point difference on an evaluation worth seventy-two points, and yet the student reported going from no confidence to average confidence. Similarly, student 51816373 reported a confidence of three on the first evaluation, but an extreme confidence score of five on the second evaluation. This was despite the fact that this student’s score only improved by eleven points, ending with a score of eighteen out of seventy-two on the second evaluation. Unlike the test group, who had higher assessment scores to back up the higher confidence rankings, the data from the control group seems to display a negative correlation between what students knew and how confident they felt. The difficulty with this is not only that students lacked the self-awareness to gauge their knowledge accurately, but that many students seem to possess a false sense of security that is worth deliberation. What happens to these students if they are no better equipped by the time they go off to college? Suppose they engage with worldviews that differ from their own poorly shaped and supported framework, what then? The research suggests that when their confidence cracks, from cultural assault or even from temptations that undercut obedience, the faith of these students will crumble. According to Barna, 61% of twenty-somethings who no longer practice Christianity were churched at one point as teenagers.¹⁴² This is a disheartening statistic, but looking at the numerical disparity between the knowledge and confidence found in this project, it is not surprising. Moreover, if these spiritually confident and doctrinally uneducated teens somehow

persist to adulthood with their faith, how effective will they be for the kingdom of God?

Revisiting the Literature Review

As demonstrated above, when the research on this subject is revisited, there is strong corroboration between the writings from within the academic community and the findings of this action research project. If CPCS fails to address their curriculum problem, it will have failed in its mandate and purpose. As was previously pointed out from long time Christian educator Frank Gaebelein, the goal of Christian education is to root students in their faith so that they possess the desire to communicate truth to others.\textsuperscript{143} Grounding students in their faith requires students to be convinced of Christianity’s truthfulness, especially by way of evidence.\textsuperscript{144} This is why the confidence rankings in the test group are more trustworthy. The students in this group had higher scores on the second evaluation and displayed such a growth of knowledge that it is safe to say that they are more grounded in their faith. Likewise, the fact that they are more grounded, possessing a greater understanding of why they believe that Christianity is true, leads to a greater confidence in sharing the truth with others. This also agrees with the study conducted by researchers Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, who concluded that young people were not deficient in the capacity to articulate what they know, but rather have been starved of actual instruction.\textsuperscript{145} This action research project affirms their conclusion as demonstrated by the first evaluation given to all forty-nine participants which reflected a doctrinal ignorance and inability to defend the validity of Christianity. As demonstrated by the second evaluation,

\textsuperscript{143} Gaebelein, \textit{The Pattern of God’s Truth}, 55.

\textsuperscript{144} J.P. Moreland, \textit{Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason In the Life of the Soul} (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997), 74.

\textsuperscript{145} Smith and Denton, \textit{Soul Searching}, 131.
however, this was not a capacity issue on the part of the teenagers in the study. The students in the test group demonstrated the capacity to both understand and express their comprehension once they had been instructed sufficiently and trained accordingly. This capacity was not limited to students with a high GPA or skill for public speaking, as those with a lower GPA demonstrated an effective aptitude to articulate the truth as well. While the control group failed to demonstrate as much growth on the second evaluation, that has been adequately proven to be the failure of the control curriculum, not a student deficiency. When students were equipped properly they were capable of providing thoughtful and articulate responses.

In addition to competence, when students come to understand their faith, and are trained in conversationally answering common objections to this belief, they become more ready and willing to engage in the kingdom calling of making disciples. The theological malnutrition of so many Christian teenagers has led to a missional misunderstanding of the purpose of what the Christian life is all about.\(^\text{146}\) This confusion was confirmed by the results on question twenty-four on the theological evaluation. This question asked, “If Christianity is true, what application does that have for how you live your life?” On the assessment given at the start of the quarter not one of the forty-nine total participants wrote anything about sharing the truth of the gospel with others. On the second evaluation, there were four students out of the twenty-two in the control group, who answered in a way that reflected the need to share their faith with others. Many answers from the control group were similar to student 63526221 who wrote, “I live my life how God plans for me to live my life. He has a plan for me and I choose to follow him.” The answers on this question in the control group tended to be honest, but still self-focused, even on the second evaluation. They expressed a desire to follow God or have a relationship with him, which

is obviously good, but failed to connect to the wider scriptural mandate to share this truth with others.

In the test group, however, eighteen students on the second evaluation included a component about sharing their faith in their answer. For example, student 62528321 wrote, “I would live my life to have a relationship with God, and spread the gospel to others so they can also be saved.” Likewise, student 22225363 wrote, “It should drive me to want to share the gospel with others and bring them into relationship with Christ. This means doing what the Bible says and living a life according to what God says. I should look different than non-believers.” Out of twenty-seven students, the fact that eighteen answered this way means that 67% of the test group understood the commissioned nature of their faith, as compared with only 18% in the control group. Again, this confirms what was demonstrated from the current research. The more Christians, and especially teenagers, understand their faith and are made ready to discuss it with others, the greater evangelistic awareness they possess. This is why it is so important for apologetic curriculums to be effective. When they fail to train Christian youth, the kingdom as a whole suffers.

**Further Study**

Although this action research project has come to a conclusion there are a few areas that could warrant further study. One of these areas, which has already been alluded to, is parent involvement. While it is primarily the church that, when done well, approaches ministry with the whole family in mind, it seems the Christian school could benefit from this as well. In both types of ministries there is a need for parents to understand that they are not outsourcing the Christian education of their children to an institution, but rather that these Christian organizations exist to
support them in their God-given responsibility to train their children in truth. It would be a beneficial area of further study to take the *Equipped* curriculum and complete the project again, but this time testing the aspect of parent involvement. In this future scenario, the control group would operate as the test group did in this project, whereas the test would include a parent component, intentionally supplementing the learning at home. This could include reading the chapters as a family and having certain questions that are answered out of family discussion. Parents could then sign the assignment sheet as evidence that this engagement was completed as a family. From the fact that so many parents attached to the test group commented on what their students were learning in this project, it is a reasonable extension to expect that there would be parent interest for this kind of further study.

Additionally, another possibility for future study is to move beyond the curriculum and actually test the readiness of students who have learned from it. Cedar Park Christian School has a Missions Week every year, when not restricted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It would be rewarding for the students and a noteworthy exercise to have students practice engaging with non-believers and then evaluating whether their projected confidence matched their in-person, real life experience. Since the self-ranking confidence scores are fairly subjective, a project that included a final, actual engagement would give those scores a more substantive meaning. This engagement would also provide a motivation beyond just the student’s grade for why they are working hard to become equipped, one that is more aligned with kingdom living and the calling of every believer.

Finally, one last area of future study is to see how this curriculum could be adapted for church use. From the start there are two challenges that would need to be addressed. The first is that many evangelical churches have shifted away from the traditional model of Sunday school...
in order to accommodate multiple services. This means that the primary youth focus in the church is usually during the mid-week youth service, and this brings the second challenge to the forefront. Since kids are in school all day, and because there is always the goal of students bringing their friends to church, which is good, there is a growing trend in the culture of many youth groups around the country to focus on games and entertainment. While fun and community are important aspects of a youth ministry, solely emphasizing these components makes any kind of in-depth Christian education difficult. As Apologist Frank Turek points out, “If bands, pizza, and Pepsi could equip church youth with the intellectual firepower to defend Christianity, we wouldn’t have so many kids fleeing the church. What you win kids with, you win them to.”\footnote{Frank Turek. \textit{Stealing from God: Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case} (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), xxvi.} Not every Christian teenager has the opportunity to attend a Christian high school or even a Christian University, and therefore it seems a fruitful endeavor to examine what role local church youth ministry can play in providing this type of systematic and apologetic teaching so that young people can grow in their understanding and capacity to interact with others about faith.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The pages of Scripture confirm the biblical mandate to instruct youth in knowledge of God. The pages of research presented in this study confirm the need for better Christian apologetics curriculum. As demonstrated, when the curriculum fails, students also fail. This failure is not only academic in that they do not understand why Christianity is true, but it is also a spiritual failure as students miss the connection regarding the part they are to play in God’s plan of redemptive the world. As this action research project has proven, however, when there is an
effective curriculum, students not only become equipped in the knowledge of their faith and their defense of it, but they grow in their personal response to live it out. For Cedar Park Christian School, the choice is clear: the school will be adopting the curriculum outlined in this project. The question is left as to how other Christian schools will respond to the data, the need, and the students in their midst.
Bibliography


McDowell, Sean and J. Warner Wallace. *So the Next Generations Will Know: Preparing Young


APPENDIX A

Theological Evaluation

Student Name: _____________________________  Student Code: ________

1. What is the “Authority of Scripture” and why does it matter?
2. What is the “Sufficiency of Scripture” and why does it matter?
3. What are some of the attributes (or characteristics of God)?
4. Explain, as thoroughly as you can, what Christians mean by Trinity?
5. What is the soul?
6. Explain what sin is and why it is a problem.
7. Why is punishment for sin necessary?
8. How could a loving God send people to Hell?
9. What is the Incarnation? Please explain as thoroughly as you can.
10. If Jesus was born, how can he be eternal?
11. In the incarnation did Jesus cease to be God?
12. Please agree or disagree, and then explain your answer: Faith and Science are enemies.
13. Please explain thoroughly: Why is it reasonable to believe that God made the universe?
14. Why does Materialism fail to explain the origin of life?
15. How did the Bible come to be?
16. How would you respond: The New Testament is myth and story?
17. How would you respond: It’s really not reasonable to believe a book with so many errors?
18. How would you respond: The resurrection of Jesus is not reasonable?
19. What alternatives to the resurrection are there, and what are their strengths and weaknesses?
20. What is evil?
21. How does Christianity explain the existence of evil and provide a solution?
22. What is the problem of discussing evil from an evolutionary worldview?
23. As a Christian, what bearing does Heaven have on the reality of pain and suffering?
24. If Christianity is true, what application does that have for how you live your life?

25. Please indicate by checking a box below: What is your comfort level with discussing Christianity with a non-Christian?

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APPENDIX B

Theological Evaluation – Rubric

1. What is the “Authority of Scripture” and why does it matter?
   Scripture/Bible is from God, God’s words are true and unchanging

2. What is the “Sufficiency of Scripture” and why does it matter?
   God’s words are complete and true, No new revelation needed

3. What are some of the attributes (or characteristics of God)?
   Perfection, Eternality, Immutability (He Doesn’t Change), Omniscient, Omnipotence, Omnipresence, Holiness

4. Explain, as thoroughly as you can, what Christians mean by Trinity?
   God has eternally exists, one in essence/being-three in person (Father-Son-Holy Spirit),
   God is three persons, Each person is fully God, There is one God, equal but distinct

5. What is the soul?
   Immaterial aspect of our nature, relates to God, lives forever, rational faculties (will, intellect, emotions)

6. Explain what sin is and why it is a problem.
   Failing God’s perfect moral standard/law in act, attitude and nature, Disobedience, legal
guilt before God, separates us from God, we cannot resolve it on our own.

7. Why is punishment for sin necessary?
   God’s righteous standard demands it, legal guilt/legal penalty

8. How could a loving God send people to Hell?
   “To send” removes the accountability of people’s choices, God allows people to choose,
in God’s love he has done all he could to save people, A good judge must judge

9. What is the Incarnation? Please explain as thoroughly as you can.
   Jesus is fully God -fully man in one person, forever, sinless, human nature with a human
   body/soul, divine nature by which he bore the weight of sin’s penalty

10. If Jesus was born, how can he be eternal?
    The eternal Son took on human nature, his human nature began in time and continues

11. In the incarnation did Jesus cease to be God?
    No, God cannot stop being God, fully God and fully human at the same time

12. Please agree or disagree, and then explain your answer: Faith and Science are enemies.
    Not enemies or mutually exclusive, false dichotomy, faith is not blind, science of origin is
a theory, scientists at war with God does not mean science is at war with God

13. Please explain thoroughly: Why is it reasonable to believe that God made the universe?
   The complexity of the universe points to design and a designer, randomness of chance is not reasonable, something that came to be would have a cause

14. Why does Materialism fail to explain the origin of life?
   Life from non-life is problematic, morality from material is problematic

15. How did the Bible come to be?
   Inspiration, the process of transmission, canon, manuscripts, translation

16. How would you respond: The New Testament is myth and story?
   Dating of New Testament, manuscript evidence, witnesses

17. How would you respond: It’s really not reasonable to believe a book with so many errors?
   Reconstruction of manuscripts, error in grammar, contradiction vs. difference, doctrine unaffected

18. How would you respond: The resurrection of Jesus is not reasonable?
   Understanding miracle, if Genesis 1:1 is true and there is a God, then all miracles in the Bible are possible, only unreasonable if materialism is presupposed, if God exists outside of nature it is possible and the best explanation of the historical facts.

19. What alternatives to the resurrection are there, and what are their strengths and weaknesses?
   Hallucination – group hallucination unlikely, Paul wasn’t grieving
   Wrong Tomb – could have been easily corrected and officials would have quickly done so
   Swoon/ Apparent Death – friends and enemies attested to his death, Rome was efficient as crucifixions, with all injuries and no medical survival is unlikely
   Stolen Body – if they are deceived they are not the deceivers, conspiracies fall a part

20. What is evil?
   Corruption of good, not tangible, not eternal

21. How does Christianity explain the existence of evil and provide a solution?
   God’s intention, the fall, sin and free will, redemption, end of the story

22. What is the problem of discussing evil from an evolutionary worldview?
   Without a moral cause the universe just is, is does not give us “ought”, no standard means nothing is justifiably wrong outside of social construct which are relative and fail

23. As a Christian, what bearing does Heaven have on the reality of pain and suffering?
   Brokenness in this life is temporary, redemption is eternal, feels heavy now but is
minimized by the weight of forever with God

24. If Christianity is true, what application does that have for how you live your life?
   *This life is about making Christ known, living for his kingdom purpose, outward not inward faith*

25. Please indicate by checking a box below: What is your comfort level with discussing Christianity with a non-Christian?

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APPENDIX C

Equipped
An Apologetics Curriculum for Juniors and Seniors in High School

Doctrine – Defense – Delivery

General Objectives:
By the end of this course students will:

1. Understand and articulate key doctrinal concepts.
2. Understand and articulate key evidences for Christianity.
3. Understand the commission of living in and for God’s kingdom.

To the Teacher:
Beyond understanding why Christianity is true and possessing the ability to articulate it, students must connect the truth of their belief to their individual purpose of living for Christ in whatever kingdom work he calls them to. While the material in this curriculum is meant to provide the content for understanding and discussion, the reality of how students connect truth to the reality of living for Christ is intrinsically tied to what they see demonstrated in the life of the teacher. Sharing your story, highlighting your kingdom living and imparting your life experiences will be crucial in students making this connection. Each lesson has a devotional prompt, but this should be tweaked and expanded in relation to the teacher’s personality and individual journey.

Resources:
Student reading is a selection from the following.

1. Christian Belief by Wayne Grudem
2. I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist by Norman Geisler and Frank Turek
# Course Design –
9 Week Schedule – Class 5 Days per Week
Average Class Time – Approximately 50 Minutes

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<th>Doctrine</th>
<th>The Authority of Scripture</th>
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<td>Unit 3</td>
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<td>Unit 9</td>
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<td>So What if it is True?</td>
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## Pillar: Doctrine

Unit 1: Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture
1.1 – The Bible as God’s Word
1.2 – Doctrine & Theology
1.3 – The Authority of Scripture

Unit 2: Attributes of God & the Trinity
2.1 – Survey of God’s Attributes
2.2 – Introduction to the Trinity
2.3 – Doctrine of the Trinity
2.4 – Doctrine of the Trinity

Unit 3: Man, Sin and the Eternal State
3.1 – The Nature of Man
3.2 – What is Sin?
3.3 – Punishment for Sin
3.4 – The Eternal State

Unit 4: The Incarnation
4.1 – Humanity of Christ
4.2 – Deity of Christ
4.3 – The Atonement

Delivery: Panels

## Pillar: Defense

Unit 5: Science: Beginnings & Design
5.1 – Can Science and Faith Coexist?
5.2 – The Cosmological Argument
5.3 – Looking Closely at the Beginning
5.4 – Looking Closely at Divine Design

Unit 6: Reliability of the New Testament
6.1 – Early Testimony
6.2 – Eye-Witness Testimony
6.3 – Ancient Biography and Manuscripts

Unit 7: The Resurrection
7.1 – Sources and Evidence
7.2 – Alternative Theories
7.3 – Miracles & Mission

Unit 8: The Explanation of Evil
8.1 – Understanding Evil
8.2 – Group Projects on Specific Questions

Delivery: Panels

Unit 9: So What if it is True?
9.1 – Thinking About Truth
9.2 – What is the church?
9.3 – Living for the Kingdom
About the Curriculum

Class Structure:
This course is structured around selected readings from source material as well as lectures from the teacher materials. Both the material from the readings and the lectures should be discussed in class. Students should be asked questions about content and engaged with collectively.

Integrating Media:
The use of PowerPoint during lecture is highly encouraged. Additionally, there are many references to teaching clips from various scholars and apologists throughout this curriculum. It is also encouraged to have students become familiar with various apologetics apps such as Cross Examined, Got Questions and One Minute Apologist. Finally, the supplemental use of current news clips and articles to prompt discussion is also recommended. YouTube videos and articles from reliable ministries are intentionally interwoven into this course to help students become familiar and comfortable with these resources.

Panels
These should be conducted after units four and eight. The first panel after unit four covers all the doctrinal material and the second panel, after unit eight, spans the material for the defense of Christianity. These panels are intentionally designed to get students articulating what they have learned, and thus they are a delivery aspect of the curriculum. There are many ways that panels could be facilitated, adapted and graded. However, here is one option:

1. Students are divided into panels of four. Depending on how many students are in the class will determine how many panels can occur in a class period.

2. Each student will be assigned as a Topic Speaker. This means that each student will be given one of the topics from that Pillar to explain. The Topic Speaker will have 2-3 minutes to explain the key concepts and overall picture of their material. This will force students to synthesize the content and then also put it in his or her own words conversationally.

3. After each student on the panel presents his or her topic, there will be a time of general questioning. The teacher can then call on any student in the panel to answer a question from any topic. This will force students to be prepared to verbally articulate responses for all the content they have just studied, not just their particular topic as speaker.

While the panels are meant to be a graded activity that assess the comprehension and articulation of each student, they can also be fun. Get creative. Each student can be awarded speaker points by their peers, where the top speaker of the panel is given a prize at the end of the week. In addition to the teacher, each panel could have student judges that weigh the answers or ask follow up questions. Another possibility is to have outside community members or teachers on their prep period come and participate as judges. In whatever way the panel is implemented, the more it is built up, the more students will gain from the experience.
Discussion Questions
These questions are based on the readings assigned from each of the textbooks. They can be used to have students respond verbally in a class discussion setting. Alternatively, they can be used as individual, written responses to the reading. If the latter route is taken, the questions should still be discussed verbally, in some capacity.

Devotional Thoughts
At the end of each lesson there is a final Scripture in order to bridge a connection between head and heart.
Unit 1 – The Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture

1.1 The Bible as God’s Word

Class Opener: Is the Bible Truly God’s Word – Got Questions
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BocabFPaKH0

Teacher Notes – To Be Used with PowerPoint

We trust the Bible as an authority
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17, John 16:13, 1 Cor. 2:13, 1 Thess. 2:13

- If we don’t accept the Bible as God’s word, as the ultimate authority, it doesn’t matter what we believe because we become our own judge, and we are not Christ followers.

- If we DO accept that God’s word is an authority, then Scripture becomes the ultimate authority. It doesn’t matter how controversial or uncomfortable, what the Bible says is true and right and just.

→ This may seem simple or matter of fact, but the reality is, many people who want to identify themselves as Christians, don’t actually accept God’s word as an authority. Accordingly, they live in contradiction (whether in thought or action) to what it says. What are some cultural issues where this contradiction may be evident?

Read and Discuss
Grudem, chapter one: Christian Belief: What is the Bible?
In addition to the questions at the end of the chapter, here are some questions to further assess student comprehension:

1. Why is Christian belief tied to Scripture?
2. In 1-2 sentences describe each of the following: Authority of Scripture, Clarity of Scripture, Necessity of Scripture and Sufficiency of Scripture.

Devotional Thought
Psalm 119:9 -16 / 2 Peter 3:15-18
1.2 Doctrine and Theology

Class Opener The Gospel Coalition: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gp5BfC61pt8

Teacher Notes – To Be Used with PowerPoint

A. Theology
Theology organizes the facts and truth of God’s word so we can understand it.

Types of Theology

1. Biblical Theology – Gives us data (exegesis) on specific parts (fractional or topical) of Scripture. (i.e. OT/NT or epistles).

2. Systematic Theology – How you put it all together. This is the big picture, and what you want to consider when thinking about doctrine.
   - Doctrine never hinges on one Scripture. Scripture interprets Scripture. (Dr. Stallman)

3. Historical Theology – What wisdom from the past can we glean? (i.e. Church fathers, early church creeds)

4. Practical Theology - This is the application to our lives.
   - The authors had a specific intent. There’s one intended meaning in each passage, and we do our best to dig that out.

That singular meaning can be applied to our lives in a variety of ways. However, should never hear, “Well, what this Scripture means to me is…” This is a sign of culture’s relativism seeping into the church.

B. Doctrine

Rupertus Meldenius (1627) – Lutheran Theologian
1. In essentials we have unity
2. In non-essentials we have liberty
3. In all our beliefs we show charity

Essential Doctrines
These are fundamental to the faith. They are what make Christianity, Christianity, and not some other religion. These doctrines affect salvation.

Non-Essential Doctrines
Just because a doctrine is non-essential doesn’t mean that it’s not important. These doctrines do
NOT affect salvation; we can disagree on these issues and still all be in Heaven together, however we probably wouldn’t attend the same church or denomination. Differing tertiary doctrines can be found within a denomination. In other words, churches divide over secondary doctrines but not usually over tertiary ones. (Breakdown list from Professor Kevin Lewis - Biola)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential Doctrines:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Inspiration and Authority of Scripture</td>
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<td>2. God’s Attributes</td>
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<td>3. Trinity</td>
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<td>4. Christ’s Virgin Birth</td>
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<td>5. Full Deity and Humanity of Christ</td>
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<td>6. Man’s Depravity</td>
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<td>7. Christ’s Atonement</td>
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<td>8. The Bodily Resurrection &amp; Ascension of Christ</td>
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<td>9. Salvation by Grace through Faith</td>
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<td>10. Creation Ex Nihilo</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Non-Essential (Secondary) Doctrines:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Calvinism vs. Arminianism</td>
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<td>2. Mode of Baptism</td>
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<td>3. Mode of Communion</td>
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<td>4. Cessationist/Continuationist (Miracles/Healing/Spirit Baptism)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Egalitarianism vs. Complementarianism (Women in Ministry)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Non-Essential (Tertiary) Doctrines:</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Spiritual Warfare Methods</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Eschatology (Pre-Trib/Post-Trib)</td>
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- The church is the body of believers which agree on essential Christian doctrine. “orthodox” = uniform / “catholic” = universal
  -- Not the denominations that claim these terms, but the idea of agreement.

- When a group of people deviate from orthodox understanding of an essential doctrine = “theological cult.” Many cults use the same vocabulary but define things very differently. For example:

1. Mormons: Holy Trinity = Polytheism. Three separate gods (in different bodies) who are each perfect in either knowledge, power and glory. Their oneness is in purpose, thought and will. They are not one in essence.

2. J.W.s: Holy Spirit = An energy or force, but not a distinct person of the triune God.
  -This is why understanding doctrine is so important. Before we can defend the faith, we have to know it deeply. We have to fall in love with truth.

Class Activity
Option A: Have students look at their church statement of faith pages and compare with others. What do they notice about essential and non-essential doctrines?

Option B: Have students read and discuss this article: https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/systematic-theology

Devotional Thought
Psalm 119:33-40 and Proverbs 30:5-6
1.3 Authority of Scripture

Class Opener: Tim Keller - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J67U2oTj5g

Teacher Notes to be used with PowerPoint

Internal Evidence
1. Bible speaks as an authority
2. Unity (66 books, over 40 authors, spanning over a 1500 year period)
3. The Bible’s transforming power

External Evidence
1. Archeology (Has confirmed many events and places from history)
   → Absence of evidence, not evidence of absence
2. Prophecy (Incredible example in the book of Daniel)
3. It’s Influence (It’s still a best seller / Indestructibility in the face of attack)

Types of Revelation:
a. General Revelation – Evidence of God clearly seen through creation/nature
   Romans 1: 18-23

b. Special Revelation – While General Revelation points the existence of God, Special Revelation provides what we need to know for salvation.
   i. The Person of Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2)
   ii. The Bible (2 Tim 3:16- 4:4) – Inspired as “God Breathed”

Theories of Inspiration (J. I. Packer - "The Origin of the Bible", p. 35-36)

Main Views of Inspiration
1. Dictation – This view states that God merely dictated what he wanted recorded.
   -Doesn’t seem to fit with the fact that personality is often seen in certain writings: Gal1:6, 3:1, Phil 1:3,4,8)

2. Limited Inspiration – This view teaches that God guided the writers but also gave them license to record their own thoughts about history and experience. So with this view, the Bible could contain errors.

3. Plenary Verbal – This view believes that the Holy Spirit worked in the writing of Scripture by guiding the authors along (2 Peter1:20-21). Seems to combine the human and divine elements of Scripture, and is often compared to Jesus’ two natures.

What Inspiration Does NOT Mean:
1. Divine Direction was not a physical or psychological force that over powered the Biblical
authors. (So, it is unlike the forceful picture of the angel imparting visions to Muhammad)

2. The fact that God allowed the personality of the writers does not denote that His guidance was somehow distorted or lacking.

3. Inspiration only applied to the original text and the inspired authors. It is not something that we apply to the transmission process.

4. The inspiration of the Bible is not like other great literature masterpieces. Inspiration does not relate to the quality of what is written, but to its character as divine revelation.

_The Canon of Scripture_

A. Understanding the Canon

1. Greek: (kanon) Meaning a straight rod, or instrument of measurement (Handbook)

2. When do we get the canon? (There were councils before and after this time)

   → The New Testament was already established by middle of the 1st Century.
      a. First used in 352 AD by Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria
      b. First employed by church council at synod of Laodicea 363 AD
      c. Council of Hippo (393), Council of Carthage (397) – Canon as we know it.

3. What was the purpose of the canon? Determination vs. Recognition
   a. It did not authorize a collection of writing
      This would be the idea of the church fathers bestowing the Bible upon us.
   b. It was a collection of already authorized writings.
      This place the authority inherent in the writing itself not on the church leaders.

B. Issues Regarding the Canon

1. Criteria - As accepted by the early church leaders and those it was addressed to
   a. Apostolic Authority – Written by an apostle or an associate of the apostle
   b. Correct Doctrine - Conformed to the “rule of faith.” No new “revelations”
   c. Acceptance of Divine Inspiration – Accepted / continuously used by the church.

2. The Canon is closed –
   a. The Apocrypha (See Handout)
      Writings from the Intertestamental period - originally rejected by both Jews /Protestants.

   Why were they rejected:
   1. They did not claim for themselves the same authority as O.T. writings
   2. They were not regarded as God’s word by Jewish people from whom they originated
   3. They were not considered to be Scripture by Jesus or N.T. authors
   4. They contain teachings inconsistent with the rest of the Bible.
Why are they in some Bibles?
1. Council of Trent (1546) – The Roman Catholic Church canonized these books.
2. It is important to note that a majority of Hebrew scholars consider the Apocrypha to be a good source of history. They just aren’t inspired like the rest of Hebrew Scripture.
   b. The Emergence of New or Lost Books - What God inspired, He preserved - Deut. 4:2 and Rev. 22:18-19

Class Activities:

Ligioner Ministires – What the Reformation was all about
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qd97uoZlqXI
Give students the challenge of synthesizing the reformation in under a minute, working together in groups and then picking a spokesperson to express their ideas.

Discussing what Catholics believe about the Authority of Scripture:
Watch this video, stopping to discuss each frame of the discussion and looking at Scriptural responses: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTBud9Vlzo&t=209s

Devotional Thought
Psalm 119:105 -112
Unit 2 – The Attributes of God & the Trinity
2.1 A Survey of God’s Attributes

Class Opener: Cross Examined Article: https://crossexamined.org/can-god-create-a-rock-so-heavy-that-he-cannot-lift-it/

Teacher Notes to be used with PowerPoint

The attributes of God declare what and how God is. They are objectively real descriptions that God gives us of himself in his Word.

God has not fully revealed himself to us, so we cannot fully know and understand him. This does not mean, however, that we cannot know him truly.

_Incommunicaee Attributes: _These are characteristics of God, that in our finite nature, we do NOT share in.

_Communicable Attributes: _These are characteristics of God, that even in our finite nature, we can share in.

Using the PowerPoint look at examples of some of God’s attributes.

Read and Discuss
Grudem, chapter two: “What is God Like?” Discuss the questions at the end of the chapter.

Devotional Thought
Deuteronomy 32:4
2.1 Introduction to the Trinity

Read and Discuss
Grudem, chapter three: “What is the Trinity?”
Discus this reading as a class

Teacher Notes to be used with the PowerPoint

Introduction to the Trinity
The Trinity is a mystery beyond our comprehension (Louis Berkhof)
→ What kind of God would He be, if in our finite nature we could grasp everything about him?

Point of Clarification: The second person of the Trinity (God the Son) is not called Jesus until he takes on human nature in the incarnation. So "Jesus" is not the correct way to speak of the Son in Trinitarian language.

The Importance of Distinction:
- We are not distinguishing between separate things, so how do we distinguish between a single thing? A basketball can be distinguished by color, shape and size and still be one thing.

Devotional Thought
John 4:24
2.3 The Doctrine of the Trinity

**Class Opener:** Got Questions: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yj0mE78SuWA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yj0mE78SuWA)

**Teacher Notes to be used with the PowerPoint**

The Doctrine of the Trinity

“God eternally exists as three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.” (Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem, pg. 226)

I. God is three persons
   II. Each person is fully God
   III. There is one God

I. God is three persons
   a. God is one in respect to essence and three in respect to persons.
      b. Using the term “Persons?”
         - We must not understand this to mean a physical, material person.
         - God should not be thought of as “Triple” - this denotes parts and God is one.
         - This is why we use the word “Triune”
         - We use the term “Person” because it shows that God is relational. He relates to Himself in personal ways; He self-communes. (Does not mean physical person)
   c. This means that each person is distinct
      - The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the H.S
      - The persons of the Trinity do not exchange their modes of existence.
      - The persons of the Trinity have eternally existed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit
   d. The Persons of the Trinity have different primary functions in relating to the world.
      This is called the “Economy of the Trinity” and refers to the idea of ordering activity within the Trinity.
      Optional Article: [https://www.gotquestions.org/economic-Trinity.html](https://www.gotquestions.org/economic-Trinity.html)

**Example: The Work of Creation**

1. God the Father spoke the creative words to bring the universe into being (Gen. 1:1).
2. God the Son carried out the creative work (John 1:3).
3. God the Holy Spirit was active at creation, “hovering” over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2). This is generally understood to be the sustaining and manifesting of God’s presence at creation.
Example: The Work of Atonement  (For Ex: The Holy Spirit didn’t die for us)
  (2) The Son accomplished it (John 6:38, Heb. 10:5-7).
  (3) The Holy Spirit applies it - regeneration (John 3:5-8) and sanctification (Rom. 8:13).

e. Because God chooses to exist this way, it gives us a picture of true unity.
    - Why humanity call for unity (we are made in the image of God)

II. Each person is fully God
   a. All persons of the Trinity are co-equal and uncreated.

   b. Each person of the Trinity possesses all the attribute of God, the only distinctions between the members of Trinity are the ways they relate to each other and to creation.

   c. The Holy Spirit is not just the power of God, but He is a distinct person of God.
      i. To think of the Holy Spirit as synonymous with “power of God” several verses wouldn’t make sense: Luke 4:14, Acts 10:38, Rom. 15:13, 1 Cor. 2:4
      ii. Furthermore, personal activities are ascribed to the Holy Spirit:
          - Teaching in John 14:26
          - Bearing Witness in John 15:26, Rom 8:16
          - Interceding or praying on behalf of others in Rom 8:26 -27
          - Restraining certain actions in Acts 16:6-7
          - Being Grieved in Eph 4:30

   d. Scripture teaches that each person is of the Trinity is God
      i. The Father is God
         Ex 15:11, 1 Kings 8:60, 1 Cor. 1:3, Eph 4:4-6
      ii. The Son is God
         John 1:1-5, John 10:30-33, John 20:28, Heb 1:6-8, Phil 2:9-11
      iii. The Holy Spirit is God
         Acts 5:3-4, 2 Cor. 3:16-17, Ex. 34:34

III. There is One God
   a. Scripture is abundantly clear that there is one and only one God.
   b. The three different persons of the Trinity are not only one in purpose and will but they are one in essence, on in their essential nature.
   c. In other words, God is only one being.
   d. Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 43:10, Rom 3:30, 1 Tim 2:5
   e. (Geisler) More than 60 Bible verses mention all three persons of the Trinity together:
      Matt 3:16-17; 28:19, 2 Cor. 13:14, Eph 4:4-6, Titus 3:4-6
*The Best Way to Visualize the Trinity*

a. All analogies from human experience will have shortcomings. So, they can be helpful on an elementary level, but as we dive deeper into understanding of the Trinity they can be misleading.

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<th>Good Analogy: Equilateral Triangle</th>
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**Problems with Common Analogies:**

1. One Person with Three Roles
   - Incomplete because you cannot be all three roles to the same individual.

2. Parts of an Egg/ Tree/ Three Leaf Clover
   - Incomplete because it represents God as 3 separate parts (can lead to Tritheism).

3. Forms of Water
   - Incomplete because it represents God as shifting between modes. (Each form also has different properties.)

b. Errors in Trinitarian thinking over the course of Church History:
   i. Modalism – One person who appears to us in different forms or modes.
   ii. Arianism – Denies the full deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit.
      - Arian Controversy – God the Father at some point created the Son

Video on Trinity from Lutheran Satire: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQLfgaUoQCw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQLfgaUoQCw)

c. Other errors in Trinitarian thinking

   i. The word Trinity is not in the Bible
      - Neither is the word incarnation
      - A better question to ask: “Does the concept of the Trinity appear in the Bible?”

   ii. Jesus is not God

   iii. Jesus is a lesser god

      Two verses often misinterpreted to say Jesus was created:
      a. Col. 1:15 used to say Jesus was the “Firstborn” of creation.
         Response: “Firstborn” means heir of all God created. (Col. 1:16-17)

      b. John 3:16 used to say Jesus had a beginning.
         Response: “Only-begotten” means Jesus was God’s unique son. (Hebrews 11:17)

**Devotional Thought**

Isaiah 44:6-11
Unit 3: Man, Sin and the Eternal State
3.1 The Nature of Man

**Class Opener:** What Does it Mean that Humanity is Made in the Image of God (Got Questions) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2yUftbD2-E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2yUftbD2-E)

**Read and Discuss**
Grudem, chapter seven: “What is Man?” Use the questions at the end of the chapter.

**Teacher Notes to be used with the PowerPoint**
Thought to Consider as we get started?
What constitutes "being human?" - Why is this question important? Hierarchy of value
- Hierarchy roach → spider → cat → dog → baby (adapted from Dr. Lewis/Biola)
- Secondary analogy → Vandalizing a car in a junk yard vs. a new Tesla

Definitions of Key Terms
1. The Intellect - Faculty of the soul that knows, deliberates and assents (agrees) to what it knows.

2. The Will - The appetitive power of a spiritual being. (i.e. the intellect knows the object, the will has the desire for it).

3. The Emotions - Essentially, a spontaneous movement consisting of an effective response to a specific apprehended object.

4. The Soul - It is the immaterial (non-physical) element of our nature that relates to God and lives forever. Luke 1:46, Revelation 6:9
   a. It is the rational substance in which the rational faculties (will, intellect, emotions) are grounded.
   b. Immortal & Survives the death of the physical body. (Gen.35:18, Ps. 31:5, Phil. 1:23-24, Heb 12:23, Rev 6:9)

**Devotional Thought**
Psalms 103:1-5
3.2 What is Sin?

Read and Discuss
Grudem, chapter eight: “What is Sin?” Use questions at the end of the book

Teacher Notes to be used with the PowerPoint

I. Definition
Sin: Any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude or nature.
See: Ex. 20:17, Matt 5:22 & 28, Gal. 5:20, Mark 12:30, Rom 5:8, Eph. 2:3, 1 John 3:4

II. The Origin of Sin
a. God did not create sin nor is sin/evil an eternally existent thing (Det. 32:4, James 1:13)
   - To say that evil is eternal is to elevate it to the same status as God. Only God is eternal.
b. Before the disobedience of Adam and Eve, sin was present in the angelic world.
c. In respect to the human world, sin originated in the Garden (Gen 3:1-19)

III. Inherited Sin
a. Federal Headship - When Adam sinned we were all present in Him. (Rom. 5:12-21)
   i. Adam was our representative
   ii. Adam sinned so we are all counted guilty

b. Is this unfair?
   i. We are all accountable for our own sin (Rom 2:6, Col 3:25).
   ii. We can't say that we would have acted differently than Adam.
   iii. If it's unfair to be represented by Adam, then it's also unfair for us to be represented by Christ. In the fall, relationship is broken, and the consequences are instantaneous, but at the cross the fix was instantaneous as well.

IV. Inherited Corruption
a. Sinful nature - (Ps. 51:5)

b. In our nature we totally lack spiritual good before God (Rom. 7:18, Titus 1:15, Jer 17:9)

c. In our actions, we are totally unable to do spiritual good before God. In other words we can't come to him of our own strength (Rom 8:8, Heb. 11:6, Eph2:1-2, John 8:34).

→ The degree to which you hold to this to be true leads to a large aspect of the debate between Calvinism and Arminianism.

V. Are There Degrees of Sin?
a. Sin is a legal guilt before God, the righteous Judge. (Gen. 2:17, Rom. 5:16)
   i. In terms of our legal standing all sins are equal (James 2:10-11, Deut. 27:26)

b. Different sins effect our life and relationship with God in different ways
   i. So, certain sins are worse than others in that they have more harmful consequences
      (Ez. 8:13-15, Matt 23:23)

**Devotional Thought**
Ephesians 1:7-14
3.3 Punishment for Sin

Class Opener: How could a loving God send a good person to Hell (Sean McDowell)  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpEaoMg3sG8

Teacher Notes to be used with the PowerPoint

a. Punishment: God's righteousness demands it. (Jer. 9:24)  
   i. If God did not punish sin, He would not be righteous.  
   ii. It’s logically inconsistent to believe that a just judge could/would ignore broken laws.

b. This is why the Cross: It satisfies Justice (because a good God cannot be unjust) and mercy  
   (because God paid the price for us and we do not get what we deserve).
   i. Implication of language: God sending people to Hell instead of us choosing Hell.

c. Summary of the problem and solution
   i. Sin left us guilty before God  
      → We need to be justified  
      (We are instantly justified, where sanctification is a process)
   ii. Sin left us alienated from God  
      → We need to be adopted
   iii. Sin left us corrupted in nature  
      → Our nature needs to be regenerated

Class Activity  
Have students look on the apologetics apps and YouTube to see what objections and responses to  
Hell are out there. Then discuss the objections students found and allow the class to  
collaboratively provide an answer.

Devotional Thought

John 3:16-21
3.4 The Eternal State

**Class Opener:** OneMinuteApologist: What Will Heaven Be Like?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRJQwSd3jqI

**Read and Discuss**
Grudem chapters ten and eleven – using the questions at the end of each.

**Teacher Notes to be used with PowerPoint**

a. When believers die
   2 Cor. 5:16, Phil 1:21-24, Luke 23:42-43

b. Resurrection bodies
   - 1 Cor. 15:35-58
   - We will live eternally with God

c. Heaven
   - Spiritual dimension where God dwells
   - New creation (varying view)

→ Eternal realities are why it is so important for believers to share the truth with others. We cannot just be content with our own salvation and security. There is a world that needs to know Jesus.

**Devotional Thought**
Revelation 21 and 22

Absent from Flesh – Sojourn (Youtube lyrics video)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivDXvkpi9_s
Unit 4 - The Incarnation

4.1 The Humanity of Christ

Read and Discuss
Grudem, chapter nine: “Who is Christ?” Use the questions at the end to discuss.

Teacher Notes to be used with PowerPoint

Summary of the Biblical teaching about the person of Christ
"Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man in one person, and will be so forever"
(Grudem, Systematic Theology, 529).

The Humanity of Christ
A. Virgin Birth

Video: One Minute Apologist: Is it Crazy to Believe in the Virgin Birth?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5AM18WdmEk

Why is this Important:
1. Salvation ultimately comes from the Lord. God brought it about by his power, not by human effort.

2. The virgin birth made it possible to unite the full deity and full humanity in one person.
   Other options:
   (a) Create Jesus full grown (no parents) and descend him from Heaven = It would be difficult to see Jesus as human like us.

   (b) Jesus could have been born of two parents naturally and then had the divine nature miraculously united to his human nature = It would have been difficult for us to understand his deity.

B. Human Weaknesses and Limitations
   Lk. 2:52 - In his human nature he grew in understanding
   John 4:6 - He got tired
   John 19:28 - He got thirsty
   Matt. 4:2 - He got hungry
   Lk. 23:46 - Ultimate limitation of his human nature: He died on the cross
b. "Jesus Rose from the dead in a physical, human body, though one that was made perfect and was no longer subject to weakness, disease, or death"(532).

c. Jesus ascended to Heaven in his perfect physical body

2. Jesus had a human...

   b. Soul with human emotions - Soul is troubled:
      John 12:27, John 13:21, Matt 26:38, Matt. 8:10, and John 11:35

C. Jesus was Sinless:
   1. God created us holy and we rebelled, thus becoming sinful.

   2. Jesus did not rebel, thus he remained holy/sinless.
      a. John 8:46 - No would could actually show Jesus had sinned.
      b. Heb. 4:15 - He was without sin
      c. Heb. 7:26 - Holy and Blameless

D. The Necessity of Jesus' Humanity:
   1. John responds to false teaching that Jesus didn't have a physical body.
      a. He was our representative and obeyed where Adam failed.
         Rom. 5:18-19, 1 Cor. 15:45-47

      b. He was our substitutionary sacrifice: If he had not been man, he could not have died in our place. Jesus had to become a man, because God was concerned with saving man. If he wasn't like us the "propitiation" (the sacrifice) wouldn't have been an acceptable substitute. Heb. 2:16-17

      c. To be our mediator. Because we were alienated from God, we required one who could represent God and represent us. 1 Tim. 2:5

E. Jesus Will Be Man Forever
   a. He kept his human nature after his resurrection: John 20:25-27
   b. He ascended and will return the same way: Acts 1:11, 7:56, 9:5
   c. Even though the incarnation began in time, it continues forever (Shedd, 623).
      See: Rom. 9:5, Col. 2:9, Heb. 13:8, Eph. 2:6, Heb. 4: 14-15

**Devotional Thought**
John 1:14 and 14:6
4.2 The Deity of Christ

**Class Opener** CrossExamined Video: Jesus Never Claimed to be God
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSKboin5VOA

**Teacher Notes to be used with PowerPoint**

Not only was Jesus fully human, but he was also fully divine.

A. Direct Supernatural Claims
   1. Jesus is called God:
      a. OT - Micah 5:2 & Is. 7:14 and 9:6
      b. NT: John 1:1-3 and 14, 1 Cor. 1:16-17, Heb. 1:1, John 17:5,24, John 8:58

B. Evidence That Jesus Possessed Attributes of Deity
   1. Jesus' omnipotence:
      a. Calm the Sea - Matt. 8:26-27
      b. Multiplied the loaves and fish - Matt. 14:19
   2. Jesus' Eternity:
      a. Before Abraham, I was - John 8:58
      b. Alpha and Omega - Rev. 22:13
   3. Jesus' Omniscience:
      a. Jesus knew people's minds - Mark 2:8
      b. Saw Nathaniel under the fig tree - John 1:48
      c. Peter affirmed, "Lord you know everything" - John 21:17
   4. Jesus' Immortality
      a. Describing himself as the Temple - John 2:19-22
   5. Jesus is worthy of Worship - Phil 2:9-11, Heb. 1:6, Rev. 5: 12-13

C. The Necessity of Jesus' Deity:
   1. Only someone who is infinitely God could bear the weight of mankind's sin
   2. Salvation is from the Lord (Jonah 2:9)
   3. Only someone who is fully God could be a mediator between God and man.
      1 Tim. 2:5, John 14:9

_The Incarnation of Christ_

Jesus was like us, and not like us at the same time. We are like him and not like him at the same
time. He was uniquely the God-man. No one existed that way before, and no one other than Jesus will exist that way again.

_Council of Chalcedon_
Near Constantinople, Oct. 8 - Nov. 1 AD 451

- This has been accepted as the standard, orthodox teaching by all Catholic and Protestant orthodox branches.

_Doctrine of Hypostatic Union_, meaning the union of Christ's human and divine natures into one being. ("personal" union of 2 natures)

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 reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] 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, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; 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. (Grudem, 556-557)

_Careful Distinctions_

1. Combining Specific Biblical Texts on Christ's Deity and Humanity
      Jesus' Divine nature = Everywhere present (Matt. 18:20)
   
      Jesus' Divine nature = Eternally Existent (John 1:1-2, 8:58)
   
   c. Jesus' human nature = Could become tired and weak (Matt. 4:2, 8:24)
      Jesus' Divine nature = Omnipotent (Matt. 8:26-27, Col. 1:17)
   
   d. Jesus' human nature = Was tempted (Heb. 4:15)
      Jesus' Divine nature = Was not tempted (James 1:13)
   
   e. Jesus' human nature = Died, subject to death (Luke 23:46, 1 Cor. 15:3)
      Jesus' Divine nature = Powerful than death (John 2:19, 10:17-18, Heb. 7:16)
      * When Jesus died his physical body died and his human soul was separated from his body and passed into the presence of God the Father in Heaven (Luke 23:43, 46).
In this way he experienced death that is like the one that we as believers will experience. It is not correct to say that Jesus' divine nature died or could die, if "die" means a cessation of activity, or consciousness or a diminution of power.

2. Anything Either Nature Does, the Person of Christ Does:
   a. Jesus doesn't speak distinguishing between his natures, he says, "I."
   b. Self-Consciousness of the God-man
      i. Two Consciousness -Divine and human - not two persons, it's 2 corresponding modes of consciousness in 1 person.
      ii. Divine perception & feeling and human perception & feeling
      iii. Ex: Man can feel cold while he's praying (2 forms of Consciousness)
           -We don't recall all we know at one time.
           -I'm not 100% conscious of all I know 100% of the time

Class Activity
Handout: Who Was Jesus?

Devotional Thought
John 1:1-5
4.3 The Atonement

**Class Opener:** Center for Philosophy of Religion - What is Atonement?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=chpRoLHam74

**Read and Discuss**
Grudem, chapter ten: “What is the Atonement?” Use questions at the end of the chapter.

**Class Activity**
Divide students into two groups and assign them each one of the below videos. Each group should watch their video and discuss it. They should then select a representative to explain the video to the group who did not watch it.

- Video A: One Minute Apologist: Is the Atonement Cosmic Child Abuse?
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qz6tl5EWil4
- Video B: Impact 360 – Who is Jesus?
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQWCb-oIn54

To conclude the unit, use the PowerPoint “Theological Evaluation” and as a class, have students identify the unorthodox teaching about the Trinity and the Incarnation. This activity will further their synthesis of the content as they prepare for panels.

**Devotional Thought**
John 1:1-5 and Proverbs 8:35-36

**Panels**
Potential Outline for the week:
Monday – Topic Speakers are assigned and students work on their specific field.
Tuesday – Students discuss and work on answering prep questions. Mock panels, if time.
Wednesday through Friday – Panel Presentations
Unit 5 – Science: Beginnings and Design

5.1 Can Science and Faith Coexist?

Class Opener: Impact 360 – Will Science Disprove God?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXev0X0CxjU

Teacher Notes to be used with PowerPoint

Science and Faith -
- Fundamental question for any worldview: “Why is there something rather than nothing?”

a. Proposed dichotomy between science (evidence) and faith (belief)
   Thinking about science as all fact and faith as all feeling
   - Lennox: Just because some scientists are at war with God, doesn’t mean that science is

b. Materialism vs Theism
   Materialism – Only matter/nature
   Theism – Divine Creator

Ending quotes

Closing Video: Dr. Craig – God & Mathematics
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJBOiZXkKu8&t=12s

Devotional Thought:
Isaiah 40:28-31
5.2 The Cosmological Argument

Class Opener: The Cosmological Argument (Dr. Craig)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CulBuMCLg0

Teacher Notes to be used with PowerPoint

→ Don’t be overwhelmed by the science. Most people you talk to conversationally, will have your level of education/understanding. It’s ok to not be an expert, but we should know enough to have intelligent conversations on general principles.

Cosmological Argument
The logical argument for causality

- Cosmological from Greek Cosmos, meaning world/universe (Turek/Geisler, pg. 74)
- Law of Causality- Fundamental principle of science. Science had taught us that things don’t happen without a cause

Structure of the Cosmological
A. Premise 1: Everything that came to be (had a beginning), has a cause
B. Premise 2: The Universe came to be
C. Conclusion: Therefore, the universe had a cause

Premise 1: Everything that came to be has a cause
Contingency Argument: Everything that exists has an explanation
Two types of things:
1. Things that exist necessarily
   - God (Exodus 3:14 – “I am” ∎ It would be impossible to cause God.

Self-Existence (Aseity):
God is uncaused and uncreated and therefore different from all other beings. Another way to think about this is in terms of God’s independence. He does not need or depend on anything else to exist. He has life in himself. (John 5:26, Acts 17:24-25, Exodus 3:14)

2. Things that are caused to exist, exist because they were produced.
   - Things like planets, chairs, people… were produced or caused to exist.
   - If something has a beginning, it must have a cause

- Nothing does not produce something without a cause; in other words, we do not expect a monkey to pop into existence randomly. This defies the reality of human experience. Premise 1 logically stands
**Premise 2: The Universe Came to Be**

1. The Expansion of the Universe -
   - 1916 Albert Einstein’s General Relativity predicted an expanding universe.
   - Theory of General Relativity- Proving that the universe was not eternal
   - He didn’t like where is calculations were leading and later called this discovery “irritating” (Geisler/Turek, 73).
   - Imagine watching the expansion in reverse – It would rewind to a single point
   - Like a cone: It has a boundary point (beginning) but can be expanded infinitely.
   - The singularity shows there is no infinite past (no eternal universe)
   - Nothing before the singularity: Big Bang is not an explosion of matter within eternally existing time and space, but the coming into being of time, space and matter. So before the Big Bang there was nothing. No space, no time, no matter.

2. The Second Law of Thermodynamics
   - Thermodynamics is the study of matter and energy
   - 1st Law: Total amount of energy in the universe is finite
   - 2nd Law: The universe is running out of usable energy (Just one part of the 2nd Law)

   Analogy of the Car
   My car only has so much gas (1st Law)
   Driving my car uses gas from that finite amount (2nd Law)
   Conclusion: At some point my car will run out of gas

   Analogy of the Flashlight
   My flashlight requires batteries that have a finite amount of power
   If I leave my flashlight on all night, the power from those batteries may run out
   Conclusion: My flashlight will quit working

   - In terms of the universe, this is solid evidence that there was a beginning. If it is going to have an end, it logically had a beginning.

Many Worlds in One by Cosmologist Alex Vilenkin (as quoted by Craig)
“ It is said that an argument is what convinces reasonable men, and a proof is what it takes to convince even an unreasonable man. With the proof now in place, cosmologists can no longer hide behind the possibility of a past eternal universe. There is no escape, they have to face the problem of a cosmic beginning.”

Premise 2 logically stands.

**Conclusion: Therefore, the universe had a cause**

- Since both premise 1 and 2 logically stand, the conclusion must also stand.
Examining the First Cause:

The controversy revolves around who/what caused the beginning of the universe

1. Preliminary Parameters
   a. Since nature (the universe) had a beginning, nature cannot be the cause. In other words, nature was the effect, so it can’t logically be the cause.

   b. A Way to Explain This: Two Choices
      i. No one created something out of nothing □ Miracle with no miracle worker
      ii. Someone created something out of nothing □ Miracle with a miracle worker

2. Characteristics of the First Cause
   The first cause must:
   a. Be causeless (without cause or self-existent)
      It must exist my its own nature or we fall into a logical infinite regress of causes.

   b. Transcend space and time
      In order to create them, it must be outside, or beyond them.

   c. Be Immaterial (non-physical or spiritual)
      In space things exist physically (they have dimension). So, in order to transcend space, the cause must be an immaterial cause.

   d. Be Unimaginably Powerful (If not Omnipotent)
      Because it created all physical reality

   e. Plausibly Personal - Basically, because the choice to create is a relational in its nature.
      (Craig) Understanding God as an un-embodied mind

The first cause sounds a lot like God.

Dealing with Objections

A. Special Pleading: (Frank Turek Video: Who Caused God)
   If everything has a cause then what about God? What caused God?
   This line of thinking confuses the Contingency and Causality Argument

   □ Contingency: Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence (Craig)
   - God never came into being. He is an eternal reality
   - This is not special pleading: This is what the atheists want to be true about matter and energy, but in light of premise two and looking at the evidence, we see it’s not true. But just because the universe isn’t eternal (existing by its own nature) doesn’t mean that God isn’t.

   □ Causality: Everything that begins (comes into being) has a cause
   - Out of nothing, nothing comes
   - If it begins it has a cause… the evidence points to the universe having a beginning, so
logically, we endeavor to understand what could have cause the universe to come into being.

By conflating these two arguments, the argument wrongly becomes: Everything that exists has a cause… but this is not the case.

B. The Fallacy of Equivocation:
Ex: Dr. Lawrence Krauss wrote the book, The Universe from Nothing
States: “Happenings at the quantum level allow for things to come into existence from nothing.” (As quoted by Turek, podcast)
Quantum mechanic level (sub-atomic=extremely small)
-- Krauss wants to define “nothing” at the quantum level as fluctuating fields of gravity.
But that is not *nothing* (no thing). He is equivocating.

C. Presenting the Cosmological Argument as the Fallacy of Begging the Question:
Begging the Question: Is assuming the premise that you’re trying prove.
The universe had a beginning
Everything that has a beginning has a cause
Therefore, the universe had a beginning called God.
□ Wrong order --- Order of the premises in a logical argument is important…
□ This presenter is misquoting the argument, and then attacking the new version of it.
   This is known as the Straw Man Fallacy
□ We don’t start by assuming God …We look at the nature of existence and then from those findings, the evidence of a non-eternal universe, and then from those finding we examine the nature of the first cause
   - This is a logically sound argument that proves true
   - Now, this should bring the honest examiner to the realization that God is a logical first cause, but at no point do we assume God (or any premise for that matter)
   - The reality is simply that the objector just does not like the obvious conclusion.

Class Activity
Have students synthesize the content into a 3 minute video for YouTube. They are not actually to be posted for the assignment.

Devotional Thought
Psalm 95
5.3 Looking Closely at Beginnings

Class Opener: Dr. Stephen Meyer – On Design
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5Z6h_RVhIw

Read and Discuss
Geisler/Turek chapter three: “In the Beginning There Was a Great SURGE.”

Questions:
1. What are the irritating facts being discussed in the opening of the chapter?
2. What should the reader understand about Alexander Friedmann’s contribution to the topic?
3. Summarize the Cosmological argument.
4. What does the SURGE acronym stand for?
5. Explain how the Second Law of Thermodynamics points to a beginning.
6. Why does it matter that the universe is expanding?
7. Explain the importance of radiation for a cosmic beginning.
8. What are the “Great Galaxy Seeds” that Geisler/Turek refer to?
9. How does Einstein’s Theory of Relativity point to a beginning?
10. How does the universe having a beginning point to the existence of God?
11. Explain the Cosmic Rebound Theory. Why bearing does this have on the conversation?
12. What points do Geisler/Turek make about the objections that come in the form of imaginary time and uncertainty?
13. If the evidence is so good why aren’t all scientists Christian?
14. So, according to Geisler/Turek, what if the Big Bang Theory is wrong?
15. How would you handle the objection: “Who made God?”

Class Activity
Have students pair up for a friendly competition. After discussing the questions as a class, assign each group a question and give the pairs 2 minutes to summarize their answer. The pairs will then present their articulated answer to the class to see who gives the best answer. Small candy or prize to the winner to make it fun.

Devotional Thought
Colossians 1:15-19
5.4 Looking Closely at Design

Class Opener: Dr. Stephen Meyer on DNA
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7c9PaZzsqEg

Read and Discuss
Geisler/Turek chapter five: “The First Life: Natural Law or Divine Awe”

Questions:
1. Why do Geisler/Turek argue that there is no such thing as simple life?
2. What are some of the key points made about the origin of the first life?
3. What are some of the fundamental differences between good science and bad science?
4. What part of the conversation do time and chance play in origin?
5. What does philosophy have to do with science?
6. Why do Geisler/Turek argue that materialism is unreasonable?
7. What key points do Geisler/Turek make about critical thinking?

Class Activity:
Timed Write - Students will be given 20 minutes to make an organized and compelling case that the universe is divinely designed.

Devotional Thought
Psalm 139
Unit 6 – The Reliability of the New Testament
6.1 Early Testimony

Class Opener: CrossExamined – Early Testimony
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9Wr2EuVVuA

Read and Discuss
Geisler/Turek chapter nine: “Do We Have Early Testimony About Jesus?”

Questions:
1. What are some of the highlights from non-Christian sources?
2. What is significant about the record given from non-Christian sources?
3. What two aspects of the manuscript evidence demonstrate the reliability of the NT? Why?
4. Discuss the common objections to the reliability of the NT discussed in the chapter, and Geisler/Turek’s responses.

Class Activity
Have students search for articles on Coldcasechristianity.com that have to do with early testimony. Once they read their article, put them in group ensuring articles don’t overlap, so they can each explain their articles to the members of their group.

Devotional Thought:
Romans 15:4-6
6.2 Eye-Witness Testimony

**Read and Discuss**
Geisler/Turek chapter ten: “Do We Have Early Testimony About Jesus?”

Questions:

1. What biblical authors mentioned claim to be eyewitness and why does it matter?
2. What evidence did you find the most compelling for the validity of these eye-witnesses, and why did it stand out to you?
3. How would you respond to the skeptic that says, “Eye-witness accounts don’t necessarily make the New Testament writings true.”?
4. What is the main point of Geisler/Turek in the section: One Source or Many (pgs. 272-273)?

**Class Activity**
Based on Geisler/Turek chapter eleven: “The Top Ten Reasons We know the New Testament Writers Told the Truth”:

1. Break students into small groups, assigning each one of the ten reasons discussed.
2. Have students in each group synthesis the main point for their reason, and come up with an argument for why their reason is the best reason. To do this effectively they will have to consider the other reasons as well.
3. Allow each group to pick a spokes-person to make their case. Have the class decide who made the most convincing case.

**Devotional Thought**
Psalm 19:7-11
6.3 Ancient Biography and Manuscripts

**Class Opener:** Have students look at OneMinuteApologist to find videos that pertain to the this topic and then have them summarize and share with the class.

**Teacher Notes to be used with PowerPoint**
Supplemental materials from Mike Licona (Risen Jesus and various presentations on NT reliability)

a. Understanding ancient biography
   - Contradictions vs. Differences (John 20:1 vs. Luke 24:1)

b. Early Manuscripts
   - How we know? Ignatius, no mention of the temple’s destruction or Peter or Paul’s dying
   - There isn’t time for Myth to develop

c. Amount of Manuscripts
   - Much of this content is a summary of the two chapters students have finished reading, so as the class goes through the PowerPoint, see how much the students can fill in without you.

**Devotional Thought**
Matthew 4:1-11

→ Give students time to work on reading Geisler/Turek, Chapter 12: “Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead” and Grudem, Chapter 11: “What is the Resurrection?”
Unit 7 – The Resurrection
7.1 Sources and Evidence

Class Opener: Ask students to answer think how they would answer the following questions:
1. Why does the resurrection matter?
2. How can a reasonable person today believe in a resurrection?

Teacher Notes to be use with PowerPoint

1 Cor. 15:12-18 depicts the propositional nature of Paul’s message.

A. The Nature of History and How to Assess It

→ We can’t know history absolutely. We can’t repeat it. SO, we are looking for reasonable certainty.

→ If you are looking for absolute historical certainty, you have to throw out all history.

→ We’d always like to have more evidence, but we have to ask ourselves: “This is where the evidence points, is it reliable?”

B. Best Sources for the Resurrection
1. Canonical Gospels – Greco-Roman Biography

2. Letters of Paul – 13 in New Testament
   a. Paul knew the eye-witnesses
   b. The dating of 1 Cor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crucifixion</th>
<th>Conversion</th>
<th>In Jerusalem w/leadership</th>
<th>Goes to Corinth</th>
<th>1 Cor. Written</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AD 30</td>
<td>32AD</td>
<td>46-49AD</td>
<td>51 AD</td>
<td>55AD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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   c. Kerygma (from the Greek word κήρυγμα - kerugma for preaching)
      - 1 Cor. 15:1-3 – A confirmed teaching from the Apostles which was carefully passed down
      - Single (his opinion), divorce (tradition, not my opinion), married to unbeliever (opinion)
      → Paul was clear about pointing out what was “Jesus Tradition” and what wasn’t
      → Paul still wrote all of the letter under Divine Inspiration

3. Church Fathers – See Handout

4. James – The Brother of Jesus
   Pre-Resurrection:
Mark 3:26-35 – Jesus’ family coming to get him
Mark 6:2-4,6 – Prophet has no honor in his hometown
John 7:1-5 – Family’s unbelief
John 19:25-27 – Jesus entrusts his mother to John, possible his brother’s weren’t there

Post-Resurrection:
1 Cor 9:5, Acts 1:14, Gal → James active in ministry/leadership in NT church
Josphus (20:200) - Records James being martyred
Clement of Alexandria – Records James being martyred → What would it take you to be convinced your brother is God?

The Empty Tomb: Jet M (From Mike Licona lectures)

J – Jerusalem: Everything happened there. All it takes is someone going to the tomb.

E – Enemy Attested: Soldiers come back and say it’s empty (Book of Matthew)
   Justin Martyr: Everyone knows people tried to say people stole the body

T – Testimony of Women: In that day, if you were going to spin a controversy, you wouldn’t have chosen women to be your chief witnesses.

Class Activity
Have students watch one of the debates between Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman on RisenJesus.com

Devotional Thought
Hebrews 12:1-2
7.2 Alternative Theories

Class Opener: Impact 360 – Did Jesus Rise from the Dead
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwXx_EQuQdQ

Teacher Notes to be used with the PowerPoint
A. Hallucination:
   Because of their grief the disciples were deceived hallucinations of a risen Jesus
   1. Group hallucinations are incredibly unlikely
   2. Appearance to Paul - Paul wasn’t grieving Jesus’ death

B. Wrong Tomb:
   Maybe the Disciples went to the wrong tomb and assumed Christ had risen
   1. If this had happened, the Jewish & Roman officials would have corrected them.
   2. Wrong tomb doesn’t explain the multiple appearances of Jesus

C. Swoon or Apparent Death Theory:
   Jesus didn’t really die on the cross, he swooned and was placed in the tomb still alive, and then somehow convinced his disciples he had risen.
   1. Friends and Enemies alike believed he was dead
   2. The Romans were war machines – good at crucifixions
   3. In Jesus’ state, could he have really survived in the tomb without medical care (and think about what medical care was even an option to him in that day and age)
   4. The blood and water from the spear in front of witnesses
   5. Jesus was embalmed with spices and bandages (John 19:40)
   6. This sort of survival seems unlikely to convince/convert a man like Paul

D. The Disciples stole the body
   1. To say that the disciples stole the body doesn’t explain why they would die for that conspiracy. If they are the ones deceiving, then they cannot be the deceived… can’t have it both ways.
   2. Given what we know about the disciples is it likely to believe that could have stolen the body from two trained roman soldiers?

E. The New Testament Writers Copied Pagan Resurrection Myths (Mike Licona video)
   1. Unlike myths the NT writers appeal to eye-witness testimony
   2. The pagan myth can’t explain the empty tomb
   3. No ancient Roman or Greek myth spoke of a literal incarnation of a monotheistic God
   4. The first myths about dying and rising gods appeared around 150AD, So, if there’s any influence it’s that pagan myths are influenced by Christianity.
   5. Even if parallel “stories” existed – it doesn’t actually have any bearing on if Jesus rose from the dead

Devotional Thought
1 Corinthians 1:18-25
7.3 Miracles and Mission

**Class Opener:** Answer the Skeptic: As someone who values science, logic and fact, how is it reasonable to expect me to believe in miracles?

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-9 and 1 Peter 3:15-16

What do we learn about Christianity and miracles? Christianity centers on the reality of a miracle.

**Teacher Context for the Definition of a Miracle**


1. Natural view (Flew): “Miracles must involve an overriding of a law of nature, a doing of what is known to be naturally impossible by a Power which is, by this very overriding, shown to be supernatural.”

2. Christian View (Purtill): “A miracle is an event (1) brought about by the power of God that is (2) a temporary (3) exception (4) to the ordinary course of nature (5) for the purpose of showing that God has acted in history.”

3. Weighing the evidence: There will always be more evidence for death than for resurrections, so we have to be careful not to exclude the consideration any worthy evidence for a miracle, simply because that evidence is a minority report. If we apply this approach to evidence in history it “would eliminate belief in any unusual or unique even from the past.” Thus, anything grand or exceptional would have to be necessarily discarded because the overwhelming majority of historical occurrences are mundane and unexciting – which would include examples such as Napoleon Bonaparte or Alexander the Great.

Class Discussion pgs. 313-324 of Geisler/Turek chapter 12 (that students have already read).

Questions:
1. What do Geisler/Turek argue about burden of proof, and why is it important?
2. What is the point highlighted in the exchange between Dr. Craig and Dr. Crossan?
3. How do presuppositions impact the discussion of the resurrection, and Christianity in general?
4. Explain Hume’s reasoning regarding miracles? Why does it fall short?
5. What point do Geisler/Turek make in the Conclusion regarding *One Solitary Life*?

**Class Activity and Devotional Thought**

*Response to the Gospel – David Platt*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzHML-wDftE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzHML-wDftE)
Written Devotional Response: Have students complete the following exercise.

1. In this video David Platt says, “Eternity is too important to be flippant with the Gospel.” What significance does this have for how we handle the Gospel message in a culture that is lost?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 15:50. In light of what we’ve learned about the resurrection, why is it important that Paul is reminding the church that “flesh and blood” does not inherit the Kingdom of God?

4. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. How does this verse relate to our resurrection discussion, and how should it impact how we live out our faith?

4. Read Matthew 28:19-20. What is the relation between the resurrection of Jesus and his parting command to his followers in Matthew 28? What does that mean for you?
Unit 8 – The Explanation of Evil
8.1 Understanding Evil

Class Opener: Show clips from the movie, The Giver

Teacher Notes to be used with the PowerPoint

The “Problem of Evil,” as it is often called, is typically used to argue against the existence of a loving and powerful God. The reality is though, that Christianity, because it is true, is the only worldview that can explain why there is evil, why we are bothered by it, and how it will be redeemed. In this way, it actually points to the validity of the Christian worldview. Use the PowerPoint, “The Problem of Evil” to teach through this material.

Two Approaches to answering this question:
1. Intellectual answer → The head
2. The emotional answer → The heart
   - There are times when each is appropriate, and as Christians we need to be aware that this topic runs deeply personal for many who have suffered or experienced loss. Often, in the moments of suffering people do not need or want intellectual answers, but instead we should be present and prayerful.

The Intellectual Answer
- The question to be answered: “Is the idea of a loving and powerful God compatible with the existence of suffering, pain and evil in the world?

Frame the conversation: Mary Jo Sharp – One Minute Apologist
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TP3b7mjKCRQ&t=10s

1. Refining the objection:
   a. When people talk about pain and suffering, they are really talking about evil.
   b. Why are we bothered by evil?
      - Obviously no one likes to hurt, but why are we bothered by suffering that doesn’t even affect us? (Why do recognize that “it isn’t right?”
      - How does our worldview correspond to our experience?
        Ex. Evolution – Is/ought dilemma

2. Define our terms:
   Evil is a corruption of something good
   Ex: Counterfeit money - You only have a counterfeit if the authentic/true thing exists first.

Frank Turek Quote – Stealing from God (pg. 97)
   → Evil shows us that there is a way things should be, and that something is broken. In other words, as Turek highlights, we are borrowing from God to argue against him.
3. Present the Christian worldview
   a. God gave humans free will
   b. Humans rebelled bringing suffering and pain into the world
   c. Jesus died for rebellious humans
   d. One day, God will have the last say regarding evil
   e. By faith, we will inherit God’s kingdom as he intended it for us.
   → This explains why there is evil and how God will put an end to evil. On atheism, suffering just is the way it is. On Buddhism it’s tied to desire. How do these fit our experience?

Could there be another way?
1. Couldn’t God have created a world where people have free will, but where evil is also prohibited? C.S. Lewis quote – *Mere Christianity* (pg. 48).
   - True freedom is the option to choose how you want, and people’s choices affect us.
   - Does this limit God’s omnipotence? Can God do anything? No, he can’t lie
   - Controlled freedom is a nonentity, and God’s omnipotence is about what is logically possible. So while he can’t lie because it is inconsistent with his character, he also cannot do the logically impossible. (Numbers 23:19, Titus 1:2)

2. Free Will is necessary for meaning
   - Video Clip: The Giver
   - Alvin Plantinga: God chose the best possible world to create: World with robots, or a world with choice. He created Eden, which was perfect but also present very real choices and consequences.

*The Emotional Answer*
1. The hope of heaven is not an afterthought.
   God’s original intention is restored (Compare Gen. 1:7-17 to Rev. 21:1 – 22:5)
   The end of the story is what humanity has been progressing towards since the beginning.
   Heaven (The eternal state) is the main attraction. Everything else is the previews.
   Heaven will mitigate our suffering on earth – 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

2. We Serve a God who suffered for us
   The suffering servant (Isaiah 53, Philippians 2)
   Jesus live the full human experience (tired, hungry, loss, rejection, betrayal, pain, death)
   Our suffering can be used to point to who He is.

*Class Activity*
Again show the clip from *The Giver*, and then discuss in light of the conversation on evil.

*Devotional Thought*
Romans 8:28
8.2 Specific Questions in Group Projects

**Class Opener:** David Platt – Jeremiah 29:11
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWyI2aHHDHk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWyI2aHHDHk)

**Group Projects**
1. Break students into groups of 2-3 and assign each group a question from the PowerPoint “Evil Questions.” Questions range in difficulty so that they can be assigned to appropriate groups based on academic ability.

2. It is the goal of each group, to research an answer to the question they have received. They will need to put together a 3-5 minute presentation that answers their question. Each member of the group must participate in answering the question.
Unit 9 – So What if it is True?
9.1 Thinking about Truth?

Class Opener: Are You Tolerant Video (from Impact 360)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rt8bJyiUAhY

Read and Discuss
Geisler/Turek, Chapter one: Can We Handle the Truth?

Discussion questions:
1. What is tension between our desire for truth and our ability to handle truth?
2. In your own words from the reading, What is truth?
3. What are some of the truths about truth that stood out, and how to they relate to culture?
4. What is self-defeating statement?
5. What is the Road Runner tactic and why is it helpful?
6. Why can’t all religions be true?
7. In your own words what are the 6 problems with “tolerance” discussed in this chapter?

Class Activity
Show YouTube clips of people supporting positions that are culturally accepted, but not biblically true. Have students practice responding in groups focusing on how they could speak truth in love, if they were face to face with those people in real life.

Devotional Thought
John 8:32
9.2 What is the Church?

Class Opener: David Platt – Follow Me  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxgDS_aSka4

Read and Discuss  
Grudem Chapter 17: “What is the church?” Use the questions at the end.

Class Activity:  
Watch the music video of Casting Crown’s “Start Right Here”  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGvfagBOHJE

→ Discuss: What does the world see of “the church.” What examples in both history and modern day where the church has done well, and where it has missed the mark?

Devotional Thought  
Galatians 2:20
9.3 Living for the Kingdom

Class Opener: Assemblies of God World Missions
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zH_OGdnCXdc

Class Activity: Business as a Mission

1. Have students read the following link about Business as a Mission:
https://bethanygu.edu/blog/skills/business-as-mission/ and discuss the concept, and different field that would be applicable.

2. Have students list 2 or 3 fields that they are interested in pursuing, and have them look into how they could leverage that field (locally or abroad) for Christ?

3. Take time to allow students to share their findings.

Devotional Thought
Matthew 28:19-20
Video – Platt: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JoOHsk5D8g
APPENDIX D

March 15, 2021

Sara Boyd
Wesley Steenburg


Dear Sara Boyd and Wesley Steenburg,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

(2) Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word research with the word project throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

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