

# Lecture 1: Course Introduction

**Professor Grimes glanced** down at his watch. *Twenty more minutes and then the class begins.*

The aging professor stood to his feet and glanced around the small room. The classroom was worn and tired. It was one of the most run-down rooms in the Rutledge Building, and the building itself was the oldest one on campus. The crumbling brick structure was supposed to have been torn down three years ago, but the seminary made a series of bad investments and ran out of money. Instead of building a new structure they were forced to make do with what they had.

That in itself would have been fine, if the school had bothered to keep up with repairs. Sadly, President Harris made the decision years ago to halt all building maintenance. He claimed that it was better to save that money

and spend it on new buildings. However, it turned out that when he said “new buildings” he actually meant “a new football stadium”. Who could possibly have foreseen that building an expensive new football stadium for a team that had not won a single game in years was *not* the ticket to riches that Harris had promised? Who could have imagined that no one – not even athletes – would want to attend a university whose buildings were one inspection away from being condemned as fire hazards?

Well, Professor Grimes could have imagined it. In fact, he warned the administration repeatedly that they were making a mistake. But it did little good.

This particular classroom was a sight to behold. The paint had flaked off the walls years ago and the ceiling was sagging in a few places. The floor was bare concrete – dirty, stained, and cracked. Two of the room’s four windows were broken, and the overhead fluorescent lights flickered ominously.

Thankfully, the room was furnished – the professor had seen to that himself. It took him quite a lot of effort to round up chairs that

weren't broken, but after attending a few local yard sales he was able to find what he needed. Unfortunately, that was all his meager budget had allowed. The room lacked any sort of modern amenities. There was no wifi, or internet access, or coffee, or air conditioning. The chalkboard that hung on the wall had to be at least as old as he was. At least the white chalk was new (a generous donation from one of the school's alumni).

Grimes, though, never wrote anything on his chalkboards. In the early days of his career he covered them with important material, but then he realized that none of his students ever took any notes of any kind. Since they couldn't be bothered to write down what he wrote on the chalkboard, over time Grimes just stopped writing anything. If the professor ever spotted a student who was an actual note-taker he was prepared to resume using the chalkboard, but that never happened.

The desk at the front of the room was no prize either. Most of the desk was charred, a sign that it had once been on fire. Professor Grimes often wondered what the story was behind that desk. Had an irate student once

set that classroom on fire, and no one bothered to remove the torched desk? Or, instead, had someone found that desk in a burned-out house and decided to carry it all the way to the seminary and then haul it up three flights of stairs? It was hard to tell which option was less insane.

A young woman walked into the room. The professor recognized her immediately. *That's Iris Pearson. She's attending this seminary with her husband. The two of them are training to be missionaries. I think they're hoping to plant churches in Ethiopia.*

As Iris took a seat in the middle of the room, she happened to notice the giant piece of industrial machinery that sat beside the professor's desk. "What is *that*?" she asked.

Professor Grimes smiled. "It's amazing what you can find on the internet these days, isn't it?"

The device was roughly the shape of the cube, and was five feet wide and four feet tall. It had a square opening at the top and was connected to the wall by a thick electrical cord. The box was made of a rough gray metal and had warnings plastered all over its side.

Iris eyed the warnings carefully. “Does that box really say that it can kill me?”

Professor Grimes nodded. “Indeed it does – but that can only happen if you jump inside it and turn it on, which I don’t recommend. You should also avoid jumping inside cement mixers, industrial grinding machines, and clothes dryers. The good news is that if you don’t come up here and bother it, it won’t bother you. In fact, it won’t do anything at all unless I insert the key and turn it on.”

“But what does it do?” Iris asked.

“It removes distractions from the classroom. I’ll explain when the rest of the class arrives.”

The professor sat down behind his desk and waited. Over the next ten minutes, four more people arrived. Professor Grimes knew them all. The first one was Brad Kramer, who entered the room wearing a rather expensive suit and tie. According to his application he wanted to become the pastor of a church. Brad definitely looked the part – he knew how to dress and he was a good public speaker. The only thing holding him back was a terrible

grasp of theology.

The second one was Isaac Keith, a music major. He wore a clean pair of blue jeans (not a single pair of holes to be seen!) and a collared shirt. Isaac had a distracted look about him, as if he had a thousand other things on his mind. From what Grimes could tell, Isaac was always busy but somehow never accomplished very much.

Next, Rob Brewer entered the room wearing blue jeans and a t-shirt. On his application he said he wanted to become a medical missionary. Rob hadn't said very much on his application – he was apparently the quiet type. Given his exam answers, though, Grimes was pretty sure that Rob had a lot to learn. The professor hoped that his knowledge of medicine was much better than his knowledge of the Bible.

The last student who entered the classroom was Wally Harding. In a class of mediocre and grossly incapable students, Wally truly stood out. Professor Grimes read his application five times but was unable to figure out what he wanted to do with his life – or if he was even capable of putting

together a coherent thought. When the professor first met him and asked him who he was, Wally had told him four times that it was Tuesday.

Frankly, Grimes was surprised to see Wally attend class at all. Ninety students had signed up for his course but only five people were present. The professor was disappointed at the turnout but he was not surprised. He knew from experience that thirty chairs would be more than enough to take care of the few students who would actually bother to come through the classroom door. If he was lucky he might hit a peak of 10 people in attendance – and that would only happen if a few students wandered into his classroom by mistake.

He looked down at his watch again. Five minutes to go.

“Hey professor?” Isaac asked. “What’s that big metal box for?”

Grimes looked over at the student and saw that he was furiously texting on his cell phone. “I use it to shred cell phones,” the professor said casually. “You see, they’re not allowed in here, and that box disposes of

them for me. *Permanently.*"

Isaac jerked his head up, his eyes wide. When he saw that the professor was serious he turned off his phone and stuck it in his pocket. "Oh, right. Sorry. It won't happen again."

The professor nodded but said nothing. He picked up his notes and rifled through them. As he expected, nothing was missing.

Brad spoke up, interrupting his thoughts. "You don't look very happy, professor."

Professor Grimes look at him for a moment. "Tell me something, young man. How long have you been going to church?"

Brad shrugged. "All my life, I guess."

"But how often have you actually attended services? Once a month?"

Brad shook his head. "More like once a week. Usually more than once a week, actually. I take church attendance very seriously."

The professor nodded. "Very good. If the average sermon you heard was a mere 30 minutes long, and if you heard two of them a week, that would mean you had 52 hours of Biblical teaching a year. Over the span of 10



years that would come out to 520 hours of Biblical instruction. A great deal can be covered in 500 hours of preaching!

“Now, if you were a new Christian or someone who had spent very little time in church, I could understand why you are so ignorant about Christianity. After all, no one is born knowing what the Bible says. You, however, have had hundreds of hours of Biblical instruction and yet you know nothing about the Bible! On the test you took when you enrolled into this seminary you could not tell me who led Israel out of Egypt. You had no idea who started the Reformation. You said that Noah was married to Joan of Arc. In fact,” and the professor began to turn purple, “when asked about Sodom and Gomorrah, you claimed *they were husband and wife!*<sup>1</sup>”

“So?” Brad said.

“You said that the Sermon on the Mount

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<sup>1</sup> I did not make up these answers. See “The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy”, by Albert Mohler (the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary). The article was written on June 29, 2004. I don’t think things have improved since then.

was preached by Billy Graham <sup>2</sup> !” the professor shouted. “And you want to be a *pastor*! My grandson Freddy knows a hundred times more about the Bible than you do – and he is 7 years old!”

“That’s kind of insulting,” Brad replied.

“No, what’s insulting is that every one of you said on your application that you feel your knowledge of Christianity is ‘exceptional’ – and yet *none* of you could explain the gospel. Since all of you lack an understanding of the most basic truth of Christianity, you were required to enroll in this class.”

The professor glanced at his watch. “Since it’s ten o’clock, we might as well get started. My name is Professor Grimes and this is Christianity 101. We are in room 313 of the Rutledge Building, and this class will be held on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at precisely 10:00 am all semester. Is there anyone who is in the wrong class?”

“Who would do a thing like that?” Brad asked.

“It’s easy to make mistakes,” the

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<sup>2</sup> I didn’t make this up either.

professor replied. "This is a rather dilapidated campus and the buildings and rooms are not clearly labeled. Besides, this is a freshman-level course and the college experience takes some getting used to. However, let me be clear: this is Christianity 101, and if you are in the wrong room you need to leave *now*."

After looking around and not seeing anyone move, the professor nodded. "Very well. Now, the first order of—"

At that moment another student noisily burst through the door. The student was wearing a dirty pair of jeans, a white t-shirt that was full of holes, and sneakers that looked like they had been attacked by a bear. After glancing around he took a seat in the front of the room, opened his backpack, and took out his laptop.

The professor frowned. "I'm sorry, young man, but I'm afraid you can't do that. This class has a strict—"

"I can do whatever I want," the student shot back. "It's a free country. Get over it."

"—policy prohibiting all electronic devices," the professor continued calmly. "That computer is not allowed in here."

"I use it to take notes," he replied.

"You may *not* use a computer in here," Professor Grimes replied firmly. "Nor are you allowed to use a cell phone, a tablet, or a portable music device. I have also banned portable radios, television sets, refrigerators, and remote-controlled airplanes. I included a complete list in your class syllabus."

"I don't care," he replied.

"Young man, you had *better* care about it. That syllabus is your guide to life in this class, and your only hope of getting a passing grade. It lays out the rules and the consequences for breaking those rules. If you do not learn what my syllabus has to say and start abiding by it, you will fail."

"Still don't care."

The professor's frown deepened. He walked over to the student and stood directly in front of his chair. "What is your name?"

"Andy," he said, without looking up from his computer. The student logged in and pulled up a web browser. "Hey, give me some space, will you? Back off. I've got, like, stuff and things."

Professor Grimes glared at him. "Andy,

you are wasting my time, which I despise. You are also wasting class time, which I despise even more. I will say this only once. I *do not* allow electronic devices in here because I do not trust any of you to use them responsibly. If you were angels from Heaven then I might change my policy, but you are *far* from being angels. Before you were even allowed to register for my class you had to sign a document in which you agreed to not bring electronic devices in here without my express written permission. The document that you signed clearly stated that if you violated that provision I had the right to immediately seize and destroy the offending device. You, Andy, are in violation of that policy. If you do not put away that laptop *right now* I will destroy it.”

The student paused the online poker game he was playing and glanced up at the professor. “I bet you will,” he smirked. “Go ahead. I dare you. Give it your best shot.”

In one swift move the professor grabbed the computer and tossed it into his industrial shredder. Before Andy could react Grimes quickly removed a key from his pocket, placed it into a keyhole in the shredder, and turned

it. The shredder roared to life and filled the room with a horrible, gut-wrenching noise.

When the awful grinding noise finally stopped, Professor Grimes removed the key from the shredder and returned it to his pocket. "I have to say that burning electronic devices was much more satisfying, but unfortunately the fire marshal didn't like the fact that I was starting fires in my classrooms. However, the shredder does get the job done, so I won't complain."

Andy was furious. "How dare you steal my computer! How *dare* you! I'll have you arrested!"

"Let's review the situation," the professor said calmly. "First of all, it is impossible to sign up for this course online. In order to take this class you must go to my secretary's office and apply for it in person. When you did that, my secretary handed you a half-page document clearly stating that if you brought unapproved electronic devices into this room and used them during class, I had the right to destroy them. In order to take this class you had to agree to my right to do that. Moreover, before my secretary would

allow you to sign that document she actually *read it to you out loud*. You had to verbally state that you understood it and had no questions. Only after you made that confession and signed that document in the presence of a notary would my wife agree to enroll you.”

“But that’s outrageous! I-”

“You have no legal basis for a claim against me. I spelled out the rules for you in detail, long before you ever set foot in this classroom. When you violated them I reminded you of the rules *and* the consequences, and I offered you a chance to escape those consequences. When you continued to violate my rules I took an action that I had every legal right to take. In other words, I did exactly what I said I was going to do.”

“I’ll sue you!” the student yelled. “No one can do this to me!”

Professor Grimes shook his head. “Over the course of my career I have had many students threaten to take me to court. Believe it or not, one day one of them actually did. By the time his case was over the student was

expelled from the school, I collected a sizable amount of damages from him, and I got his lawyer permanently disbarred from practicing law. I may look old but I assure you I am not an easy target.”

Andy jumped up out of his chair and shook his fist at the professor. “I’ll get you,” he snarled. He then stormed out of the classroom and slammed the door behind him.

The professor looked at the students who were still in the class. Wally had somehow managed to sleep through the entire episode. Grimes had a feeling it would not be the first time.

“So what can we learn from this?” Grimes asked them.

“Um, pay more attention?” Iris said.

Professor Grimes smiled. “Yes, I do recommend that. But let’s take a look at what just happened. I have a very clear rule: no unpermitted electronic devices may be used in this classroom. I have spelled out the consequences of breaking that rule: if you disobey I will destroy that device. The young man who just left was aware of that rule, but he was not concerned about it. He rejected



my authority to make rules and my authority to enforce them. He believed that he had an absolute right to do as he wished and that no one could tell him otherwise.

“My rule may inconvenience you, but it is for the best. Young people such as yourselves have a great deal of trouble paying attention. It is much easier to focus if distractions are kept to a minimum. You may not agree with that decision, but as your teacher I have the right to make that call.

“Now, a rule that has no consequences is not much of a rule at all. In order for a rule to matter it *must* be enforced. What so upset our departed pupil is that I exercised my authority to do exactly what I said I was going to do. He learned that there really *are* consequences for breaking rules. His rejection of my rules does *not* mean that my rules do not apply to him. All it means is that he is going to suffer the consequences of being a rulebreaker – and that is something he is not going to enjoy.”

“I’ll say,” Isaac commented. “He’s going to hate you!”

“He should be upset with *himself*. I gave

him the opportunity to avoid the consequences of his actions, but he refused to change his behavior. He could have avoided destruction but he chose not to. He is the one who is responsible for his fate.

“The same thing can be said for all of us. God has laid down very clear rules for living in the universe that He created. If we wish to avoid His eternal wrath, all we have to do is be absolutely, completely perfect for every moment of our entire lives. We must never lie – not even once. We must never steal anything, however small. We must never commit adultery, or lust after someone, or dishonor our parents, or worship anyone other than God. Even the smallest infraction of any of His rules is punishable by eternal damnation.”

“But that’s totally impossible to do!” Iris exclaimed. “No one could ever live up to that.”

Professor Grimes nodded. “You are absolutely right. All of us are guilty before God, and no amount of good works can ever make things right. We have *no* hope of *ever* doing anything that could pay for our sins. Yet, when we were utterly lost and without hope,

God acted on our behalf. God, out of a deep and unfathomable love, sent His Son Jesus into this world. Jesus suffered on the cross and died for *our* sins. He took upon Himself the punishment that *we* rightfully deserved for our actions. Since He was declared guilty, we can be declared innocent. Our sins have been paid for by His death. Those who confess their sins and believe on Him will be given everlasting life and joy. However, those who refuse to repent and insist on living as they please will face God's wrath."

"Yeah, yeah, we know," Brad said.

The professor sighed. "I wish you did know. If you understood the gospel you wouldn't be in this classroom. All of you are here because you don't have the slightest understanding of what Christianity actually is."

"Of course we do!" Brad replied curtly. "God loves us and wants to make us happy."

Professor Grimes winced. "That is *exactly* why you are in this room, Brad – because of answers like that. Let me read something to you."

The professor picked up his Bible and opened it. "Hebrews 11 talks about some of

the great heroes of the Bible – men and women who were faithful to God. Let's take a look at what God had to say about these people who served Him faithfully. Verses 36-39 say this: 'And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise'."

The professor looked around the room. "Did you catch any of that? These people – who delighted God and who were faithful – were stoned to death. They were *murdered*. They were destitute and afflicted. They had to wander around in deserts and live in caves. In other words, they *suffered*. Suffered! In fact, they suffered terrible horrors. Why was that, Brad? If God loves us and wants us to be happy, why did these righteous people suffer

so much?”

Wally spoke up. “You gotta name it and claim it! There’s power in prayer, man.”

Professor Grimes was surprised to see that Wally was awake. Perhaps he wasn’t going to spend the semester asleep at his desk after all.

“Is that why Jesus was crucified?” the professor asked. “Did He forget to ‘name it and claim it’? Is that why He was so poor that He didn’t even have a home of his own?”

There was silence in the classroom. “All over the world today Christians are being beaten, imprisoned, and put to death. Why is that happening, Wally? During the Middle Ages many Christians were burned at the stake. Eleven of the apostles were put to death, even though they faithfully served Christ to their final, dying breath. Why didn’t they lead wealthy and fabulous lives? Where was their ‘best life now’?”

“What you all seem to have forgotten – or perhaps were never taught in the first place – is that Jesus promised us *suffering*, not wealth. In John 15:19 Jesus told His followers that the world would hate them,

and in the next verse He said the world would persecute them. In John 16:33 Jesus said that in this world we would suffer tribulation and trials. In other words, He warned us that the world that hated Him would also hate us, and the world that sought to murder Him would also seek to murder us. Following Jesus carries a very real and very serious cost. It is not a ticket to an easy life – which is something Christians all over the world can tell you.”

“That’s crazy!” Brad exclaimed. “Who would sign up for a deal like that?”

“That’s a good question. Tell me, young man: what happens if you *reject* that deal?”

“Well, you avoid all that crazy persecution, for one thing. That’s pretty big in my book.”

Professor Grimes nodded. “That’s true. The world tends to love those who are on its side. However, there’s a catch: God considers all those who are on the world’s side to be His enemies. James 4:4 says ‘whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God’. What does God do to His enemies?”

“He loves them,” Wally said.

The professor paused for a moment. “There is truth in that. All of us started out as God’s enemies – people who were lost in sin and living lives of rebellion against God. Yet, despite that, God offered salvation to the very people who were in rebellion against Him. He loved us even though we hated Him, and He offered us a chance to repent and be forgiven. Those who take it will be saved. However, those who *don’t* take it – those who choose to continue to live in sin – will be tormented for the rest of time. They will literally be burned alive for all of eternity – unable to die and unable to do anything but face endless billions of years of unbearable pain and agony.”

“That doesn’t seem very fair!” Brad said sourly.

“You’re absolutely right,” the professor agreed. “It would have been far more fair if God had just condemned *all* of us to Hell right from the start. After all, Jesus never did anything wrong. It wasn’t the least bit fair for *Him* to be tortured to death, since *we* were the ones who were guilty! Instead of being

fair God offered us *mercy*. Jesus paid our debt *with His own blood*. We did not deserve that, but God did it anyway. God did not owe us salvation, but He still provided it.

“What is truly amazing is that all those who repent and believe will be spared the consequences of their actions, because Jesus has taken the consequences of their sins upon Himself. *That* is the love of God. Those who refuse that offer and reject that love have only themselves to blame for what happens next.

“So yes, you can certainly choose to side with the world, and in doing so you may escape persecution. But instead of facing the wrath of man you will face the wrath of God – and that is far, far worse than you could ever imagine. As Jesus said in Matthew 10:28, ‘And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.’”

Wally spoke up. “But I don’t want to suffer!”

“I’m afraid that suffering is not optional,” Professor Grimes replied. “The only question is this: are you going to be faithful to God and



suffer in this life, and then spend eternity in peace and joy; or are you going to rebel against God in this life to avoid that suffering, and then spend an eternity of unbearable torment in unquenchable fire? Those are your only options. No matter how much you might wish the world was different, it's going to be one or the other."

The professor glanced down at his watch. "Next week we will begin our class by studying the person and characteristics of God. Be sure to read chapters 1 through—"

At that moment the door to class suddenly swung open and Andy barged in. A policeman followed close behind him.

"There he is, officer!" the student shouted. "He's the one who took my computer!"

Professor Grimes reached out and shook the policeman's hand warmly. "Good to see you, Bob. How are you doing these days?"

Officer Bob Wells smiled. "Life hasn't changed much since I last saw you earlier this morning. You've got a lively bunch this year, don't you?"

Andy interrupted. "Officer, you need to

arrest that man! He's a criminal! He's dangerous!"

Professor Grimes shook his head. "I have broken no laws. In fact—"

But Andy just couldn't take it anymore. In a fit of rage he lunged at the professor and hurled a punch at him. Grimes was so focused on his conversation with Officer Wells that he was caught completely off-guard. Andy's punch landed squarely on the professor's chest and knocked him down onto the floor.

Before Andy could land any more punches the policeman grabbed him. In a matter of seconds he had the student in handcuffs and was telling him his rights. Officer Wells then helped Professor Grimes back to his feet. "The usual charges?"

Grimes nodded as he tried to catch his breath. "Assault, public disturbance, etc. I'll be down later to fill out the paperwork."

"You can't do this to me!" Andy shouted. "You'll pay for this!"

"Really?" Professor Grimes asked. "You applied to this seminary to become a *pastor*, and during your first hour in class you tried to get your professor arrested and then

assaulted him. Not only have you failed the class, but the assault of a teacher results in automatic expulsion. Your career here is over.”

As Officer Wells led the screaming youth away, the professor turned to the class. “You’re all dismissed! I’ll see you on Wednesday.”

After the students left the room, Grimes gathered up his materials and looked around. He sighed deeply. *Another casualty*, he thought to himself. *But perhaps there is still hope for Andy. This is probably the first time in his life he has ever been told ‘No’, and the first time he has ever suffered consequences for his actions. Perhaps he will learn that there is a real world out there, and its rules cannot be ignored simply because he doesn’t like them. I tremble for those who never hear the word ‘No’ until they stand before God and are judged. That is a poor time to find out that choices have very real consequences.*

