

ST535 Theological Foundations for Counseling Fall 2026 (v. 040626)

J. V. Fesko

jfesko@rts.edu

Fall 2026

Class Meeting Day and Time: Tuesdays, 9am-11am

Room: TBD

TA: Ray Shores, shoresray@gmail.com

Course Description

This is the first of five courses exploring the relation of psychology and counseling to biblical and theological studies. This course focuses on the relation of Scripture to psychological studies and counseling, on Scripture as the central text of the Christian counselor, and on scriptural texts of central importance to Christian counselors.

Course Objectives (Knowledge and Skill Outcomes)

After successful completion of the course, students will demonstrate the ability to:

1. Contrast the major approaches evangelical Christians take to psychology and counseling
2. Identify some of the challenges to a Christian approach to counseling in the contemporary world due to worldview differences
3. Articulate a biblical framework for understanding the Christian life and counseling process
4. Understand key scriptural themes and passages relevant to Christian counseling
5. Develop a holistic framework for counseling in Christian public health settings consistent with the Reformed faith

Methods of Instruction

Reading, lecture, classroom discussions, and essay papers.

Electronics

Computers, laptops, smart phones, and recording devices are not allowed in class. Students may use “dumb tablets,” such as Kindle Scribes, reMarkables, or Booxs. Failure to follow this policy will result in points deducted from the participation grade.

Main Texts

Fesko, J. V. *Theological Foundations for Counseling* (Baker Academic, 2026): ISBN 978-1540968760.

Johnson, Eric, ed. *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*. (Inter Varsity Press, 2010): ISBN 978-0830828487

Styker, Susan. “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1 (1993): 237-54. The document is available as a PDF on CANVAS.

Trueman, Carl. *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Crossway, 2022): ISBN 978-1433579301

Vanhoozer, Kevin J. “The Sufficiency of Scripture: A Critical and Constructive Account,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 49/3 (2021): 218-34. The document is available as a PDF on CANVAS.

Westminster Standards (post-1788 American revisions): WCF = Westminster Confession of Faith, WLC = Westminster Larger Catechism, WSC = Westminster Shorter Catechism

Course Assignments

Reading (10%): completion of all assigned reading. Please only report your reading if you *do not* complete all 100 percent.

Participation (10%): attend and actively participate in lectures and class discussions. Unexcused absences result in a five-point deduction for your participation grade. Being late to class results in a three-point deduction per incident. More than three unexcused absences results in an F for participation. Excused absences are those that are cleared with the professor ahead of time due to illness or extenuating circumstances. Note the following grading rubric:

A (100-94)	B (93-86)	C (85-78)	D (78-70)	F (69 – 0)
Asked clear and cogent questions; was respectful of others. Attended class. Participated in discussions. Did not misuse technology.	Participated in discussions; shared questions and comments. Was respectful of others. Was late to class.	Listened mainly; occasionally asked a question or offered a comment. Was respectful of others. Misused technology. Was late to class.	Questions or comments were off topic. Was disrespectful of others. Or, dominated class time by not permitting others to ask their questions. Misused technology. Was late to class.	Failed to attend class—missed more than three lecture periods total without an excused absence.

Paper (30%): Comparing evangelical counseling positions. Compare and contrast the three most viable positions evangelicals have taken regarding psychology and counseling (biblical counseling, Christian psychology, and integration) regarding such matters as the role of the Bible and creation grace in the human sciences; the use of the Bible and theology in counseling; the influence of secularism in contemporary psychology and counseling; participation in contemporary psychology, counseling, and public mental health; and the counseling in the church. For sources you should incorporate the following documents and interact with them:

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

SYSTEM

ACBC, Annual Covenant of ACBC (Association of Certified Biblical Counselors)

<https://biblicalcounseling.com/positions/membership-covenant/> Retrieved online 04/06/26. The document is also available as a PDF on CANVAS.

Johnson, ed., *Psychology & Christianity: Five Views*.

Your paper should be 3-5 pages, single-spaced, and you should answer the following questions in the assignment:

1. What is your understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture and which view(s) rightly account for the doctrine?
2. Briefly explain common grace and general revelation and which view(s) rightly factor them?
3. Which view(s) in your judgment best account for general and special revelation?

Final Exam (50%): The final exam covers theological concepts covered in the course lectures and assigned readings. The final exam date is will be December 8-10, 2026. You will log on to Canvas during this period to take the exam on-line.

Lecture Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading
Aug 25	General and Special Revelation	WCF 1; WSC qq. 2-3; qq. WLC 3-5 Fesko, 13-28
Sep 01	The covenants of redemption, works, and grace	WCF 7; WSC qq. 12, 20; WLC qq. 20, 30-35 Fesko, 39-50
Sep 08	Archetypal and Ectypal Theology Faith and Reason	Fesko, 29-38
Sep 15	The Impact of the Enlightenment on Theology and the Church	Trueman, <i>Strange New World</i> Fesko, 1-12
Sep 22	The Sufficiency of Scripture Common Grace	Vanhoozer, "Sufficiency of Scripture" Fesko, 67-80, 51-66
Sep 29	The Light of Nature and Common Notions	
Oct 06	READING WEEK	
Oct 13	The Twofold Knowledge of God A Theology of the Body	WCF 2, 8, 25, 26; WSC 4-6; 21-28, 36-38; WLC qq. 6-11, 36-57, 61-64, 65-66, 82-83, 86, 90 Stryker, "My Words" Fesko, 81-90, 127-40

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

SYSTEM

Oct 20	The Word of God	Fesko, 91-100
Oct 27	Union with Christ	WLC q. 69 Fesko, 101-10
Nov 03	Sanctification	WCF 13; WSC 35-36; WLC qq. 75, 77-78. Fesko, 111-26
Nov 10	Suffering	WCF 27; WSC qq. 91-93; WLC qq. 161-64 Fesko, 127-40
Nov 17	NO CLASS	
Nov 24	Christ and Culture	Johnson, <i>Five Views</i> , 101-48
	Integration View	
Dec 01	A Biblical Counseling View	Johnson, <i>Five Views</i> , 245-91. Papers Due

Policies and Important Information

All written work must conform to American Psychological Association (APA) style. If a student does not have a copy of the APA manual, one should be purchased, or students may use one of the many APA style websites available online (e.g. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>). Materials should be in 12 pt Georgia font and double spaced (Georgia font has been selected because research indicates it gets the best grades). Assessment will include how well students represent their thoughts on paper, craftsmanship in writing, and organization of all written work.

Disability Policy

If you have a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects your academic performance) and would like to receive academic accommodations, please inform your instructor prior to the start of this course. The instructor and student will discuss the available accommodations for the course. If the student with a disability does not disclose that s/he has a disability, then the student is agreeing to take full responsibility for any related consequences that may occur.

Access to Research Database.

RTS provides Jackson MAC students access to the EBSCO host Psychology & Behavioral Science Collection of full text journal articles. You can access this collection from computers in the library, or from your home computer by following the link below and logging in with a username and password to be provided in class.

<http://search.ebscohost.com/>

Submission of work

Written assignments are to be emailed to the instructor for this course by 11:59 PM on the date due. Keep a digital copy of your work. Hard copy assignments must be turned in to the MFT office by 4:00 PM on the date due.

Late work

All assignments are due as scheduled regardless of attendance, unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor. Assignments turned in late will be deducted 1/3 letter grade for each late day.

Anonymity

All written assignments and exams should be identified by the last six digits of your Self-Service id number and NOT by your name. Anonymity permits more objectivity in grading.

Return of work

All work returned to students will be available in the MFT Office. Any work not collected by the first full week of the next semester or term will be shredded.

Grading Scale

A (97-100)
A- (94-96)
B+ (91-93)
B (88-90)
B- (86-87)
C+ (83-85)
C (80-82)
C- (78-79)
D+ (75-77)
D (72-74)
D- (70-71)
F (Below 7)

Attendance Policy

Regular attendance is expected and required. Excessive absences (more than 3 class meetings) will result in the loss of points equal to one letter grade per absence. If serious illness or an emergency prevents a student from attending any class, please notify the instructor before the class begins. It is the responsibility of the student to obtain any materials handed out or presented during the missed class from a classmate.

Class Participation

Students are expected to participate in all components of the class. Each student is expected to read all of the assigned materials in advance for each class. Contributions should reflect knowledge of the reading assignments.