

Pastoral and Social Ethics (6ST528)
Winter 2009

Reformed Theological Seminary
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Class meets at McLean Presbyterian Church
January 5-9, 2009
Monday-Friday 9:00am-5:00pm

Office Hours

Please feel free to contact me at gsackett@rts.edu to make an appointment or to submit comments or questions.

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.

Required Texts

1. John Frame, *The Christian Life* (P&R Publishing, 2008)
2. Jochem Douma, *The Ten Commandments* (P&R Publishing, 1996)
3. John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics* (P&R Publishing, 2004). [The third edition (2004) is required. It covers topics that are not dealt with in previous editions.]
4. Westminster Standards (Confession of Faith, Shorter Catechism and Larger Catechism). Available in book form at <http://www.mindandheart.com/>. Available electronically at <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html>.

Read Frame (pp 3-908) before the course begins [however, the classroom experience will be enhanced to the degree that Douma (pp 1-390) and Davis (13-288) are also read prior to the course]. All of the readings (Frame, Douma, Davis) will need to be read by February 19, the date of the final exam. The following reading schedule corresponds with the lecture schedule:

1. Day 1: Frame 1-361. Davis 13-26. Douma 355-390.
2. Day 2: Frame 361-486. Douma 1-72.
3. Day 3: Frame 487-683. Douma 73-206. Davis 203-237.
4. Day 4: Frame 684-829. Douma 207-311. Davis 27-202, 239-288.
5. Day 5: Frame 830-908. Douma 313-353.

Reference Texts (recommended but not required)

William Frankena, *Ethics* (Prentice-Hall, 1988)
James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy with a Dictionary of Philosophical Terms* (McGraw-Hill, 2002)

John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Eerdmans, 1957)

John Murray, *Divorce* (P&R Publishing, 1961)

Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Zondervan, 1980)

Schedule

January 5

- Introduction: the study of ethics
- Ethical Theories: Deontological, Teleological, Virtue
- Historical survey of ethical reflection
- Principles of Christian ethical decision-making

January 6

- Contemporary approaches to ethics (e.g., Peter Singer, feminist, Rawls)
- Reformed Theological Ethics: Principles, Distinctives, Issues
- The Decalogue: orientation/Prologue
- 1st Commandment (sample issues: “the only true God”; atheism, agnosticism, religious pluralism and other “isms”; idolatry)
- 2nd Commandment (sample issues: uses of images, regulating worship)

January 7

- 3rd Commandment (sample issues: “taking” the name; reverencing God; vain speech; oaths)
- 4th Commandment (sample issues: creation ordinances; Sabbath-keeping; work)
- 5th Commandment (sample issues: authority; family; church; the state; punishment; civil disobedience)

January 8

- 6th Commandment (sample issues: types of killing; just war; abortion; euthanasia)
- 7th Commandment (sample issues: marriage; divorce, remarriage; adultery)
- 8th Commandment (sample issues: stealing; private property; stewardship)

January 9

- 9th Commandment (sample issues: bearing false witness; kinds of lying; truth telling)
- 10th Commandment (the inward orientation of all sin)
- Christ and Culture

Evaluation and Assignments

1. 3 Reading Reports (20% each = 60%). Due February 5.
2. Case study (5% peer-input; 5% final product = 10% total). First pass to fellow student due January 21. Final product due February 12.
3. Exam (30%). February 19.

Reading reports:

- For each report, pick one ethical issue from any of the assigned readings (either Frame, or Douma, or Davis) or in a reading approved by the instructor.
- Summarize the author's thesis or argument
- Identify one aspect of the thesis or argument that you agree with. Argue your point.
- Identify one aspect of the thesis or argument that you disagree with. Argue your point.
- 3 pages each report (9 pages total)

Case study:

- *Ethical Situation.* Create a realistic ethical situation that you could reasonably expect to face in your particular calling (preferably, an issue not dealt with in the reading reports. Topic must be pre-approved by the instructor or you may pick a topic from the pre-approved list* at the end of the syllabus)
- Identify the ethical dilemma exposed by the situation
- Name the relevant ethical facts
- Render a decision. Argue your position.
- Must interact with Scripture, Westminster Standards¹, and any one of the assigned texts (Frame, Davis, Douma)
- *Peer-Input.* One of your fellow students (whom you will be paired up with in class) will take a position contrary to your own. Your peer will name the contrary position and make a brief argument (3-4 sentences) in its favor.
- Evaluation of Peer-Input will be based (at least) on the forcefulness (e.g., evidence adduced in favor) of the contrary argument and the fairness with which it deals with the original position
- *Final Product.* Interact with your peer's argument. Name (a) one merit of the contrary position and (b) what you ultimately find erroneous about the position
- Evaluation of the Final Product will be based (at least) on the realism of the situation, the forcefulness (e.g., evidence adduced in favor) of the argument, the handling of relevant data from Scripture, Standards, and assigned text, and the convincingness and fairness of your interaction with the Peer-Input.
- 5 pages max

Exam:

- Take-home. Details will be discussed in class.

¹ See the end of the syllabus for sections of the Standards that are directly relevant to this assignment.

Grading Policy

See the seminary catalogue.

***Pre-Approved Case Study Topics**

Just war (e.g., on terrorism)
Depictions of Christ (e.g., in church, film, art)
Sabbath-keeping
Religious pluralism
Adultery (e.g., and the use of Internet)
Lying
Civil disobedience
Divorce and remarriage
Minority rights
Human rights
Intellectual property
Worship (e.g., regulative principle)
Christians in politics
Protection of the environment

Sections of the Westminster Standards (Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechism) that deal directly with the Moral Law (Decalogue)

Confession of Faith: Chapters XIX, XX, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV (aspects of the moral law are also dealt with in other sections so it is worth becoming familiar with the Confession all the way through)

Larger Catechism: Questions and Answers 91-151

Shorter Catechism: Questions and Answers 39-84