

ST513 Syllabus: The History of Apologetics

Course Description

How has the church defended the faith over the last 2,000 years? This course traces the history of Christian apologetics, beginning with the biblical text itself and moving through church history to the modern day. We will examine how the prophets, the apostles, and the great defenders of church history answered pagans, philosophers, skeptics, and modern secularists. We will evaluate all historical methods from a firmly Reformed perspective, recognizing that true apologetics must defend the faith without compromising the authority of Scripture, the total depravity of man, or the sovereignty of God.

Instructor Information & Course Details

Instructor: Dr. Toby Holt, D.Min., M.Div.

Title: President, New Geneva Theological Seminary

Contact: tholt@newgeneva.org | **Office Hours:** Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM (Zoom)

Course Duration: 10 Weeks | 2 Additional Module Videos | **Class Session Length:** 2 Hours per week

Course Objectives

- Understand the biblical mandate and methods for defending / contending for the faith.
- Trace the historical development of Christian apologetics from the early church right up to the contemporary era.
- Identify and critically evaluate the major apologetic methodologies (Classical, Evidential, Presuppositional) through a robust Reformed epistemological lens.
- Develop a working proficiency in the presuppositional method of Cornelius Van Til and its practical application.
- Equip students to confidently engage contemporary cultural, philosophical, and theological challenges within the context of the local church.

Biblical Foundation

"13 And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. 'And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.' 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." (1 Peter 3:13-15, NKJV)

Course Reading & Bibliography

Required Primary Sources & Texts:

- Cornelius Van Til, Christian Apologetics (2nd edition)
- Francis Schaeffer, The God Who Is There
- R.C. Sproul, Defending Your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetics

Recommended Secondary & Supplemental Texts:

- Voddie Baucham, Expository Apologetics
- J. Gresham Machen, Christianity and Liberalism

Course Assignments & Grading Rubric

Reading Verification (20%): Students are required to complete all assigned readings prior to class and be prepared to discuss.

Quizzes (20%): Three short quizzes will be administered throughout the term covering key historical figures, essential terms, and core methodological distinctions.

Midterm Paper (30%): A 5-7 page paper evaluating a historical apologist (e.g., Thomas Aquinas, William Paley, Justin Martyr). The student must outline the apologist's core argument, demonstrate its historical strengths, and identify any areas of theological compromise from a Reformed perspective.

Final Project (30%): A 7-10 page written dialogue demonstrating a sound, Biblical defense of the faith against a specific modern worldview (e.g., secular humanism, atheism, postmodernism).

Grading Scale: A: 90-100% | B: 80-90% | C: 70-80% | D: 60-70% | F: 0-60%

Course Policies

Auditors Welcome: Students wishing to audit this course are warmly welcomed and encouraged to fully engage in classroom conversations and discussions. Auditors are not required to submit paperwork, complete assignments, or take exams, and will not receive formal academic credit.

Attendance: Students taking the course for credit are expected to attend all scheduled lectures and actively participate. More than two unexcused absences will result in a full letter grade reduction. Three or more may result in course failure.

Late Assignments: Assignments are due at the beginning of class. Late submissions incur a penalty of one letter grade per day late. Assignments submitted more than four days late will not be accepted without prior approval.

Academic Integrity & AI Use: Original work is required. Plagiarism will result in an automatic failing grade. While laptops are permitted for note-taking, the use of generative AI tools (ChatGPT, Claude, etc.) to write or outline assignments is strictly prohibited.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction To Apologetics

Hour 1: Defining the Task

Hour 2: How Theology Drives Methodology

Week 2: Apologetics In The Old Testament

Hour 1: Polemics Against the False Gods

Hour 2: How The Prophets Contended For Truth

Week 3: Apologetics In The Apostolic Age

Hour 1: The Apologetics of Jesus

Hour 2: Paul and the Suppression of Truth

Week 4: The Early Church (2nd–3rd Centuries)

Hour 1: Response To The Rumors

Hour 2: Athens vs. Jerusalem

Week 5: Augustine and the Fall of Rome (4th–5th Centuries)

Hour 1: The City of God

Hour 2: The Corrupted Will and the Problem of Evil

Week 6: The Middle Ages and the Reformation Reset (11th–16th Centuries)

Hour 1: The Limits of Medieval Logic

Hour 2: The Reformation Reset

Week 7: The Enlightenment and the Evidentialist Trap (17th–18th Centuries)

Hour 1: The Age of Reason

Hour 2: The Evidentialist Trap

Week 8: Liberalism and the Worldview Defense (19th–Early 20th Centuries)

Hour 1: The Enemy Inside the Gates

Hour 2: A Comprehensive Christian Worldview

Week 9: Presuppositionalism and Cultural Engagement (Late 20th Century)

Hour 1: Van Til and the End of Neutrality

Hour 2: Apologetics Of Schaeffer And Sproul

Week 10: Apologetics Today: Postmodernism and the Local Church

Hour 1: The New Battlefield

Hour 2: Equipping the Saints in the Local Church