

Dr. Mark I. McDowell
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Reformed Theological Seminary
ST5500/3 Credit Hours

Orlando, Spring 2026
Fri: 3-9PM; Sat 8AM-5PM
Feb 20-21, Mar 13-14
& April 24-25

Pastoral & Social Ethics

I. Course Description (3 credits)

This course will examine the biblical and theological material that constitutes the foundational elements of ethical and moral reflection. To understand Christian ethics requires attention to its sources, norms, authorities and forms of practical reasoning. The course is divided into three sections: the first is a general consideration of ethics from an historical perspective with particular attention to the theological virtues; the second examines the law from a distinctly reformed perspective as a framework for the Christian life; and the third section looks with a more specific focus at a series of concrete ethical matters.

II. Course Objectives

- a. To acquaint students with the sources, questions, conversations, challenges and tasks of Christian ethics.
- b. To introduce students to a deep reflection about the moral life that is shaped and formed by theological convictions rooted in and governed by Holy Scripture.
- c. To help students cultivate the biblical and theological skills and virtues necessary to engage in ethical issues and disputes.

III. Course Requirements

- a. **Required Reading:** Students must complete all required reading by the last day of class. As a theological student, good reading and the virtues that attend reading well are essential to pastoral ministry and the Christian life. Learning key texts and the ability to engage them charitably and fairly is an exercise central to good theology. Students will submit a report of how much reading has been completed.
Due: Friday, May 8th, 5:00PM

b. **Reflection Paper:** Students are expected to write a 3-page reflection paper that looks at the ‘Third Use of the Law’ as it is defined and put to use in Reformed Theology. The aim of this short paper is for students to be able to grasp the theological importance of this significant feature of the Reformed tradition and to articulate its significance for Christian discipleship. **Due: Friday, May 8th, 5:00PM**

- i. Students should consult the following readings to help write this paper that are available on canvas: Ferguson and Hesselink

c. **Book Review:** Students are expected to write a 3-page book review of one of the works listed below. The aim is to understand the theological and pastoral significance of the issue dealt with in the book, engaging the author with fairness and charity, while analyzing the argument clearly and competently. The aim is to grapple with the issue and whether one agrees or disagrees with the main thesis, the review should demonstrate a solid biblical and theological engagement to help the student speak to believer and unbeliever on the topic. The structure of the review should include a description of the argument and the work, and a critical engagement. **Due: Friday, May 8th, 5:00PM**

- i. Matthew Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2018)
- ii. Jacob Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God* (Downers Grove IVP, 2019)
- iii. Duke Kwon, *Reparations: A Christian Call For Repentance and Repair* (Grand Rapids, Brazos, 2021)
- iv. Nigel Biggar, *Reparations: Slavery and the Tyranny of Imaginary Guilt* (Forum, 2025)
- v. Brent Waters, *Just Capitalism: A Christian Ethic of Economic Globalization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016)
- vi. Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2015)
- vii. Andrew Whitehead, *American Idolatry: How Christian Nationalism Betrays the Gospel and Threatens the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2023)

viii. Doug Wilson, *Mere Christendom: The Case for Bringing Christianity Back into Modern Culture - Leading by Faith to Convert Secularism* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2023)

d. **Research Paper:** Each student will write a research paper, between 12 and 15 pages, on a topic that will be addressed in class and from the reading. **Due: Friday, May 8th, 5PM**

IV. Grading

- a. Reading – 20%
- b. WSC Examination on Qs. 39-84 (to be discussed in class) – 10%
- c. Reflection Paper – 20%
- d. Book Review – 20%
- e. Research Paper – 30%

V. Required Reading

- a. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics: The Duties of the Christian Life*. Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021)
- b. Luke Bretherton, *A Primer in Christian Ethics: Christ and the Struggle to Live Well* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023)
- c. Jochem Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Philadelphia: P&R, 1996).
- d. Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* (New York: Harper, 1994).
- e. Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2020, 4th ed.).
- f. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991)
- g. Sections from the Westminster Larger Section (WLC)
- h. **A reading packet including a number of articles will be provided on canvas**

VI. Academic Policies

- a. Plagiarism – intentional and unintentional plagiarism will lead to a failing grade for the course

- b. Extensions to Course Assignments – if an extension is needed, it must be requested early in the semester and it will only be granted under the most exceptional circumstances

VII. Grading System

A	(97-100)	4.00
A-	(94-96)	3.66
B+	(91-93)	3.33
B	(88-90)	3.00
B-	(86-87)	2.66
C+	(83-85)	2.33
C	(80-82)	2.00
C-	(78-79)	1.66
D+	(75-77)	1.33
D	(72-74)	1.00
D-	(70-71)	0.66
F	(below 70)	0.00
I	(incomplete)	–
W	(withdraw)	–

VIII. Outline of Lectures

- a. Ancient & Modern Ethics
- b. Introduction to Moral Theology & Christian Ethics
- c. Sources of Ethics
- d. Virtues, Fruit, Gifts, Beatitudes
- e. Law and Commandments
- f. First Table of the Law
- g. Second Table of the Law
- h. Keeping the Commandments
- i. Good Order – Statecraft, Justice, Punishment & War
- j. Good Life – Money, Work, Rest
- k. Good Relationships – Friendship, Race, Gender, Marriage, Divorce & Sex
- l. Good Relationships II – Economics, Immigration, Incarceration & Policing

m. Good Beginnings and Endings – Birth, Contraception, Abortion, Euthanasia & Suicide



Course Objectives Related to MDiv Student Learning Outcomes With Mini-Justification

Course: Pastoral and Social Ethics
Professor: Dr. Mark I. McDowell
Campus: Orlando
Date: Spring 2026

<u>MDiv Student Learning Outcomes</u>		<u>Rubric</u>	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
		➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None	
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	Reading, exam and research paper
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	Lectures and reading focus on scripture as the basis and primary resource for ethical reflection and judgements
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	Central to this course
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	Study of Scripture and the Reformed Tradition issues in the godliness required for ethical behaviour and practice
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Strong	Emphasizes the holistic horizon of Scripture for all of life

Winsomely Reformed/ Evangelistic	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.)	Strong	Careful interaction and engagement with other views that also entails an appreciation of ethical insights.
Preach	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Minimal	Course requirements provide framework for preaching and assess issues that ought to be understood and addressed
Worship	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.	Moderate	Sound understanding of biblical and theological loci encourages and promotes faithful 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	Class material and readings shape the pastoral imagination
Church/World	Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Strong	Engages key ideas of the public square