

Foundations of Systematic Theology

Syllabus

John M. Frame, D.D.
Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy
Reformed Theological Seminary (Oviedo, FL)

INSTITUTE OF
THEOLOGICAL
STUDIES



This page is intentionally left blank.



Syllabus

Course Rationale

Theology can be intimidating for beginners. Many students have been overwhelmed by the diversity of opinions and sheer volume of information to comprehend. If they are to succeed in their theological studies they must first establish a foundation of concepts and terminology on which to build their theological framework. Without this foundation, students cannot access important theological works or confidently discuss the various teachings of Scripture and how they apply to life. However, with this foundation in place, they can read and discuss the intricacies of God's Word and more readily build a theological framework for teaching others.

Course Overview

The *Foundations of Systematic Theology* deals with the essentials of all major areas of systematic theology with the goal to orient listeners to the basic concepts and terminology necessary to understand the big picture of God's Word and to engage in further study. The lectures focus on the overarching theme of God's Lordship using three "Lordship Attributes" (control, authority and presence) to organize the doctrines of Scripture and help listeners remember them. Listeners gain an understanding of how the doctrines of Scripture fit together and how to apply those teachings to life.

Course Objectives

Given active participation, upon completion of this course you will be able to:

1. Understand the nature of theology.
2. Summarize what the Bible teaches on the subjects commonly discussed in theological literature.
3. Trace the way biblical teachings are linked together by the overarching theme of Lordship.
4. Establish a foundation of theological terms and concepts for future studies in theology.
5. Identify major doctrinal controversies in the history of the church and show how they affected the study of theology.
6. Apply good theological methods to analyze issues not explicitly discussed in the course.
7. Appreciate the significance of understanding basic theological concepts for the Christian life.
8. Analyze your own spiritual life in light of biblical doctrine in order to identify areas for growth.
9. Place a high value on theology for spiritual growth.

Syllabus

Course Lecturer

John M. Frame is Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, FL (2000-present) where he was appointed to the J. D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology and Philosophy in 2006. He is a respected Reformed theologian, philosopher and ethicist perhaps best known for his prolific writings, including eleven books and numerous contributions to reference volumes, scholarly articles and magazines. His most popular works include *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, *Cornelius Van Til*, and *Doctrine of God*. He has also taught at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia (1968-80) and Westminster Seminary California (1980-2000). He and his wife Mary have two daughters and three sons. His education credentials are:



Princeton University, A.B.
Westminster Theological Seminary, B.D.
Yale University, M.Phil.
Belhaven College, D.D.

Course Texts

Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

The student should also have access to a Bible and the following historical documents: Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, Westminster Confession of Faith, and Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms, which are included as appendices to Grudem's text and are also available online at www.creeds.net, www.reformed.org/documents/ and www.tulip.org/refcon/.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Whether you sit in a traditional classroom or study from a distance, you will benefit from interaction, collaboration, and spiritual formation (ATS schools, note Standards 3.2.1.3; 10.3.3.3; 10.3.4.3). In order to meet this need in distance theological education, ITS is developing structures and resources to encourage spiritual formation and community interaction in our courses. In this course, we have included three collaborative learning features:

1. [ITS Online Interactivity Forum](#) (see p. 12) – fosters peer-to-peer interaction in a global, threaded discussion (required for all students)
2. [Spiritual Formation Project](#) (see p. 12) – fosters mentor-to-learner interaction in a mentor-guided reflection, discussion and application (required for all students)
3. [Learning Community Assignments](#) (see end of ILG) – fosters peer-to-peer collaboration in a group approach to assignments (optional but recommended where possible)

Go to www.ITScourses.org/interactivity/ for the most up-to-date ITS resources.



Syllabus

Three-Track Format

This *Foundations* course is written with **three tracks** to provide flexibility in multiple educational contexts (for full descriptions of the learning activities, see “Course Learning Activities” below).

- **Track 1** is a **3 semester hour** (4 quarter hour) **graduate course** and includes the following learning activities:
 1. Lectures and Reflection Questions
 2. Reading
 3. Theological Research Paper (15-20 pages)
 4. ITS Online Interactivity Forum
 5. Spiritual Formation Project (5-6 pages)
 6. Graduate Final Examination

- **Track 2** is a **3 semester hour** (4 quarter hour) **undergraduate course** and includes the following learning activities:
 1. Lectures and Reflection Questions
 2. Reading
 3. Theological Research Paper (8-12 pages)
 4. Spiritual Formation Project (3-4 pages)
 5. Undergraduate Final Examination

- **Track 3** is a **1 semester hour** (2 quarter hour) **graduate course** and includes the following learning activities:
 1. Lectures and Reflection Questions
 2. Reading
 3. Graduate Final Examination

For grading scales, see page 10.

Course Learning Activities

Learning Activity #1: Lectures and Reflection Questions (All Tracks)

Listen carefully to all twenty-four (24) audio lectures recorded by John M. Frame, D.D., and answer the reflection questions in each lesson. These lectures summarize the concepts of systematic theology using the rubric of the Lordship Attributes (control, authority, presence), which will help you remember the various doctrines and relate them to each other. Use the lecture outlines as a guide and the note-taking space for recording your thoughts. Note the following:



Syllabus

1. Consistent with the nature of systematic theology, the lectures refer to numerous passages of Scripture. *It is recommended that you have a Bible available as you listen and when necessary stop the lecture to look up passages or concepts that are new to you.* This will help you learn the concepts more thoroughly and cause you to engage the text of Scripture, which is the purpose of all biblical and theological study. Do not study theology apart from actually reading Scripture!
2. The lecture outlines have been reformatted for this distance-learning course, so some references by Dr. Frame to the numbers or letters of the outline may not match.

Tracks 1 and 2: Although the lectures are not factored into your course grade, the final exam assesses your understanding of their content and assumes you will have completed them. In addition, the reflection questions are optional but valuable to the learning process.

Objective: to accumulate course content through active and careful listening and to foster cognitive interaction with the material and application of it for the Christian life.

Learning Activity #2: Reading (All Tracks)

Read the following and submit a report at the end of the course stating that you have done so:

1. Read Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* in its entirety. *It is recommended that you read the relevant chapter(s) alongside each lecture so that you can compare and contrast Grudem's view with Dr. Frame's.* This will provide additional perspective from a respected contemporary of the lecturer.
2. Read the historical documents assigned in each lesson, which include the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, Westminster Confession of Faith, and Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms. These documents have been influential in shaping the theology of the church and provide background to the audio presentations.

Objective: to accumulate course content through active reading.

Learning Activity #3: Theological Research Paper (Tracks 1 and 2 only)

Choose one doctrinal issue to study in greater depth. You may choose anything that is covered in the course, but it is recommended that you study an issue that is relevant to your theological tradition, current ministry or future ministry. Hand your paper in at the end of the course. Required length: Graduate students should write **15-20 double-spaced pages**, and undergrad students should write **8-12 double-spaced pages**. Format the paper according to your school's guidelines.

Discuss the following:

- 1) Relevant biblical passages and how they inform the discussion,
- 2) Historical debates on the subject (if any) and the lessons we can learn from the past,
- 3) The views of systematic theologians on all sides of the issue with their strengths/weaknesses,



Syllabus

- 4) Your own position, reasons for it and its similarities or differences with other views,
- 5) Application of the doctrine in the Christian life.

Consult commentaries, journal articles and relevant books for your research (see the Course Bibliography, pp. 11ff, to get started). You may choose from any of the following topics below or suggest your own (this should be approved by your proctor/grader):

- 1) Should we use divine Lordship as a comprehensive model for theology?
- 2) Is the Bible completely true?
- 3) How sinful are human beings?
- 4) Do we inherit sin from Adam?
- 5) Do we have free will? In what sense?
- 6) Is Jesus God?
- 7) Did Jesus die for everybody?
- 8) Is Jesus the only savior?
- 9) Does God give gifts of prophecy, tongues, and/or healing today?
- 10) Does God choose people for salvation before they are born? For condemnation?
- 11) What are the meanings of “calling” in the Bible?
- 12) What role, if any, do works play in our justification? (Make sure to deal with James 2:14-26)
- 13) What is the basis of our assurance of salvation?
- 14) What is the proper mode(s) of baptism, and who should be baptized?
- 15) Is it fair for God to punish some people eternally?

Objective: to develop theological research and writing skills and to gain an in-depth understanding of one specific topic in systematic theology that will be helpful for current or future ministry.

Learning Activity #4: ITS Online Interactivity Forum (Track 1 only)

Participate with other students worldwide in an ongoing, asynchronous, threaded discussion on two major course topics. Go to www.ITScourses.org/interactivity/ to register for and enter the ITS Online Forum. In order to get the fullest benefit from the Forum, complete this assignment **after** you have listened to all the lectures. Return to the forum after finishing the course to see how others respond. Follow these steps to complete the assignment:

- ◆ Post an original answer to each question for your course (75 word min.).
- ◆ Post your response to one previous answer given to each question (75 word min.).
- ◆ Submit a document to your proctor that contains the original questions, your postings, and the postings to which you responded. (You will make a total of four (4) postings.)

NOTE: Please read the “Assignment Instructions” in the Forum for details.

Objective: to develop critical thinking skills through personal interaction with the content of the course and the responses of others within a diverse community of learners.



Syllabus

Learning Activity #5: Spiritual Formation Project (Tracks 1 and 2 only)

RATIONALE: Ministry preparation and the Christian life require more than academic exercises. Learners also need personal, spiritual formation, which involves theological reflection and critical thinking on their current practices and assumptions. This process occurs as learners engage in self-reflection and interaction in a community of learning. **With this in mind**, ITS includes in all courses a capstone project addressing these issues and facilitating interaction beyond the formal learning environment (ATS schools, note Standards 3.2.1.3; 4.1.1; 10.3.3.3).

Write a **5-6 page reflective essay** and **interview a mentor**, discussing the spiritual impact of this course on your life (undergrad students should write 3-4 pages). *Identify your mentor early in the course*, and submit the essay to your grader when you take the final exam. This last project should not be a summary of course content, but an application of course principles. Complete the following:

1. **Personal Reflection and Evaluation: *Reflect on the course*** – To integrate your academic studies with your walk of faith, reflect on the content of the course and evaluate your life in light of what you learned.
 - a. Follow these steps in your reflection:
 - Step 1: What **one** theme, principle, or concept in the course is the most significant to you personally? Why is it significant?
 - Step 2: What portion(s) of the course brought this theme/principle/concept to light?
 - Step 3: Think about your past. Why is it vital now for you to deal with and apply this theme/principle/concept?
 - Step 4: How should this affect your thoughts and actions, and what *specific steps* should you take to *concretely* apply what you have learned?
 - b. Write your answers to the above questions in full paragraph form. (Recommended length for this reflection: **approximately 3 pages**; 2 pages for undergrad students)
 - c. Give a copy of this reflection to your mentor (see #2).
2. **Community Reflection and Interaction: *Interview a mentor*** – Since the Holy Spirit uses the input of others to guide and form His people, interview a mentor according to the following guidelines:
 - a. Who should you interview? (1-3 are required; 4-6 are recommended)
 1. Someone with whom you have a reasonably close relationship.
 2. Someone who is a mature Christian ministry leader (i.e. a pastor).
 3. Someone who is **not** your grader or a family member.
 4. Someone who values the spiritual formation process.
 5. Someone who is familiar with and values the subject of the course.
 6. Someone who has experience using the content of the course in ministry.



Syllabus

NOTE: *Identify your mentor early in the course*, and give him/her the page entitled “Guidelines for Mentors.”

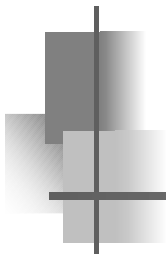
- b. Focus of the interview – Your interview should focus on the issues and questions you raise in your essay. For example:
- ♦ What feedback can your mentor give in response to your essay?
 - ♦ In light of the course content, are the conclusions you made appropriate? Why or why not?
 - ♦ What additional advice, deeper insights or broader applications might he/she suggest from his/her own life and ministry?

NOTE: Conduct this interview either in person (preferred) or over the phone. Do **not** use electronic communication (i.e. email, instant messenger, etc). Suggested length: 45 minutes.

3. **Synthesis and Application: *Draw your final conclusions*** – Having reflected on the course and the discussion with your mentor, synthesize what you have learned in these three sections:

- a. Section 1: Begin your essay with the personal reflection from #1 above. This should be exactly what you gave your mentor for the interview.
- b. Section 2: Comment on your interview, explaining what you discussed and the insights you gained from your mentor. Include the following:
- ♦ What were the mentor’s comments regarding your essay?
 - ♦ What advice did he/she give?
 - ♦ How did his/her comments expand or correct your application of the course?
 - ♦ Include the person’s name, occupation, and the length of the interview.
- c. Section 3: Conclude with a synthesis of what you have learned. Answer the following:
- ♦ If your mentor corrected any thoughts in your “Personal Reflection and Evaluation”, how do you feel about these corrections? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
 - ♦ Synthesizing your thoughts from section one and your mentor’s insight in section two, what final conclusions have you reached? How is this different from section one?
 - ♦ In light of the interview and further reflection, what additional, *specific* changes need to occur in your life and what *concrete* steps will you take to implement them?

NOTE TO STUDENTS: Your effort in this assignment will determine its benefit. If by the end of this course you have not yet reflected critically on your life in light of what you have studied, allow this assignment to guide you in that process. The instructor for this course will not score your essay based on the amount of spiritual fruit you describe; so do not exaggerate (or trivialize) what you have learned. **The primary grading criteria is that you have thoughtfully considered the principles of the course and realistically sought to apply them to your life.** If you have done this and met the minimal requirements (as noted above), you will earn the full points for this assignment.



Syllabus

Note on confidentiality: Perhaps the Holy Spirit is dealing with you in some very personal areas of your life. Because of this, your grader will keep your essay entirely confidential and either return or discard it.

Objective: *to stimulate reflection and interaction on course principles in order to enhance personal spiritual formation.*

Revised 10/05

Learning Activity #6: Final Examination (All Tracks)

There is a cumulative final examination at the end of the course, which covers anything discussed in the lectures. Graduate students and undergraduate students will take different exams, but both will include the following (unless your school makes changes—check with your grader/proctor):

1. Matching: Twenty (20) important theological terms and their definitions
2. Short Answer: Ten (10) questions covering various topics discussed in the lectures.
3. Essay: Graduate students will select one of two long essays (2-page minimum). Undergrad students will complete two 1/2 page essays.

Objective: *to assess understanding of the course content.*

Course Grading

Track 1 (3 sem/4 quar hrs. graduate):

Lectures and Reflection Questions	
Reading.....	20%
Theological Research Paper	30%
ITS Online Interactivity Forum.....	5%
Spiritual Formation Project	15%
Final Examination.....	30%
	<u>100%</u>

Track 2 (3 sem/4 quar hrs. undergraduate):

Lectures and Reflection Questions	
Reading.....	20%
Theological Research Paper.....	35%
Spiritual Formation Project.....	15%
Final Examination	30%
	<u>100%</u>

Track 3 (1 sem/2 quar hrs. graduate):

Lectures and Reflection Questions	25%
Reading.....	25%
Final Examination.....	50%
	<u>100%</u>

Syllabus

Notes Regarding This Downloaded Syllabus

This downloadable syllabus is not exhaustive. It is designed to provide learners with a picture of the course, not a full outline of the course. Grader Guidelines, Appendixes, Bibliographies, Lecture Outlines, and Review Questions have been removed. The complete course syllabus is included with purchase of the course in either a digital or hard-copy format.

Likewise, individuals taking the class for credit are responsible for the syllabus requirements of the specific institution through which the course is offered. Each individual institution has reserved the right to alter or change the syllabus as deemed necessary.