

ST5500: Pastoral and Social Ethics (3 hrs)

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Meeting Time: Monday, 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Fall 2019

Meeting Place: DC2

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

Contact Information

Professor

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Teaching Assistant

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RTS Catalog Course Description

Students are introduced to terminology, major views, and problems in the study of ethics and to a biblical basis for morality. Basic concerns and current issues in social ethics are covered.

Expanded Course Description

Moral theology has a structure similar to systematic theology, beginning with a discussion of theological prolegomena (in this case on the existence, nature, and sources for knowing the moral order and method of displaying that knowledge), followed by a discussion of the content of the moral order organized under the ten heads of the summary of the moral law provided in the Decalogue. In the prolegomena, special attention will be paid significant issues in Reformed moral theology such as the ground of moral order (natural law or divine command), the relationship of the moral law to the moral order, the priority and use of Scripture in moral theology, uses (and abuses) of the moral law, its relation to the gospel and role within the covenant of grace, and the rules for rightly interpreting and applying the the Decalogue. In the lectures on the content of moral theology we will work our way through each commandment, noting any significant exegetical issues, and identifying the scope and contrary forces of each. The bulk of our discussion, however, will be devoted to the application of the moral law to contemporary personal and social ethical issues Christians face today.

Readings

Textbooks

Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life* (ISBN 978-0875527963)

Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, (ISBN 978-1598561685 or any complete copy; also available online)

Standards

Westminster Larger Catechism (ISBN 978-0979377006; must bring to class each day)

On Topics

Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 3d ed., (ISBN 978-0802867704)

PCA Position Papers & Studies available at <http://pcahistory.org/pca/>

Perspective on the Moral Law

The moral law is spiritual and describes not only what humans, as bearers of the divine image, were created to do but the kind of people we were created to be. As such, the work of this law was written on our hearts and belongs to the terms of the original covenant between God and all people in Adam. When Adam broke that covenant and plunged himself and his posterity under its curse of death, God, being unfathomably gracious, established another covenant with his people in Jesus Christ, who fulfilled all the requirements of the moral law on our behalf. Now, everyone who believes on him has been raised to spiritual life, set free from the power of sin, and empowered by the indwelling Spirit to will and do what pleases God.

By studying the Decalogue, which summarizes the whole moral law, we are studying Jesus Christ's form of life: perfect in love, Jesus is the living exposition of the moral law. If we want to know what the law commands then we should look to Jesus who expounds it not only in his teaching (e.g. Sermon on the Mount, and many

other places) but lives it out in the flesh; if we want to understand Jesus Christ or what love is, then we must study the moral law. As we do, we are also studying the Christ-like form of life we have been set free to gladly and gratefully live out now and in the sinless age to come.

The moral law remains the standard of righteousness for all people. If we love God, we will keep his commandments—this is what disciples of Christ do. There is great joy and rich blessing in doing so and as we do so we become living displays of the reality of God’s saving grace and the saving power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Attendance & Participation Policy

Your primary assignment is to be present, prepared, and ready to participate fully in class each week. This requires showing up on time and remaining for the duration of class, ready to contribute meaningfully by having read all assigned materials beforehand.

Any student who misses class or is grievously or repeatedly tardy (without prior permission or a compelling emergency) may find their course grade reduced on the following schedule:

1. By one full letter grade (e.g. A to B) for each unexcused absence
2. By one increment (e.g. A to A-) for each unexcused tardy or absence from class of more than 20 minutes
3. By one increment (e.g. A to A-) for every unexcused tardy of less than 20 minutes, for repeat offenders

Students found studying for other classes or using electronic devices for any reason not directly related to the current topic of discussion will be counted as being tardy or absent from class for more than 20 minutes.

Permission to be absent from class will ordinarily be granted only for medical reasons or family crises. Elective choices such as attending a conference, work (including RTS and church internship duties), enrolling in another course in conflict with this one, and so on, are unacceptable excuses. (The professor will try to accommodate special events on campus and presbytery meetings, as needed.)

Note: this “law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient” (1 Tim 1:9).

Technology Use Policy

Since students who type notes during lectures consistently perform worse on exams and other assessments of lecture and discussion comprehension, laptops and tablets are prohibited in class except by special permission from the professor.¹ (Permission is ordinarily restricted to matters of learning disabilities or those who handwrite their notes directly into a tablet application). Phones must be on silent and kept out of sight (and mind). If you must receive or place a call, even during a class break, please leave the classroom to do so.

Assessments

Term Paper: you must write and submit a ten to twelve (10–12) page term paper on a specific ethical problem of contemporary pastoral significance. You are free to pick any ethical problem you are likely to encounter in the context of your anticipated ministry. Use standard font and style (follow latest edition of Turabian’s *Manual*); a bibliography of at least five high-quality sources is required. See schedule for due date.

Papers should follow the principles of interpretation and application presented and modeled in class. Your work must be original and should reflect the quality of writing and exegetical and theological acumen expected of a third or fourth year seminary student. Papers receiving “A”s will ordinarily do the following:

1. Clearly define the ethical question and state a clear, arguable position (<1 page)
2. Show awareness of the current debate and relevant historical discussions on this question, noting the strongest objections or opposing views (3–4 pages)

¹ See, for example, Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer, “The Pen is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand over Laptop Note Taking,” *Psychological Science* 25.6 (June 2014): 1159–1168. See also the excellent guide produced by Harvard University’s Harvard Initiative for Learning and Teaching (HILT): Machael C. Friedman, “Notes and Note-Taking: Review of Research and Insights for Students and Instructors,” available online at https://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/hilt/files/notetaking_0.pdf.

3. Argue for and defend your position from Scripture (4-6 pages)
4. Conclude by showing how the argument has answered the original question (<1 page)

Exams: you will be given two exams (a midterm and a final) that will cover course content including class lectures, class discussions, and assigned readings—the final is comprehensive. These will be timed-limited open note and open book exams administered through Canvas and taken at your convenience within specified windows of opportunity. The exams may include a combination of objective (T/F, multiple choice, etc.), short answer (a sentence or two), and short essay (1–3 concise paragraphs) type questions. While you may use notes and books, you must NOT work together with classmates while taking the exams or discuss the content of the exams with classmates till the professor has notified you that ALL exams have been submitted. See schedule for dates.

Note well: I often use student questions to introduce and expand on important concepts and their applications. Class discussions ordinarily cover testable material.

Course Grade

Term Paper	40%
Midterm (Intro & 1 st table)	30%
Final (2 nd table)	30%
<hr/> Total	<hr/> 100%



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Course Objectives Related to MDiv Student Learning Outcomes

	MDiv Student Learning Outcomes	Rubric	Mini-Justification
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	First 1/3 of course is on ethical sources, norms, and methods; latter 2/3 of course on Reformed understanding of content of Moral Order
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	Ethics is taught from Scripture and exegetical perspective
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	Students expected to know Westminster Standards teachings on topic and develop an ethical method grounded in Reformed principles
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	Love for God and neighbor summarizes Moral law which is the content of this course
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Strong	See course title
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.)	Minimal	Professor strives to model and encourage such
Preach	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Minimal	Course will help student handle and apply biblical ethics
Worship	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.	Moderate	The first table of the law, treated in this class, has great significance for worship
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.	Moderate	Will constantly keep the pastoral use and application of course content in view
Church/World	Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Strong	Engaging contemporary ethical issues of society a focus of course