

ST528 : PASTORAL & SOCIAL ETHICS

Instructor: Bill Davis
Adjunct Professor of Systematic Theology (RTS),
Professor of Philosophy (Covenant College)

Reformed Theological Seminary, Metro Washington, DC
May-June 2007 : 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 0875526225; 288 pages, 11.69 new from Amazon, but used is OK)

Douma, Jochem, *The Ten Commandments* (P&R Publishing, 1996, ISBN 0875522378; 390 pages, \$16.99 new from Amazon, used OK)

Jones, David Clyde, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Baker Academic, 2004, ISBN 0801052289; 204 pages, \$22.00 new from Amazon, used OK)

Westminster Standards (*Confession of Faith, Larger & Shorter Catechisms*) [available on line; included in course CD]

Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism [available on line; included in course CD]

Note: the Final Exam will assume familiarity with all of these texts. Any reading completed prior to the class meetings will significantly enhance the experience and equip students to be especially productive contributors to the group project.

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 **June 9**. *Open Bibles, texts, and notes.* Students will be required to answer at least one question about each of the three required books for the course (Davis, Douma, and Jones) and another question about the confessional standards.

Papers:

Book Review: A 3000 word summary and analysis (Biblical and pastoral) of a book published after 1997 (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 four-paragraph (total) description and rationale for TWO books, either of which would be appropriate for this assignment. (The instructor and the student will agree on the *one* book to be reviewed based on this proposal.) For each book, the student will provide a two-paragraph vindication of the choice: (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. The student's first choice should be explained first. **DUE by Saturday, May 26.**

Rough Draft: A 2400 word (target) draft of the text (not just an outline) of the review. **DUE by June 9.**

Final Draft: Completed review. **DUE** ten days after receiving the professor's comments on the rough draft, or **June 30**, 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)
- Frame, *Medical Ethics* (for those likely to work in hospitals)

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 June 1 (two copies, please).**

Note: the *kinds* of ethical challenges will be determined the class during the first weekend (May 18-19). 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 **June 2**. The completed **Resource Guide** is **DUE on June 23**.

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 Rough Draft.....	10%
Book Review Final Version.....	15%
Case Study.....	10%
Resource Guide (group).....	30%

Schedule of Topics & Summary of Due Dates:

May 18-19

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 Beastiary of Relativisms
- Identifying the most pressing pastoral challenges in our future
- *A messy game involving a cream pie*

May 25-26

Social Ethics and the Current Landscape in Ethics

- Rawls & Reflective Equilibrium
- Singer’s Anti-speciesist Utilitarianism
- Feminist Ethics of “Care”
- Narrative Ethics
- Casuistry

- *Another game that will test your fairness*

The Decalogue: Prologue

The First Commandment

DUE: Prospectus for the Book Review (May 26)

June 1-2

The Second Commandment

The Third Commandment

The Fourth Commandment

- Sabbath-keeping as a delight

- The abiding ordinances

The Fifth Commandment

The Sixth Commandment

- Just War Theory

- End-of-Life Decision-making

DUE: Case Study Scenario (two copies) (June 1)

DUE: Plan for the Resource Guide (June 2)

June 8-9

The Seventh Commandment

The Eighth Commandment

The Ninth Commandment

The Tenth Commandment

FINAL EXAM

DUE: Rough Draft of Book Review (June 9)

June 23 (Sat) DUE: Resource Guide (Case Study Responses + Group Elements)

June 30 (Sat) DUE: Final Draft of Book Review (unless comments on draft received after June 20)