



Grace Communion Seminary

TH501: The Nature of God and Jesus Christ

Short Syllabus

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GCS mission statement

“Equipping the Saints for Pastoral Ministry.” We are committed to equip the saints for pastoral ministry through quality graduate-level distance education programs in biblical, theological, ministerial and pastoral studies informed by Incarnational Trinitarian faith.

Course description

This course provides an introduction to the doctrines of the Christian church. It studies the nature of biblical revelation and inspiration from the writing of the texts to canonization of the New Testament. Primary focus is placed on the nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and on the natures of Jesus Christ.

Required textbooks

You will need to obtain four books. The first three are assigned; you may choose the fourth from the list below. Please obtain these books before the class begins. To find the lowest prices on these books, use bookfinder.com.

Johnson, Alan, and Robert Webber. *What Christians Believe*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989, 1993. ISBN: 978-0310367215. Approximate cost for a new book: \$23. Pages 17-186.

Barth, Karl. *Dogmatics in Outline*. New York: Harper and Row, 1959. 978-0061300561. \$13.50.

Jenkins, Michael. *Invitation to Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001. 978-0830815623. \$17.00. Pages 15-206.

Required Text (One of the following texts is to be reviewed by the student):
(cost on average \$13.50) (You may request another text.)

Beisner, E. Calvin. *God in Three Persons*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1978. 978-1592445455. \$17.00.

Bowman, Robert M., Jr. *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994. 978-0801009815. \$11.00 used.

Erickson, Millard J. *Making Sense of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000. 978-0801062872. \$14.50.

Kruger, C. Baxter. *The Great Dance: The Christian Vision Revisited*. Vancouver, B.C., Regent College Publishing, 2005. 978-1573833455. \$10.50.

Recommended textbooks

Grenz, Stanley, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling. *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999.

Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Handbook*. Boston, MA: Bedford Books, 1995. Other editions are acceptable.

Student learning outcomes

Through this course, students will...

1. Analyze biblical foundation and historical development of doctrinal interpretation on the nature and purpose of the biblical revelation.
2. Explain the development of the Christian canon as it relates to old covenant and new covenant theology.
3. Articulate the importance of theology and its place in the first-century church in its worship.

4. Explain theological issues in the early church regarding God's existence and sovereignty.
5. Explain conflicting perspectives in the early church regarding the two natures of Jesus Christ's existence as divine and human with its vicarious nature for humanity.
6. Exegete biblical passages as foundational to theology on the nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
7. Identify appropriate definitions of theological terms used in the study of the nature of God and Jesus Christ.
8. Analyze and evaluate the doctrine of God as Trinity in Trinitarian Incarnational theology in contrast to other held positions.
9. Express orthodox theological understanding of the two natures of Jesus Christ.
10. Interpret and describe Trinitarian Incarnational theology on the nature of the union of humanity with Jesus Christ.

Requirements and assignments

1. **Read the lectures.** Lectures will be posted each Monday for the first ten weeks. See the *Academic Catalog* for study suggestions. You should look up any Scripture references in the lectures.
2. **Participate.** In most courses, part of the learning that occurs comes through discussion and interaction with other students. In an online class, this is done through comments posted on a discussion forum. We will have five questions posed that relate to the readings and lectures. You are required during that week to post a comment that can be read by other students in this course; then respond to at least one of the comments made by another student. This counts for one sixth of the final grade.
3. **Read the textbooks.** They total about 700 pages, or about 70 pages each week.

4. **Four Papers.** These count for two thirds of the final grade. We estimate that you will need about 80 hours to work on these papers – an average of 7 hours per week – some weeks more, some less. For a guide to formatting your papers, see “How to Format a GCS Paper,” posted at <http://www.gcs.edu/course/view.php?id=23>.
- 1) One 5-7 page review of a book about the Trinity. See choices on page 2; see below for more details. One sixth of the final grade. Due Monday of week 5.
 - 2) One 7-10 page research paper on the nature of God. See below for more details. One sixth of the final grade. Due at the end of week 6.
 - 3) One 5-7 page review of Karl Barth’s *Dogmatics in Outline*. See below for more details. One sixth of the final grade. Due at the end of week 9.
 - 4) One 7-10 page paper on the natures of the Lord Jesus Christ. See below for more details. One sixth of the final grade. Due at the end of week 10.
5. **One final exam,** which must be proctored. This counts for one sixth of the final grade. The study guide in this syllabus provides the terms and general concepts/councils that you need to become familiar with for the final examination. This two-hour exam will include multiple choice and matching questions, and a few short essay questions. It will be taken during the twelfth week of the course, after all lectures are provided and the book reviews and papers are due.

Here's a chart to summarize the assignments:

Assignments, estimated hours, and grade weighting

Assignment	Hours*	Percentage of grade
Reading the syllabus and lectures	12.5	
Reading discussions and making responses	5	16.67
Taking the final exam	2	16.67
Reading the textbooks	40.5	
Studying for the final exam	6	
Writing two research papers	60	33.33
Writing two review papers	20	33.33
Total – about 12 hours each week	146	100

* A student who reads quickly may be slow in writing papers, and vice versa. Some students will complete the course requirements in less time, and some will take more time.

Library resources

For doing research and writing papers, you will find it helpful to use a few modern scholarly books. Some students already have access to appropriate books; others will need to plan ahead, to obtain these books at a local seminary library, through interlibrary loan at a public library, or by mail from the GCS library.

You should also consult the document on our website, “Research Resources Available Off Campus.” Go to the “Public Information” section of our website: <http://gcs.edu/course/view.php?id=23>. While you're there, look at the GCS library catalog, too. We'd be happy to share our resources with you. For details on how our library works, see the *Academic Catalog*, section VI.H.¹

¹ The *Catalog* is posted on the GCS home page, left column, under “About GCS.”

Weekly topics and assignments

Week	Topic	Assignments for the week
Week 1	The Nature of Theology and Revelation: How has God revealed himself to us?	Read Johnson & Webber Chapter 1 Read Jenkins – Intro & Chapter 1 Begin reading selected text
Week 2	The Nature of Biblical Revelation: How are books written by humans inspired by God?	Read Johnson & Webber Chapter 2 Read Jenkins Chapter 2 Read selected text
Week 3	Biblical Development and Canonization: How were these 66 books selected out of hundreds written?	Read Johnson & Webber Chapter 3 Read Karl Barth – Chapters 1-9
Week 4	Nature of God: His Attributes Who is God? How is he Triune?	Read Johnson & Webber Chapter 4 Read Jenkins Chapter 3
Week 5	Nature of God: Heresies What is true about God? What is heretical?	Review One: selected text review due Monday. Read Johnson & Webber Chapter 5
Week 6	Nature of God: Biblical Orthodoxy: How does the Old Testament relate the true nature of God?	Read Johnson & Webber Chapter 6 Jenkins Chapter 4 Karl Barth, Chapters 10-15
Week 7	Nature of God and Jesus Christ: How does the New Testament develop understanding of one God?	Research Paper 1: Nature of God (due Monday) Read Jenkins Ch. 5 Read Barth – Ch. 16-20

Week 8	Nature of Christ: The Philippian Hymn: How does Paul understand the advent of Jesus?	Read Johnson & Webber Chapter 7 Read Jinkins Chapter 6 Read Karl Barth – Chapters 21-24
Week 9	Nature of Christ: Through the Centuries: How has the church understood the nature of Jesus? Was he human? Was he divine?	Read Johnson & Webber Chapter 8 Read Jinkins Chapter 7
Week 10	Nature of the Holy Spirit: Who is the Holy Spirit? How is the Spirit God?	Review Two: of Barth's Dogmatics in Outline (due at end of week) Read Jinkins Chapter 8
Week 11		Research Paper 2: Nature of our Lord Jesus Christ (due during week 11)
Week 12	Final exam must be taken on or before Monday of week 12.	

Further details on assigned papers

Review One: on a Text on the Trinity: Select *one* of the following texts and write a 5-7 page review. You may submit a request to me for another text that interests you. In this review, you should summarize the content and main points or positions taken in the book. Then highlight which concepts were the most meaningful for you personally and which you apply in your ministry.

Beisner, E. Calvin. *God in Three Persons*.

This text focuses on the threefoldness of God. Its cover states: “The word ‘Trinity’ is not found in the Bible. Where did it come from and why do we believe it?” Herbert Armstrong gets mention on page 18 due to his teachings that parallel Arian theology. Beisner starts with the Bible and progresses through the first four centuries of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Bowman, Robert M., Jr. *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*.

Bowman’s book is written as a response to the doctrine of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who teach that God’s oneness counters any claims of Trinity. They cling to a sense of Unitarianism. Bowman adheres to a strong Orthodox view of the Trinity.

Erickson, Millard J. *Making Sense of the Trinity*.

Erickson addresses three crucial questions; each serves as the title for his three main chapters:

1. Is the Doctrine of the Trinity Biblical?
2. Does the Doctrine of the Trinity Make Sense?
3. Does the Doctrine of the Trinity Make any Difference?

Kruger, C. Baxter. *The Great Dance: The Christian Vision Revisited*.

Kruger addresses the relevance of the Trinity to our lives. “In *The Great*

Dance, C. Baxter Kruger takes the historic doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, shakes them free of their academic dust, and shows how they unlock the hidden truths of our ordinary lives” (from the back cover).

Research Paper on the Nature of God: This paper should be 7-10 pages long. It should be organized in three sections and must incorporate material from the readings in the assigned textbooks, and may include references to material in lectures.

1. Section one: Prologue on the nature of knowing through revelation.
2. Section two: The nature of God.
 - a. What are the essential attributes of his nature?
 - b. What are the moral attributes of God?
 - c. What proves his existence to you?
 - d. To what degree does he control his creation?
3. Section three: How is God one, yet three?

Research Paper on the Natures of the Lord Jesus Christ: This paper should be five to seven pages long, organized in three sections, and must incorporate material from the readings in the assigned textbooks, and may include references to material in lectures.

1. Section one: The nature of God the Son
2. Section two: The human nature of Jesus
3. Section three: The vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ

Review of Karl Barth’s *Dogmatics in Outline*. (This should be 5-7 pages)

The purpose of this book review is to have you interact with the assigned reading of Barth’s *Dogmatics*. State the author’s thesis, summarize the major themes/concepts/ideas of the author, and then reflect on these questions:

1. What was most meaningful to you in your study of theology? Why?
2. What concepts are the most difficult for you to accept? Why?
3. What concepts have you incorporated into your theology?
4. How can you apply some of these concepts into your situation?