

Apologetics—ST5450

Reformed Theological Seminary
Fall 2026
2 Credit Hours

Note: the professor reserves the right to modify this syllabus as needed at any time.

Time and Location

Monday 1:00-3:00pm

Instructor

Justin Holcomb

jholcomb@rts.edu

Course Description

Students will examine the various approaches to apologetic methodology and engage the most frequently raised objections to the Christian faith. Through this course students will develop skills necessary to evaluate different worldviews and defend the Christian faith. Each student will have an opportunity to develop and sharpen an apologetic methodology and apply it to the task of defending and proclaiming the gospel.

The course is designed to be a basic introduction to the biblical, theological, and philosophical foundations of Christian apologetics. Attention is given to the differences between Christian thought and select examples of non-Christian thought. It will explore some of the assorted challenges to Christian belief and provide a survey of resources for meeting those concerns. There is an emphasis on using the discipline to effectively engage the contemporary scene.

Reading

Books

- K. Scott Oliphint, *Know Why You Believe*
- Timothy Keller, *Reason for God*

Electronic Readings on Canvas

- Other articles, chapters, and excerpts will be provided electronically on Canvas

Assignments

1. Research Paper: This paper is to address an argument for the Christian faith OR a major challenge to the Christian faith. This might be the resurrection, existence of God, problem of evil, trustworthiness of the Bible, or any other one in which you have a particular interest. If

researching a challenge, describe the challenge as clearly as possible, citing where necessary proponents of the challenge, and then formulate a response to the challenge from a Christian perspective. If researching an argument for the Christian faith, describe the argument as clearly as possible, citing where necessary proponents of the argument, and then articulate why this argument serves as a reasonable argument in support of the Christian faith.

This paper will be between 2,500-2,750 words and double-spaced with appropriate footnotes. This paper will constitute 50% of the final grade for the course. Due date is December 9, 2026 at 11am.

2. Debate Reflection: Write a 750-word reflection on “The Great Debate: Does God Exist.” This is 10% of your final grade. Due date is December 9, 2026 at 11am.

- Listen to the Bahnsen-Stein debate here: <https://justinholcomb.com/2012/01/17/the-great-debate-does-god-exist/>)

3. Reading Briefs: Reading is to be done in its entirety before class each week. We discuss readings in class, so prepare thoughtfully. Students will be assessed weekly via Canvas on their assigned readings. See Course Schedule for reading assignments and due dates.

Students are expected to prepare a brief on the assigned reading for each lesson. The purpose of the brief is to summarize the thesis, outline, and argument of the assigned readings, as well as to state one’s own analysis of it (in the form of questions, confirmations, objections, etc.). Briefs may include quotations from various points in the readings (so long as page numbers are referenced).

Briefs should be no more than 350 words. Briefs cover all the readings for each module. Do NOT write a brief for each chapter or article in a given module but all of the readings together.

Eleven (11) reading briefs are assigned but students are only responsible for ten (10) reading briefs. This means the lowest of the 11 briefs will be dropped. Reading Briefs are 40% of your worth grade. Each brief is 4% of the final grade. Reading Briefs are due each Monday by 1pm. Reading briefs are due for weeks 2-5 and 7-13.

Course Reading and Lecture Schedule

Week 1—August 31: Introduction to Apologetics: Faith, Belief, Burden of Proof, and the Myth of Neutrality

- RFG, “Introduction”
- KWYB, “Introduction”
- Acts 17
- Greg Bahnsen, “Socrates or Christ” (pages 218-220, “Paul’s Apologetic Method: Acts 17”)
 - Related but not required:

- Augustine, “Tractate 29.6” (p. 301) (Give attention to the word “believe.”)
- Anselm, Proslogion, chapter 1 and 2 (pp. 90-94)
- Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.6-7 (pp. 548-551)
- Graham Ward, “A Winter’s Tale”
- Khegan Delport, Why Faith Makes Sense: On Graham Ward’s *Unbelievable*”

Week 2—September 14: The Existence of God

- RFG, chapter 8 – “The Clues of God”
- RFG, chapter 9 – “The Knowledge of God”
- KWYB, chapter 2 – “Why Believe in God?”
- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book I
 - Related but not required:
 - Thomas Aquinas, “God’s Existence”
 - Terry Eagleton, “Lunging, Flailing, Mispunching”

Week 3— September 21: How God Relates to the World: Miracles as Test Case

- KWYB, chapter 4 – “Why Believe in Miracles?”
- RFG chapter 14 – “The Dance of God”

Week 4—September 28: The Case for the Resurrection

- RFG, chapter 13 – “The Reality of the Resurrection”
- KWYB, chapter 5 – “Why Believe Jesus Rose from the Dead?”

Week 5—October 5: The Trustworthiness and Reliability of the Bible

- RFG, chapter 7 – “You Can’t Take the Bible Literally”
- KWYB, chapter 1 – “Why Believe in the Bible?”

Week 6—October 12: **READING WEEK**

Week 7—October 19: The Problem of Evil

- RFG, chapter 2 – “A Good God Could Not Allow Suffering”
- KWYB, chapter 9 – “Why Believe in God Despite the Evil in the World?”

Week 8—October 26: Eternity, the Justice of God, and Other Religions

- RFG, chapter 5 – “A Loving God Would Not Send People to Hell”
- KWYB, chapter 7 – “Why Believe in Life After Death?”
- KWYB, chapter 10 – “Why Believe in Christianity Alone?”

Week 9—November 2: Science and Faith: Where the Conflict Really Lies

- RFG, chapter 6 – “Science Has Disproven Christianity”
- KWYB, chapter 8 – “Why Believe in God in the Face of Modern Science?”
- Alister McGrath, “Natural Sciences and Apologetics”
 - Related but not required:
 - Roger A. Johnson, “Charles Darwin and Darwinism”

- Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*, chapters 1, 2 and 11

Week 10—November 9: What Does It Mean to Be Human? Anthropology and Apologetics

- Oliver O'Donovan, *Begotten or Made?* (chapter 1 and 2)
- Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (intro and chapter 10)

Week 11—November 16: Jesus Christ

- KWB, chapter 3 – “Why Believe in Jesus?”
- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book II
- C.S. Lewis, “What are We to Make of Jesus Christ?”
- Lamin Sanneh, “Jesus More Than a Prophet”
 - Related but not required:
 - Thomas Jefferson, “Jefferson's Extracts”

Week 12—November 23: Beauty and Apologetics

- William Edgar, “Aesthetics: Beauty Avenged, Apologetics Enriched”
- C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory”
- Gavin Ortlund, “Why Math, Music & Love Make More Sense If There Is a God” (pages 87-101 from chapter 2 in Gavin Ortlund, *Why God Makes Sense in a World That Doesn't*)

Week 13—November 30: The Gospel Is the Heart of Christian Apologetics: Sin, Salvation, and Life with God

- RFG, chapter 10 – “The Problem of Sin”
- RFG, chapter 11 – “Religion and the Gospel”
- RFG, chapter 12 – “The (True) Story of the Cross”
- KWB, chapter 6 – “Why Believe in Salvation?”

Week 14—December 7: Defeater Beliefs and the Scandal of Christianity

- Tim Keller, “Deconstructing Defeater Beliefs”
- RFG, chapter 1 – “There Can't Be Just One True Religion”
- RFG, chapter 3 – “Christianity Is a Straightjacket”
- RFG, chapter 4 – “The Church is Responsible for So Much Injustice”
- Rod Rosenblatt, “The Gospel for Those Broken by the Church”

Policies and Important Information

Submission of work

Written assignments are to be submitted to the Canvas page for this course on the date due. Keep a digital copy of your work.

All written assignments should be submitted in Word format. Assignments should be double-spaced with 1” margins on all sides and formatted in Georgia or Times New Roman 12-point type.

Do not submit a paper that you submitted for another course. This will result in a grade of 0 for that assignment.

Late work

All assignments are due as scheduled regardless of attendance, unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor. Assignments turned in late will be deducted 1/3 letter grade for each late day.

Grading Scale

A (97-100)	B- (86-87)	D+ (75-77)
A- (94-96)	C+ (83-85)	D (72-74)
B+ (91-93)	C (80-82)	D- (70-71)
B (88-90)	C- (78-79)	F (Below 70)

Attendance Policy

Regular attendance is expected and required. Excessive absences (more than 3 class meetings) will result in the loss of points equal to one letter grade per absence. If serious illness or an emergency prevents a student from attending any class, please notify the instructor before the class begins. It is the responsibility of the student to obtain any materials handed out or presented during the missed class from a classmate.

Disability Policy

If you have a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects your academic performance) and would like to receive academic accommodations, please inform your instructor prior to the start of this course. The instructor and student will discuss the available accommodations for the course. If the student with a disability does not disclose that s/he has a disability, then the student is agreeing to take full responsibility for any related consequences that may occur.

Class Participation

Students are expected to participate in all components of the class and will be evaluated on the quality and quantity of discussion. Each student is expected to read all of the assigned materials in advance for each class and have prepared written comments and questions for class discussion. Contributions should reflect knowledge of the reading assignments or other sources.

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Apologetics 02ST5450
 Professor: Justin Holcomb
 Campus: Orlando
 Date: Fall 2021

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u> <i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i> <i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i>		<u>Rubric</u> ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.	Strong	Knowledge of Bible, systematic theology, historical theology, history, and cultural information will be presented and articulated in both written assignments and a dialogical teaching approach.
Scripture	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Strong	Student will demonstrate suitable use of Scripture and hermeneutical methods in understanding biblical worldview as it relates to belief and unbelief. Lectures will deal lots with biblical studies. One assignment is focused specifically on a passage the student selects.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	Material will be presented through the grid of Reformed Theology and practice as it relates to apologetic methodology and the Christian faith being presented.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Minimal	Materials will be presented that give the student a better understanding of the priority of sanctification
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Strong	This is the focus of the course. Students will gain an understanding of the need to conform all of life to the Word of God with special focus on "taking every thought captive."
Winsomely Reformed	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Strong	Student reads articles by authors that are not Reformed, and discusses the value of ecumenicalism as it applies to apologetics. Some readings and lectures will focus on presenting the gospel to de-churched and un-churched.
Preach	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Minimal	Content of course will influence the content of preaching. One assignment focuses on studying a sermon from Acts.
Worship	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to	None	

	lead a worship service.		
Shepherd	Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians, both in America and worldwide.	Minimal	The student will grow in their understanding of the role of apologetics for spiritual maturity (for believers to be more confident in their faith). The course promotes the use of various gifts and encourages students to grow in their concern for non-Christians.
Church/World	Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Strong	The student will gain an understanding of how to interact denominationally, ecumenically, and in the local context as it relates to apologetics and evangelism.