

Reformed Theological Seminary

Classics of Pastoral Theology

2026 Syllabus

I. Course information

Dates: August 25, September 8, 22, October 13, 27, November 10

Time: Tuesday, 6:15–8:30pm

Credit hours: 1

Instructor: Chad Van Dixhoorn cvandixhoorn@rts.edu

TA: Kirby Key KKey3761@student.rts.edu

Office hours: This term I plan to be in my office frequently from Tuesday to Thursday. Contact me for both (1) personal matters, and (2) course-related questions. Please try valiantly to meet me during those three days, but email me for all in-person appointments or appointments at other times in the week. If you have a question about the class, please ensure that you have read the syllabus carefully first.

II. Course description

Classics of Pastoral Theology is a reading and discussion course that addresses the life and work of gospel ministry. These classics are read and discussed with the hope of growing each student's respect and love for the work of gospel ministry.

This course exposes students to some of the most famous books in the Christian tradition authored by practicing pastors. By discussing a cluster of major texts and authors on the subject of ministry, this reading course helps students to read with discernment and to set our own service to God on a firm foundation, so that we can together grow in faithfulness as disciples and ambassadors of Jesus Christ. The class will also consider and critique different approaches in the broad genre of ministerial counsel: apologetic, manuals, polemic, letters, biography, sermons, commentary, and essays.

III. Discussion format

All classes will be held in our home. Discussion will take place over a meal and dessert. The class will be limited to 12 students. As I plan to offer this class every second year, **students graduating in the next year or two will be given preference.**

Reading and writing work is due BEFORE the first day of class.

IV. Assignments

A. Participation (10%)

This is a discussion class. Attendance and conversational contributions are required, in which both quality and quantity matter. Do not wait all term for a brilliant comment to come to you. Come prepared to discuss and to be called upon in every class. Participation also involves listening. Discussion is a team performance and not a solo sport. A helpful class will build on the comments that others make with occasional affirmation and gracious disagreement.

B. Reading (10%)

Each week students must submit to Canvas the percentage of assigned reading completed for that week. This reading report is **DUE one hour prior to the start of class**. Grades are assigned according to percentage read and thus partial marks are awarded. If you indicate that you read 90% of the assigned material, this will contribute 9% to that week's reading grade.

C. Reading notes (60%)

Students will provide detailed rough notes of their reading WITH page references to particular points and quotes. Notes without page references will not be accepted.

In addition to the above, your notes should show evidence that you have read the works and understand the main argument(s) made therein. You may offer your notes in point form, but your points should make sense to the reader (me) and not simply to the writer (you). These should normally show a grasp of the main flow or structure of a text and its main point(s). Nonetheless, if a reading is lengthy, students (while still the entire assignment), may focus their notes on one part of a work only.

Your submitted document containing your notes and questions should be a minimum of two pages, single-spaced. This assignment is **DUE one hour prior to the start of class**.

D. Book review (20% of grade) DUE on the last day of term, December 1, 11:59pm

Students are to write a 7-10 page review of their selected book.

An informal and very brief comment on the book will be made by the student on the last day of class.

The written review itself should be styled as a gracious and thoughtful book review for an imagined scholarly journal with an audience of pastoral and seminary students. This review should entail a brief summary and response. It must include a statement of the most beneficial (if any) and most problematic (if any) aspect of the book. It must offer a clear recommendation to readers at its close (must read it; read with care; best book on the topic, etc.)

The reading choice is yours but it (1) must be 200 -300 pages (if less than 200 pages, you must supplement with some additional reading); (2) must be a book that you have not already read; (3) must be a book which – to your knowledge – is not required in another RTS course; (4) must be

included in the recommended books listed in this syllabus, section ‘VI. Recommended Pastoral works’ (below), unless you get permission for an alternative text from the instructor.

NOTE:

All written work must be submitted on Canvas.

Late work is not accepted. If you are unable to complete an assignment on time, **please submit incomplete work instead**. For additional help understanding the grading scale or my hand-written notes, please see the file, “Grading Policies,” in Canvas. This policy holds in all situations except in the case of extraordinary extenuating circumstances. A medical emergency is an example of an extenuating circumstance; a busy academic or work schedule is not.

V. Schedule of Readings

Week 1 (August 25): NT, Church Fathers, and Monks and Popes

READ: Titus 1

READ: John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood* (post 381) (Provided on Canvas).

READ: Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Rule* (590; Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2007), Part I, sections 1-9 (pp. 29-43). (RTS Library & selections provided on Canvas).

READ Innocent III, *Between God and man*, trans. C. J. Vause and F. C. Gardiner (c. 1201-1216; Washington DC: CUA, 2004), pp. 4-15 (Provided on Canvas).

Week 2 (September 8): Reformers and early Puritans

READ Martin Luther, Lectures on 1 Timothy 3:1-7, in *Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1973), pp. 281-295. (Provided on Canvas).

READ: Oliver Bowles, *De Pastore Evangelico* (London, 1649), trans. Jonathan Rockey and David Noe. (Provided on Canvas).

Week 3 (September 22): Post-Reformation Scots and Later Puritans

READ George Gillespie, ‘A humble acknowledgement of the sins of the ministry of Scotland’, in *Causes of the Lord’s Wrath against Scotland*, in *Works* (1844), pp. 39-46 (Provided on Canvas)..

READ Richard Baxter, ed. and abridged, Tim Cooper, *The Reformed Pastor* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), chs 2, 3, 6, 7. (Purchase)

Week 4 (October 13): First and Second Great Awakenings

READ John Newton, “A Plan of Academical Preparation for the Ministry, in a Letter to a Friend,” in *Works* (1784; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2015), vol. 3:487-518. (Provided on Canvas).

READ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students* (any edition), “The Minister’s Self-watch”; “The preacher’s private prayer”; “The Blind eye and the deaf ear.” (Provided on Canvas).

Week 5 (October 27): The Free Church and Princeton Seminary

READ Patrick Fairbairn, *Pastoral Theology, A treatise on the office and duties of the Christian pastor* (1875; Dahlonga, GA: Old Paths Publications, 1992), Ch. 6. (Google books)

READ J. W. Alexander, *Thoughts on preaching* (1864; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975, or reprint), thoughts: 1-2, 7-9, 12-15, 17-23, 28, 30, 33-34, 43, 45, 47, 51, 58-60, 62, 66, 70-71, 85, 95, 104, 113-114, 127. (Provided on Canvas).

Week 6 (November 10): Twentieth Century Scotland and Twenty-first Century America

READ William Still, “38 Years at Gilcomston,” *Banner of Truth magazine*, no. 244 (Jan. 1984). (<https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2010/from-the-archives-thirty-eight-years-at-gilcomston/>)

READ Timothy Witmer, *The shepherd leader: achieving effective shepherding in your church* (2010), Introduction only (Provided on Canvas).

READ Philip G. Ryken, “Union with Christ: Gospel Ministry as Dying and Rising with Jesus,” in *Theology for Ministry: How Doctrine Affects Pastoral Life and Practice*, R. Edwards, J. Ferguson, C. B. Van Dixhoorn, eds (Philipsburg, 2022), ch. 10. (Provided on Canvas).

VI. Recommended Pastoral works

Ascol, Thomas. *Dear Timothy: letters and pastoral ministry*.

Baxter, Richard. *The Reformed Pastor*.

Bonar, Andrew. *Diary and Letters*.

Bonar, Andrew. *Life of Robert Murray M’Cheyne*.

Brainerd, David. *The Diary of David Brainerd*.

Bridges, Charles. *The Christian ministry*.

Clowney, Edmund. *Called to the ministry*.

Dickson, David. *The elder and his work*.

Dudley-Smith, Timothy. *John Stott: the making of a leader*.

Fairbairn, Patrick. *Pastoral Theology*

Garretson, James. *Princeton and preaching*

Gatiss, Lee. *Preachers, pastors, and ambassadors.*

Lloyd Jones, Martin, *Preachers and Preaching.*

Logan, Samuel, ed, *The preacher and preaching.*

Marshall, Colin and Tony Payne. *The trellis and the vine.*

Piper, John. *Brothers we are not professionals: a plea to pastors for radical ministry.*

Spurgeon, C. H. *An all-around ministry.*

Spurgeon, C. H. *Lectures to my students.*

Strauch, Alexander. *Biblical eldership: an urgent call to restore biblical church leadership.*

Still, William. *The work of the pastor.*

Stott, John R. *The preacher's portrait.*

Tripp, Paul. *Dangerous calling: confronting the unique challenges of pastoral ministry.*

Ventura, Rob and Jeremy Walker. *A portrait of Paul: identifying a true minister of Christ.*

Witmer, Timothy. *The shepherd leader: achieving effective shepherding in your church.*

Any other work on past from ministry approved by instructor.

VI. Grading policies

All written work must be submitted on Canvas.

Late work is not accepted. If you are unable to complete an assignment on time, please submit incomplete work instead.

Extensions Policy for Assignments: In extenuating circumstances, a deadline extension of up to one week may be granted at the discretion of the professor. Requests for extensions of more than one week must be submitted to the Registrar for consideration by the Academic Dean in consultation with the professor. Extensions are granted only for significant emergencies or unforeseen circumstances, and a grade penalty may be applied. All extension requests must be made prior to the assignment deadline. No retrospective extensions will be granted.

Each term I will routinely choose as many as three people with whom to discuss one or more pieces of their written work. Students should expect that in this conversation I will ask about the development of their written work and discuss with the student claims made or sources used. I also reserve the right, in the event that I have any concern about AI use, plagiarism, or cheating,

to substitute an oral exam for any assignment, quiz, test or exam. The length and complexity of the oral exam will depend on the scope and complexity of the assignment or assessment exercise.

VII. Note on computer use

RTS Charlotte Classroom Technology Usage

RTS Charlotte recognizes how essential it is for students to have reliable, campus-wide access to the internet. For that reason, we have made Wi-Fi available for our student body, not only in the library

and student lounges, but also in the classrooms. We know that students need to use the internet to download class materials, access files on the Cloud, and locate other important information.

However, we also recognize that internet access in the classroom provides opportunity for abuse and misuse. Some

students have unfortunately used their internet access to engage in many activities that distract them from the classroom lectures (e.g., surfing the web, checking sports scores, playing games). Not only does such activity hamper a student's own seminary education, but it distracts other students who can easily view the screens of nearby students. In addition, donors and classroom guests (who often sit in the back) can see this inappropriate internet usage, which reflects poorly on RTS. Classroom etiquette includes leaving cell phones turned off, refraining from surfing the Internet or playing computer games or other distracting activities. In addition, students must respect standards set by individual professors regarding the use of technology during their class.

In order to address this issue, we must appeal to the integrity of the students as ones who are preparing for a lifetime of ministry to Christ and his church. We expect each student to take personal responsibility for proper classroom technology usage and to encourage others around them to do the same. All RTS-Charlotte students are accountable to the policies stated in the Student Handbook and Academic Catalog and are therefore expected to use technology in the classroom only for appropriate class-related activities. Student conduct is under the supervision of the Dean of Students.

Van Dixhoorn Classroom Technology Policy

I'm joining the ranks of those strongly discouraging laptop computers from class, although tablets are fine. Even the godliest, most focused student find screens a distraction, including the screens of others. Moreover, recent research has plausibly suggested that students learn better when taking notes by hand. If a student can demonstrate that not using a computer will cause hardship or inhibit learning, I'll happily consider their argument. Abuse of laptops (using them for a purpose other than note-taking) will result in my request that the laptop not be used by the student for the remainder of the semester. Unless there is an emergency, please also forebear the use of cell phones.

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Classics of Pastoral Theology
 Professor: Chad Van Dixhoorn
 Campus: Charlotte
 Date: Autumn 2026

MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes <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>		Rubric ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None	Mini-Justification
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	History of pastoral theology traced; theological and biblical case made for Reformed ministry
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	Scripture is expounded in defense of Reformed pastoral theology
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	Confessional heritage is explained in support of Reformed pastoral theology
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Moderate	Pastoral theology is presented in relation to personal sanctification
Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Moderate	We exist to worship, and thus in the Reformed tradition worship is related to our pastoral theology
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.)	Strong	This course recognizes that there is a long tradition of pastoral theology in the church, and that students will come from various perspectives
Pastoral Ministry	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm. 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	Strong	Preaching is addressed as a component part of pastoral theology