

ST528 : PASTORAL & SOCIAL ETHICS

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Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta, GA
Spring 2009 : Course Syllabus
Please send questions to Prof. Davis at davis@covenant.edu

Texts: **Davis, John Jefferson, *Evangelical Ethics*** (P&R Publishing, 2004 [3rd edition], ISBN 9780875526225; 288 pages, used is OK)
Douma, Jochem, *The Ten Commandments* (P&R Publishing, 1996, ISBN 9780875522371; 390 pages, used OK)
Jones, David Clyde, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Baker Academic, 1994, ISBN 9780801052286; 204 pages, used OK)
Westminster Standards (*Confession of Faith, Larger & Shorter Catechisms*) [available on line at <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html>]
Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism [available on line at <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html>]

Suggested Reading: Rachels, James, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy with a Dictionary of Philosophical Terms* (McGraw-Hill, 2002, ISBN 007282574X).

Exams: **Final Exam** in class on the afternoon of **Saturday, April 18**. Open Bibles, texts, and notes.

Papers: **Book Review:** A 3000 word summary and analysis (Biblical and pastoral) of book published after 1998 (or pre-approved by the professor) that deals with an ethical matter *that the author is likely to confront*. This requirement has three parts:

Proposal: A two-paragraph description and rationale for reviewing a book appropriate for this assignment. For the book, the student will provide (a) a brief explanation of the ethical issue(s) treated by the book, and (b) a brief justification that the issue will be of relevance to the student's likely future role in the church. This should include a reason to believe that the book is biblically sound *enough* for consideration. **Feb. 21.**

Rough Draft: A 2400 word (target) draft of the text (not just an outline) of the review. **Optional Due Date: March 21.** *Drafts received by this date are guaranteed a detailed response with sufficient time to make revisions. Drafts received after this date will be considered as time permits.*

Final Draft: Completed review. **DUE** ten days after receiving the professor's comments on the rough draft (if submitted prior to March 21), or **May 2**, whichever is *later*.

Pre-approved ideas (but still just illustrative):

- Elshtain, *Just War Against Terror* (for those likely to serve military families or politicians)
- Marsh, *God's Long Summer* (for those likely to serve in racially charged situations)
- Adams, *Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage* (for those likely to counsel couples)
- Plantinga, Cornelius, *Not the Way it's Supposed to Be* (for those likely to counsel addicts, especially)
- Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (1957) (a standard among older ministers)
- Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (for those likely to assist with reconciliation efforts)

Case Study Scenario: Each student will prepare a short (1 page maximum) description of a realistic situation in which biblical ethical guidance is required for an assigned *kind* of situation. Another student will write a response to the scenario as part of their Resource Guide. Scenarios will be evaluated for (a) realism, (b) adequacy of the details provided, (c) difficulty, (d) clarity, and (e) mechanical proficiency. **DUE in class on Friday, March 13.**

Note: the *kinds* of ethical challenges will be determined in the class on the first day. Possibilities include the following (as illustrations):

- Materialism (as a form of idolatry)
- Depictions of Christ (in art, film, flannelgraphs)
- Oath-taking
- Sabbath-keeping
- Civil disobedience
- End-of-life decision-making
- Divorce & Remarriage
- Intellectual Property
- Lying
- Jealousy

Resource Guide (Group Project): Students will be placed in groups of three or four. During the week of class, time will be set aside for laying the groundwork for a *jointly produced* guide for biblically handling a *kind* of ethical challenge. Each student will write a (1000 word) response to a Case Study Scenario. Together, the group will also prepare each of the following (each targeted at 1000 words).

- (a) a summary of the most important considerations to bear in mind, both biblical and practical (this element is required),
- (b) a guide to using the internet to seek help,
- (c) a guide to print materials available in a local Christian bookstore, and
- (d) a summary of an interview with a local pastor about the challenge.

(So each member will write one of these elements and a Case Study response.) A PLAN for the Resource Guide (who is doing what) is due on **April 4**. The completed Resource Guide is **DUE April 25**.

Quizzes: No quizzes for this course.

Attendance: Attendance is expected. Students who miss a significant portion of class meeting time will have their grade adversely affected.

Grading: Grades will be calculated using the following percentages:

Final Exam.....	30%
Book Review Prospectus.....	5%
Book Review	25%
Case Study.....	10%
Resource Guide (group).....	30%

Schedule of Topics & Summary of Due Dates:

Feb. 6-7 God's Character and Will:

- The foundation of all ethical considerations
- The necessity of this transcendent foundation

An Overview of Systems of Ethical Deliberation

- Everything you need to know about Kant's Deontology, Mill's Utilitarianism, Aristotle's Virtue Ethics, recent reworkings of those systems and a bestiary of Relativisms
- Identifying the most pressing pastoral challenges in our future
- *A messy game involving a cream pie*

Reading Assignment (if possible): Douma, "The Prologue"
Jones, Chapters 1 & 6.

