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Welcome and What is Theological Study?

Welcome to Carey Baptist College

It is great to have you as a student. These *10 Essentials for Assignments* are designed to give you some practical help in your study. They will provide you with useful guidance on approaching theological study, using your time wisely, researching and writing assignments and a number of other helpful study skills that a student needs to do well at Carey.

Read these essentials carefully and refer to them often. You will find that they are a useful companion as you immerse yourself in your Carey studies.

I trust that you enjoy your study at Carey.

Chris Berry
Executive Director

Acknowledgements:

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Carey has further refined and adapted the resource to suit the needs of their students. Carol Fearon assisted with the current updated version.

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What *is* Theological Study?

Objectives:

- To understand the theological and academic position of Carey.
- Develop an awareness of the biblical academic environment.
- Be able to state why you are studying at Carey and what you can expect from your studies.

1. Studying at Carey

Carey Baptist College is a Theological College. Study at Carey can be referred to as “biblical studies” or “theological studies” or similar terms. While they each have a particular definition for this purpose I am meaning the same thing each time. The study skills that you will learn are applicable to all students whether they are full-time, part-time, residential, or distance students.

Theological Education. . . What have I got myself in for?!

You have heard, or you may hear, a comment that goes something like this – “Bible colleges and seminaries are places where people lose their faith”. There is a mentality that exists in the community, Christian churches especially, that thinks knowledge is a dangerous thing and regards ignorance as bliss. Now I don't want to come across too harsh on this but that idea is total nonsense! Because you are embarking on theological studies I guess I don't need to convince you of this fact. But right from the start I would like to say that God wishes us to love him with all of our “heart, soul, body and mind”. Carey exists to facilitate the growth of biblical knowledge in order that you love and serve the Lord your God with all the resources he has given you. No study of God and his Word can be too much. *Only study that does not result in practice is wasted study.*

But amongst many Christians there is a suspicion that theological colleges, and hence Bible students such as you have just become, border on being overly critical of minor issues and doctrines. You may have heard it said that in the scholastic period theologians would debate endlessly such minor questions as “How many angels could fit on the end of a pin?” Many believe you are about to do the same thing in your biblical studies. But you are not - or at least, we are not going to teach you about insignificant, trivial matters. We shall expose you to the Bible and all its teachings. However, and this is the main point, in order to expose you to biblical teaching we must also expose you to the different ways humanity has attempted to interpret the Bible. As you will be well aware, the Christian church has not always agreed over many aspects of the Bible, and so part of your courses will involve reading ideas and interpretations that you do not agree with. This should not be too threatening. We are not asking you to believe in them. What we are seeking to do is to present to you the main arguments for any given question or interpretation of a passage, and then to critically discuss the different interpretations in order to reach the best possible conclusion. This is what it means to study the Bible at a more academic level; it is called the critical study of the Bible.

Critical study does not mean we are “critical” of the Bible. Far from it! It means that we engage the text of Scripture in an intelligent and thoughtful way, utilising the best of scholarly tools, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in order to hear God's voice as clearly as possible today. In this way, we

believe we are being faithful and honest with the Scripture's God has placed within our hands to understand and apply.

But Warning!

This means that during the course of your study, be it at certificate, diploma, or degree level, you will have many of your ideas and beliefs challenged. Sometimes the course notes will disagree with your views, views which you may hold dear. When that happens - do not be discouraged. Unless you believe that you have the only valid interpretation of a given passage then view these times as challenges. God may be doing one of two things. First, he may be correcting an incorrect interpretation you hold. Isn't it great that God cares enough about us to correct us when we are wrong? Second, it may be that God wants you to develop a more biblical and stronger argument for your belief and he is doing this by causing you to interact with those who think differently. Either way, your faith is strengthened. So be prepared to face challenges such as this, but also be prepared to grow in your knowledge and faith through these very same challenges.

Carey's Theological Stance

Without going into too much detail it may be good to see where Carey fits into the theological spectrum. Carey is an evangelical institution. Now don't confuse "evangelical" with "evangelistic". "Evangelical" is a term to describe a group of Christians who adhere to a similar list of doctrines and generally share a common Christian heritage.

Some of the key features of evangelicals are the following:

- A commitment to the Bible as the living Word of God that is totally authoritative for faith and practice.
- A commitment to Jesus Christ as the only Son of God.
- A commitment to the cross of Jesus Christ and all that it stands for. Only through Christ's work on the cross can we come to God, hence we stress the cross in all we do.
- A commitment to living out God's calling in our lives. This starts with a personal commitment to God (conversion) and involves a life committed to serving this same God.
- A commitment to the doctrine of the One God in Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

While there are other aspects involved these are the key indicators of evangelicalism. As you can see, evangelicalism is not limited to any one denomination but is interdenominational.¹ Evangelicals are found within most denominations. Carey Baptist College is a Baptist college meaning that it is part of the Baptist Union of New Zealand but our student body includes students from Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Brethren, and charismatic churches. So, positively, we can say that evangelicalism is an interdenominational movement that stresses the Bible, the God of the Bible,

¹ There is also disagreement between evangelicals, as will be clear from a quick search of online bloggers.

and the cross work of Jesus Christ. Whilst negatively, evangelicalism excludes all people, churches, and traditions who do not trust in Scripture, Jesus Christ, or salvation by grace and faith.

Carey is committed to its evangelical roots and so within all the course material you will find an emphasis on the consistent teaching of Scripture, on the central place of Jesus Christ, on the call for action that reflects God's being in the world, and on missions in the form of personal witness, corporate proclamation, and anything in-between. Evangelicals are people who love the Lord Jesus Christ, who love the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and who love the Spirit of God, and love to tell others about God as they learn more of him, and experience more of him themselves.

About Carey Baptist College

Carey Baptist College has offered tertiary level training since 1926. It is a learning community in which the following values provide the catalyst for our life together.

- **Evangelical in our Identity** - We are founded on the word of God. The living Word (Jesus) is our focus and the written word (Scripture) is our basis.
- **Excellent in our Performance** - We aim to be the best we can be. All of us, in all that we do, are continually stretching beyond mediocrity.
- **Integrated in our Practice** - We are committed to being an honest, transparent, and accountable community. Authentic Christian character is a priority and so is the development of fully integrated people. The gap between our heads and our hearts and our hands will be small.
- **Innovative with our Development** - We recognise that while convictions need not change, techniques must. We will be at the 'cutting edge', being creative and courageous in the way we learn together. We are continually prepared to take risks.
- **Accessible to our Constituency** - We celebrate diversity. We want to be inclusive. In particular, people's age, gender, ethnicity or geographical location is not a barrier to belonging to this learning community. Nor is their denomination because, while we belong to the Baptist family of churches, we are also a contribution of those churches to the wider church.
- **Relational in our Approach** - We value harmony within the community. We aim at relational leadership that empowers staff and student alike to be part of the direction of Carey. We reject unnecessary competition and we are committed to developing strategic networks with training agencies beyond Carey.

When it comes to our mission as a learning community we express it like this:

Because God matters to us and because the world matters to Him and because He wants His people impacting that world . . .

**Carey exists to train people for the church and for the marketplace
so as to enable them to serve and think and lead in a way that advances
God's mission in the world.**

In seeking to accomplish this purpose we are committed to four specific tasks:

1. Training pastors for the Churches in New Zealand.
2. Resourcing Christians called by God to remain in the 'real world', enabling them to integrate their faith with their vocation.
3. Equipping people for leadership in specialised mission and ministry roles.
4. Engaging in research and encouraging debate on contemporary issues.

2. The Impetus to Learn

OK, we have that official stuff out of the way. Now to the study itself, we look at why you are studying at Carey. Your reasons for coming to Carey will help you determine how to learn to the best of your potential.

Not *ought*. . .

In deciding to study through Carey many thoughts and reasons would have influenced your decision to study. A common phrase heard by adult students is that of “I ought. . .” People say “I really felt I ought to know more about the Bible, about my faith, about church history”, etc. The problem with “I ought” is that it usually stems from a vague feeling of guilt. Guilt doesn't usually provide a strong basis for motivation. Most of us don't like feeling guilty and will sooner or later give up what we feel we ought to be doing. “Deciding to study because you feel guilty about how little you know will be like trying to push a heavy boulder up an extremely steep hill.”²

² S. Roberts, & D. Muir, *The Distance Learner: A Travel Guide for Christians Studying Theology*, (Nottingham: St John's Extension Studies, 1994), 8.

But Why?

A better question is to ask what you *want* to achieve, and *why*. Spend some time thinking about the questions below. It is important to get answers to these questions now, before the “dark night of the study” sets in.

- Why have you enrolled in this course?
- What do you really want to get out of the course?
- Is there a specific thing you would like to be able to do as a result of completing the course?

The reason we must be focused on why we have come, started our studies, and what we intend to get out of this experience, is that in studying theology we are placing under the microscope many of our deepest held beliefs. You are studying something that impinges directly on your own faith. The content of the courses may be new to you, may be different from anything you have ever come across before. You will be faced with new ideas, new problems. This new knowledge may demand that we change our long held beliefs on the world, on ourselves or even our ideas about God. This sort of change is exciting but it can also be painful.

As you study theology, keep coming back to why you are here. Why is it God lead you to this place, at this time, and into this course of study? As it was the Holy Spirit who led you here, then remember to be reliant upon him throughout the journey. Pray often. Pray not just for understanding but for the faith and the courage to apply what you learn to all areas of your life. Working through your uncertainties to a place of greater security, will in the end lead to a stronger faith.

As you begin your theological education it is a good idea to invite a fellow student to be your prayer partner to share in the spiritual battles that you shall both face further up the road. If you are an individual student then ask your mentor or supervisor to pray for you regularly.