

ST5500 : PASTORAL & SOCIAL ETHICS

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Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta
Fall 2026 : Course Syllabus
Please send questions to Prof. Davis at bill.davis@covenant.edu

Course Description: Today's ethical issues are not all found in a concordance; yet God's Word provides instruction that touches the most complex matters: moral responsibility, bioethics, conscience, environment, war, the state, worship, and more. This is an opportunity to explore the complexities of life's perplexing questions from a relevant and scripturally grounded perspective.

Texts: **Davis, Bill, *Departing in Peace*** (P&R, 2017, ISBN 978-1629952598; used OK)
 Jones, David Clyde, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Baker Academic, 2004, ISBN 0801052289; 204 pages, used OK)
 Miller, Patrick, *The Ten Commandments* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, ISBN 978-0-664-23055-5; 477 pages, used OK)
 Yarhouse, Mark, *Understanding Sexual Identity: A Resource for Youth Ministry* (Zondervan, 2013, ISBN 978-0310516187; 208 pages, used OK)
 Westminster Standards (*Confession of Faith, Larger & Shorter Catechisms*) [available on line at <http://www.pcaac.org/resources/wcf/>]
 Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism [available on line at <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html>]

Suggested Reading:

Davis, Bill, *Honoring Dependent Parents* (P&R Publishing, 2026, ISBN 979-8887792330).
Douma, Jochem, *The Ten Commandments* (P&R Publishing, 1996, ISBN 0875522378) – advisory: Douma's treatment of the doctrine of the *imago dei* includes lamentable 20th-century Dutch misgivings about the image-bearing status of some kinds of people. The book has many virtues; but this feature counts against its usefulness.
Dunnington, Kent, *Addiction and Virtue* (InterVarsity Press, 2011, ISBN 978-0-8308-3901-8).
Plantinga, Cornelius, *Not the Way it's Supposed to Be* (Eerdmans, 2005, ISBN 978-0802842183).
Rachels, James, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy with a Dictionary of Philosophical Terms* (McGraw-Hill, 2002, ISBN 007282574X).
VanDrunen, David, *Bioethics and the Christian Life* (Crossway, 2009, ISBN 978-1433501449).

Exams: **Final Exam** distributed by email/CANVAS by the end of Monday, November 9, 2026. The completed exam is **DUE midnight, November 21, 2026**. Open Bibles, texts, and notes; proctor's report of original work will be required to earn above an 80%. *Note: A portion of the Final Exam will be administered on*

Saturday afternoon, November 7. Answers for this portion will be handwritten, with books and notes available to prepare, but no electronic helps.

Catechism Quiz (WSC 39-84): Completed as an activity on the last day of class meetings. Twenty multiple choice questions with a bonus short answer section.

Papers: Complete ONE of the following:

Book Review: A 3000 word summary and analysis (Biblical and pastoral) of book published after 2018 (or pre-approved by the professor) that deals with an ethical matter *that the author is likely to confront*. This requirement has two parts:

Proposal: A four-paragraph (total) description and rationale for a book appropriate for this assignment. For the 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.
Due by midnight on Saturday, October 3, 2026.

Rough Draft (not required, but urged): A 2400 word (target) draft of the text (not just an outline) of the review. *Drafts received before November 1 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 November 1), or **December 5, 2026**, whichever is *later*.

Pre-approved ideas (but still just illustrative):

- Bauman, *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis* (2016)
- Hill, *Washed & Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (2016)
- Ince, Irwyn, *The Beautiful Community* (2020)—on racial reconciliation within the church
- Korpi, Todd, *AI Goes to Church: Pastoral Wisdom for Artificial Intelligence* (IVP, 2025)—finding works that are not two generations behind AI's development is hard...
- Mizell, *Thirteen Reasons Why Not: A Step-by-Step Guide to Helping Depressed & Suicidal Teenagers* (2017) – short, but would require watching the very difficult video series
- Serven & Ellis, *Heal Us, Emmanuel: A Call for Racial Reconciliation, Representation, and Unity in the Church* (2016)
- Strickland, Darby, *Is It Abuse?* (2020) – on identifying and helping people mistreated, especially in marriage.

- PCA Study Committee Report on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault (288 pages, exhaustive, withering, and important). Videos of the report to GA and the full report is here: <https://dasacommittee.org/committee-report>.
- PCA Student Committee Report on Sexuality. Also available online (62 pages, also dense in places). See this site for the document: <https://pcaga.org/aicreport/>.

Interview Report and Analysis: A 3000 word summary and analysis of three interviews of sources of mature Christian guidance regarding a specific area of pastoral concern. The interviewees may include ruling or teaching elders, counselors, godly lay people, etc. This assignment as two parts:

Proposal: A four-paragraph (total) description and rationale for a SET of interviews and questions appropriate for this assignment. The student will provide a two-paragraph vindication of the choice of a topic: (a) a brief explanation of the ethical issue(s) to be discussed in the interviews, and (b) a brief justification that the issue will be of relevance to the student's likely future role in the church. The proposal should include the names of at least two of the interviewees and a sketch of the questions to be used to start the interviews. **Due by midnight on October 3, 2026.**

Rough Draft (not required, but urged): A 2400 word (target) draft of the text (not just an outline) of the report and analysis. *Drafts received before November 1 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 November 1), or **December 5, 2026**, whichever is *later*.

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.....	40%
Book Review or Interview Proposal.....	10%
Book Review or Interview Report.....	40%
Participation.....	10%

Schedule of Topics & Summary of Due Dates:

Sept. 11-12 God's Character and Will:

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

The First & Second Commandment

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):

Miller, "Introduction," "Chapter 1: The Lord Alone," "Appendix" (pp. 1-62, 415-432)

Jones, Chapters 1 & 6.

Sept. 25-26 Social Ethics and the Current Landscape in Ethics

- Rawls & Reflective Equilibrium
- Singer's Anti-speciesist Utilitarianism
- Feminist Ethics of "Care"
- *Another game that will test your fairness*

The Decalogue: Prologue

The Third Commandments

Reading Assignment: Miller, chapter 2: Hallowing the Name of God; and Jones, Chapters 2-5, 7

Oct. 3 Writing Assignment: Proposal for the Book Review or Interview

Oct. 16-17 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

Reading Assignments: Davis, all
Miller, chapters 3 and 4
Jones, Chapters 1 & 6.

(Nov. 1 Optional Due Date for Rough Draft of Book Review or Interview Report)

Nov. 6-7 The Seventh Commandment – Tenth Commandment

Reading Assignment: Miller, chapters 5-9
Jones, Chapters 8 & 9
Yarhouse, all

Nov. 7 in the afternoon: the handwritten part of the Final Exam

Nov. 21 (Sat) DUE: Final Exam, the rest

Dec. 5 (Sat) DUE: Final Draft of Book Review or Interview Report

AI Use Policy:

By submitting work for evaluation in this course, you represent it as your own intellectual product. You may not submit for evaluation any content (e.g., ideas, text, code, images) that was generated, in whole or in part, by Generative Artificial Intelligence tools (including, but not limited to, ChatGPT and other large language models) unless the instructor has explicitly granted permission to do so. Your instructor will explain to you the uses of GAI tools that are permitted or prohibited in this course, including on what specific assignments use of GAI tools is permitted. Submitting content for evaluation that was produced in whole or in part by GAI tools, except for the specific purpose(s) and assignment(s) discussed and authorized by the instructor, constitutes cheating and a violation of academic integrity.

RTS Extension Policy

All assignments and exams are to be completed by the deadlines announced in this syllabus or in class.

Extensions for assignments and exams due within the normal duration of the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. Extensions of two weeks or less beyond the date of the last deadline for the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. A grade penalty may be assessed.

Extensions of greater than two weeks but not more than six weeks beyond the last deadline for the course may be granted in extenuating circumstances (i.e. illness, family emergency). For an extension of more than two weeks the student must request an Extension Request Form from the Student Services Office. The request must be approved by the Professor and the Academic Dean. A grade penalty may be assessed (RTS Student Handbook).

Any incompletes not cleared six weeks after the last published due date for course work will be converted to a failing grade. Professors may have the failing grade changed to a passing grade by request. (RTS Catalog p. 42)

RTS Grading Scale:

Grade point averages on RTS transcripts will be determined on the basis of work done only at Reformed Theological Seminary.

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)	-
S	(satisfactory)	-
P	(passing)	-

The grade "I" indicates that the work required for the course was not completed. It is given only when special, extenuating circumstances (such as illness) prevent the student from completing the work or taking the examination.

A written request for an extension must be submitted prior to the due date of the work concerned. If the request is granted, it remains the responsibility of the student to complete all work for the course as soon as possible. In any case, an "I" grade must be removed within the extension time granted; otherwise it will be changed to "F."

The grade "W" indicates that a student has withdrawn from a course after the drop deadline. This grade is granted by the academic dean only in extenuating circumstances.

The grade "P" is only used as a Pass/Fail option and is limited to the Field Education course.

A grade of C or better is required to continue in the sequence of language courses (does not apply to RTS-Charlotte).

If a course is retaken, the original grade remains on the transcript and is included in the GPA.

For all RTS courses that have exceeded standard degree time limits and are now ineligible to be applied to a degree, these courses will be shown on a separate transcript and will not be applied to the student's GPA.

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: ST 5500 Pastoral & Social Ethics

Professor: William C. Davis

Campus: RTS/Atlanta

Date: June 4, 2026

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u> <i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i> <i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i>		<u>Rubric</u> ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
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. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Strong	Course readings and lecture/discussions focus on the detailed development of ethical thought (both biblical and philosophical). Course activities (oral and written) foster student ability to explain and apply knowledge acquired.
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	Course emphasizes that Scripture alone is the ultimate ethical norm. All course elements explore and nurture close attention to the specific teaching of Scripture and its sound use.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	Course lecture/discussion organized according to the Ten Commandments, following the common Reformed approach on display in the Westminster Standards.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Moderate	Pastoral and social ethics is centrally concerned with sanctification as growth in love for the Triune God and taking delight in his law.
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Strong	Conformity to God's Word as a lived reality is even more important than command of ethical and hermeneutical theories in this course. Course management practices (lecturing, grading, etc.) aim to increase student zeal for living a life pleasing to God.
Winsomely Reformed	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.)	Moderate	Charity and appreciation for the insights and practices of other Christians is encouraged throughout, and in particular in the book review/interview assignment.
Pastoral Ministry	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both church and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading, and	Strong	Lecture/discussion and reading assignments give extensive

	shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Xns.		attention to the task of counseling believers making practical life choices in a biblically thoughtful way; course activities encourage careful attention to the formative impact of worship patterns, rituals of home and church life, and the influence of the models for imitation offered by pastoral leaders.
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