

Course Description:
Time Tested Truth:
A Systematic Study of Biblical Doctrine
2nd-5th Wednesdays, 7:00 pm
Orchard Hill Church, Lobby
Begins Wednesday September 14, 2011

Purpose of This Course Description: To answer the questions:

- Is this class for me?
- Will this meet me where I am in my spiritual journeys?

What Is It? This course of study approach to finding the answers every Christian needs to know about what the Bible has to say regarding matters of God, faith, and the church. It is a course of study in systematic theology for ordinary people.

1. For example: Our Christian understanding of “the Doctrine of the Word of God” says we believe the Bible to be the true and inerrant Word of God, essential for salvation and sufficient in all matters of faith. Where does that come from in scripture and how is a statement like that supported scripturally? More importantly, where do I stand on the issue and how does a statement like that support or challenge my faith to grow?
2. “User-friendly” Approach: This study takes the intimidating language out of the study of our scripture-based faith. Words like “Theology” and “Doctrine”, or words such as “Arminian versus Reformed Evangelical/Calvinist/Orthodox” or “post- tribulation, pre-amillennialist” often get in the way of understanding. This study avoids unnecessary Christianese and defines the bare essentials making scriptural truth accessible without over-simplifying.

Why Is It? If you were responsible to spiritually nurture a group of people exploring their faith and you were asked to consider the most essential foundational blocks of the Christian faith that would allow them to grow and mature into the persons God made them to be, what would those foundation blocks be? You might reflect on Romans 12:2 “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” Or Matthew 28:20: “...teaching them all that I commanded you...” The list goes on. What’s clear: scripture places the responsibility for Christian growth through study in two places: first, on the church leaders to teach; and second, on the growing disciple to learn, grow, and be transformed “by the renewal of the mind”. That’s why Orchard Hill Church offers a study like Time Tested Truth – to grow disciples to allow the church to be the church, at its very best.

What does it do?

1. **Explores Faith and Reason.** *Time Tested Truth* teaches the foundational truths of Christianity by scouring the entire Bible for what it says about each issue of faith. For many people, this study answers questions that linger behind their faith about the Bible, about what we claim to believe, and about what we actually believe. For some people, the chasm over which they make their “leap of faith” narrows considerably. Faith in the one true God of Judeo-Christian tradition becomes not only more understandable, but also, more reasonable. At the end of this document, are some testimonies from previous participants about their personal experience through this course of study.
2. **Settles Some Controversies.** *Time Tested Truth* delves into many of the historical controversies that have been the fiery furnace refining our faith for over 2,000 years of church history. Participants settle these controversies in their own minds and yet come to appreciate how and why others may hold onto scriptural understandings that differ.
3. **Connects Us to Our Faith Roots.** We connect with others at church for encouragement, support, fellowship, and study. We connect during weekly worship, in the Lobby, through small groups, and in groups that study, serve, and care. Believers in Jesus Christ throughout the last 2,000 years have struggled with the same faith issues and life challenges that we struggle with today. *Time Tested Truth* connects us to our faith roots and reminds us that we are not alone in our human faith struggles. It reveals the depth and richness of the Judeo-Christian faith tradition we've inherited, the legacy of mainstream Christian orthodoxy.
4. **Who Me, Do Theology?** An important piece to the study of theology is understanding how it's done. It may seem a scary word, but theology is literally “the study of God” or simply “faith seeking understanding.” A few ground rules apply that allow us to do theology together. If we can agree on the ground rules, we can do theology together. *Time Tested Truth* explains the ground rules, demonstrates them and practices using them.

When Is It? *Time Tested Truth* meets on the 2nd through 5th Wednesday of the month beginning on Wednesday, September 14, 2011. It is intended to be scheduled through the fall of 2012 (approximately 35 Sessions in all).

Where Is It? In the Lobby at Orchard Hill Church, Brandt School Road, Wexford, PA.

Who Will Teach/Facilitate this Study? This will be a collaborative effort among three teachers: Senior Pastor, Dr. Kurt Bjorklund; Teaching Pastor, Dr. Terry Thomas; and Ken Gryger, M.Div.

Who Should Participate? All of us have faith that seeks understanding; that's the only pre-requisite for participation. A disciple of Jesus Christ confronts the truth of scripture on almost a daily basis - at home and in the workplace. To work at understanding and to embrace its truth alone is a daunting task at best. To work at it in the context of Christian community can turn the work into a life-enriching blessing.

How Will the Sessions Be Organized and Do I Have to Make a Long-Term Commitment? You will get out of it what you put into it. You can determine your own commitment level. In this way, you can out of the study as much or as little as you prefer.

1. **Come When You Can, Leave When You Have To.** Weekly session topics will be posted in advance. Choose to drop in on the sessions that interest you. Each session will stand alone - no text, no required reading, just attend. Class outlines and notes will be available each session should you opt to use them.
2. **Diving In Deeper.** If you appreciate the encouragement a more organized method of study provides, this option is for you. If you commit to the long-term study, you will receive a course text, weekly reading, chapter summaries, notes in advance, session notes and outlines, post-session follow-up notes, and other communication via email. The material will be easily digestible and manageable.
3. **Dive In – Step Out.** The study design easily allows for all levels of commitment. Come for a season, step back for a season, re-enter later.

Personal Testimonies:

Systematic Theology has been a great experience. This study has filled in gaps in my understanding and addressed issues that I was subconsciously struggling with even though I did not know enough to put them into words. All that I felt was a vague uneasiness with certain subjects and doctrines that I was unwilling to contemplate on a deeper level. I have a much firmer understanding of what my faith encompasses and I am confident in how it all fits together. The takeaway for me was that God is bigger than my imagination and complete unto himself. My God is truly bigger and greater than any trouble or temptation I may face. And, he still loves me (individually) more than I can ever understand.

Derek Bozek, April 14, 2011

I remember it was at a men's retreat when I heard the idea of digging into a theology textbook. I had finished a 2nd CLC 2 years earlier and the timing seemed just right. I missed the discipline of meeting together weekly with some other guys. I had a working understanding of our creedal statements and thought it would be interesting to sit with a dozen men and read through a textbook. I had no idea what God had in mind. Room 15 was packed.

Grudem's text was basic but was so carefully constructed with every concept driven home with multiple Biblical references. (and not preachy, plenty of room to discuss differing views within Orthodoxy) I would have never undertaken a book like this on a topic like this without patient leadership. The group discussions brought the topics alive. Ken would say, "Let's 'do' some theology." And the guys responded by giving people enough time and space to work out what they really believe when no one is looking. And although some of my personal theology has become more crystallized, more sure, on some other points I have become softer, more open and tolerant. If Grudem wouldn't be adamant about a peripheral topic, who was I to push it. I heard "Unity vs. Purity" and I wanted to wisely seek the balance.

A project like this should change you, and it did. I've come to know and love the real God of the Bible in a more comprehensive way. I've come to appreciate and understand other denominations and their beliefs. I've come to love and respect the friends I've shared my Friday mornings with. I have a real appreciation for how much OHC desires to 'reach seekers and build believers' through offering studies like this. Room 15 was a safe place where we could share our doubts, ask challenging questions, all without fear of judgment or condemnation. It taught me that it isn't about us. We are now so much better equipped to serve.

Jeremy DeLattre May 3, 2011

I was "on the road", so to speak, over 2 years ago and thought Systematic Theology might be a way to know a bit more about God and Jesus Christ.

I was wrong!

I learned a TON more. Perhaps learned isn't the correct word, maybe, clarified, or have had explained is more appropriate. I never was, nor will I become a chapter and verse biblical scholar; however, I do find myself being able to convey scripture to others, if only when using part of a passage, to convey a thought about God's love. "...was blind but now I see." I have come to accept God's love for me in giving his only Son and Himself as well. He has given...and GIVEN is the key word, me the opportunity to accept it. I find my heart, which was hardened for so many years, has softened and while I may be a Christian bull in a china shop at times, I now welcome the opportunity to tell others about God-whenver I can. I feel so much better equipped to do that now.

As far as impact on Orchard Hill, I do give more of myself now than ever before, and it's a good feeling. Does it have impact? That's not for me to evaluate, but I will continue on my path. I can't help but feel that Systematic Theology should be an ongoing study program for those who are interested in a deeper understanding.

Mike McGann 4/14/11

We covered a lot of relevant topics. I felt like I learned a lot and I am more confident in my faith. In thinking about our Systematic Theology journey, I thought I had a fairly firm 3-legged stool foundation of Christian faith before this class. However, this class has put concrete reinforced with steel bars under my foundation stool.

I particularly enjoyed the Character of God and understand His 'beauty' more through his character. I enjoyed the distinct views of predestination and found the discussions encouraging and relevant. Often times, the time just flew by. I found the structure of the classes pertinent with the doxology first and the hymn last. The hymn melody would often remain in my mind days after class.

In addition, even though we have come from different points of faith views, we were able to disagree yet be in unity as a church community in and through Christ. All in all, I am proud to be a member of Orchard Hill Church. We are so blessed with talented and knowledgeable men willing to serve and support this teaching ministry.

Bob Foster 5/6/11

Systematic theology is any study that answers the question, "What does the whole Bible teach us today?" about any given topic. There are other definitions but as you would expect from the author, this definition accurately describes the text. Grudem does a great job of presenting theology that is based on the whole bible. In addition to his own theology, he offers a fair presentation of other widely held interpretations identifying the major scriptures they use to draw their conclusions. The reader gets more than the evangelical reformed tradition the author adheres to (as does Orchard Hill Church). The presentation of how other thinkers think, illustrates for the reader how to "do theology" so that you can draw your own conclusions and recognize fallacious beliefs.

We studied topics that I had no prior interest in. Numerous times I was uninspired by the title and brief summary of a chapter but was pleasantly surprised at how much I was edified by a seemingly mundane topic. Every step of the way as I was learning more about God through the detailed study of his Word I realized how much better I was coming to know God on a personal level.

Before systematic theology I completed 2 CLC groups, read through the Bible once and was engaged in ongoing Bible study. I felt like I had a lot of knowledge and was at a higher level of Christian maturity as a result. After completing this course I see how much more I've learned and grown. Before, when our faith was challenged I was quick to take a strong stand. While there's nothing necessarily wrong with that statement, I can now see how much fear and insecurity fueled my approach. Now I feel a lot more confident and better equipped, which I suppose can be interpreted as a stronger faith. I am much more patient with incomplete or faulty doctrine which enables me to respond in love (as we are commanded to do). This became most apparent when I recently attended a Christian retreat with people from many other churches. I didn't agree with several things I heard and in all cases my new renewed ability to respond in love resulted in the other people being very receptive to what I had to say.

I can see that through this study of Systematic Theology I have been able to trust in God more fully and gain a deeper understanding of the power his Love and Grace. Somehow I am intuitively finding the balance between full reliance on God and obedient living on my part. I don't know if this makes sense, and it's hard for me to articulate. Maybe the difference is that my thoughts and actions are in response to the Holy Spirit rather than my works.

One last thought. The retreat I referred was designed to build Christian leaders who will actively live their faith and be an influential part of their church home. I came away feeling like Orchard Hill is exceptionally strong in the areas of discipleship and study. As a participant in Systematic Theology there's no doubt this program is a major influence on my perspective.

I first started attending Orchard Hill in late 2001. People invited me to things like CLC and challenged me to serve as leader of a group. This is a church that fully believes their mission is to facilitate and encourage people in their seeking, spiritual growth and personal ministry. When opportunities like Systematic Theology are offered it's like a helping hand for those of us desiring a closer walk with God. It takes a lot of work to present something like Systematic Theology. I am very grateful for this church and the atmosphere that encourages men to volunteer their time, talent and energy that we might be blessed by their teaching, example and leadership; And I pray that others will feel led to begin the study and endure the inconveniences long enough to see if they are not only knowing more about God but knowing God more and experiencing Him on a more personal level.

Bob Cornelia 4/17/11