

Reformed Theological Seminary

Personal Sanctification PT5375

2026 Syllabus

Chad Van Dixhoorn

Course information

Class dates: August 25–December 1 (12 weeks)
Class time: Tuesdays 1–2 PM
No class: October 6 (Fall break)
November 17
Class dinner: TBD
Credit hours: 1
Contact: Dr. Van Dixhoorn cvandixhoorn@rts.edu
PA: Faith Key fkey@rts.edu
TA: 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 either (1) personal matters, or (2) historical and theological questions. Please try valiantly to meet me during those three days, but email Faith Key for all in-person appointments or appointments at other times in the week. If you have a question about the class, please contact Kirby Key *after* reading the syllabus carefully.

Description (as per RTS *Catalogue*)

“This course emphasizes methodology and responsibility for personal growth in Christ. This involves the study of Scripture for personal nurture and the exercise of certain disciplines necessary for spiritual growth.”

Course Objectives

- (1) To understand and to articulate the doctrine of sanctification in Christ
- (2) To grasp the principles and key ideas impelling growth in godliness
- (3) To understand the Holy Spirit’s use of the church and the ordinary means of grace for personal growth in Christ
- (4) To acquire practical acquaintance with personal holiness

Class dinner

My wife Emily would like to host you all one evening for dinner and dessert this term. This shared meal and discussion will count as the thirteenth week of class time.

Required Reading

Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices* (Banner of Truth Trust, 2021 or after), "Epistle Dedicatory" (pp. xxix–xxxiv **only**); and II. Satan's Devices to Draw the Soul to Sin," Devices 1–6 **only** (pp. 9–56); (53 pages).

Thomas Chalmers, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection" from <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/Chalmers,%20Thomas%20-%20The%20Expulsive%20Power%20of%20a%20New%20Af.pdf> (11 pages)

J. Ligon Duncan, "The Ordinary Means of Growth" from <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/ordinary-means-growth/> (3 pages).

Matthew Henry, *A method for prayer*, "To the readers" and Chapter 1 (21 pages; provided on Canvas).

Michael Horton, "The Reformation and Spiritual Formation," *Modern Reformation*, June 2013. <https://www.modernreformation.org/resources/essays/the-reformation-spiritual-formation>; (10 pages).

Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, Directions/Chapters 1–4 (75 pages).

John Murray, *Writings*, vol. 2, chapters 21–25 (40 pages)

Dane Ortlund, *Deeper*, chapter 5: "Acquittal" (25 pages; provided on Canvas).

Dane Ortlund, "Sanctification by justification: the forgotten insight of Bavinck and Berkouwer on progressive sanctification" *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 28:1 (Spring 2010), p. 43–61 (18 pages; provided on Canvas).

J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (any unabridged edition), chapter 1–6, 20 (158 pages).

Tom Schwanda, "Growing in Christ: Glorifying and Enjoying God through Reformed Spiritual Disciplines" *Reformation & Revival* 10:1 (Winter 2001): pages 19–45 (26 pages; provided on Canvas).

James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), chapters 1–4 (110 pages).

C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to my students*, Chapter 1: "The minister's self-watch" (18 pages) and Chapter 3 "The minister's private prayer" (13 pages); (31 pages; provided on Canvas).

Westminster Confession of Faith, chs 13, 15, 16; Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 35, 87–88; Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 137–139, 143–145.

Recommended Reading

Alleine, Joseph. *Sure Guide to Heaven* (or *Alarm to the Unconverted*).
Ames, William. *The Marrow of Theology*.
Athanasius, *The Life of Anthony*
Baillie, John. *A Diary of Private Prayer*.
Baxter, Richard. *Dying Thoughts*.
Bonar, Andrew. *Diary and Letters*.
Bonar, Andrew. *Life of Robert Murray M'Cheyne*.
Boston, Thomas. *The Beauties of Boston*.
Brainerd, David. *The Diary of David Brainerd*.
Brooks, Thomas. *Christ is the Life of Believers*.
Brooks, Thomas. *The Secret Key to Heaven*.
Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress*.
Burroughs, Jeremiah. *Gospel Remission*.
Chalmers, Thomas. *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*.
Clairveaux, St. Bernard. *On Loving God*.
DeYoung, Kevin. *The Good News We Almost Forgot*.
DeYoung, Kevin. *The Hole in our Holiness*.
Edwards, Jonathan. *The Religious Affections*.
Edwards, Jonathan. *Charity and Its Fruits*.
Ferguson, Sinclair. *The Christian Life*.
Ferguson, Sinclair. *Devoted to God: Blueprints for Sanctification*.
Ferguson, Sinclair. *Grace Alone. How the Grace of God Amazes Me*.
Ferguson, Sinclair. *Grow in Grace*.
Ferguson, Sinclair. *John Owen on the Christian Life*.
Ferguson, Sinclair. *Know Your Christian Life: A Theological Introduction*.
Ferguson, Sinclair. *The Sermon on the Mount*.
Ferguson, Sinclair. *The Trinitarian Devotion of John Owen*.
Ferguson, Sinclair. *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance*.
Flavel, John. *Christ Altogether Lovely*.
Goodwin, Thomas. *The Vanity of Thoughts*.
Gurnall, William. *The Christian in Complete Armour* (abridged version is fine).
Guthrie, William. *The Christian's Great Interest*.
Hamilton, Ian. *The Faith Shaped Life*.
Hooker, Thomas. *Danger of Desertion, or A Farewell Sermon of Mr. Thomas Hooker*.
Keller, Timothy. *The Prodigal God*.
Law, William. *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*.
Lewis, CS. *Screwtape Letters*.
Manton, Thomas. *Let Patience Have Its Perfect Work*.
M'Cheyne, Robert Murray. *A Basket of Fragments*.
Murray, Andrew. *Humility*.
Newton, John. *Out of the Depths*.
Newton, John. *Selected Letters and Poems of John Newton*.
Owen, John. *Communion with God*.
Owen, John. *The Glory of Christ*.
Owen, John. *Indwelling Sin in Believers*.

Owen, John. *The Mortification of Sin*.
Owen, John. *Triumph Over Temptation*.
Rutherford, Samuel. *The Loveliness of Christ*.
Ryle, J.C. *Holiness*.
Ryle, J.C. *Practical Religion*.
Scougal, Henry. *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*.
Scudder, Henry. *The Christian's Daily Walk*.
Sibbes, Richard. *Divine Meditations*.
Sibbes, Richard. *Bruised Reed*.
Spurgeon, C. H., *Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*
Spurgeon, C. H., *Sermons*
Troxel, A. C., *With all your heart*
Vos, Geerhardus. *Grace and Glory*.
Watson, Thomas. *All Things for Good*.
Watson, Thomas. *A Test of Assurance*.
Watson, Thomas. *The Doctrine of Repentance*.

Assessment

A. Reading (10% of grade). Each student must submit to Canvas three completed reading pledges. These assignments are **DUE** at 11:59 the evening before class on the 4th, 8th and last week of class (September 15th, October 20th, and December 1st respectively) and cover the readings up to and including that week (see reading schedule in Canvas). 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 your overall grade.

B. Participation (10% of grade). This portion of the grade is assessed according to attendance and the quality of conversational contributions. Both quality and quantity matter. Don't wait all term for a brilliant comment to come to you. Come prepared to discuss and to be called upon in every class. Nonetheless participation also involves listening. Discussion is a team performance and not a solo sport. A helpful class will note or build on the comments that others make with occasional affirmation and gracious disagreement.

C. Presentation (5% of grade).

During our dinner and dessert students are to present a *brief* verbal book review (the length of presentation will depend on the class size, but will likely range between 2–5 minutes). This should be a summary and response. It must include a statement of the most beneficial (if any) and most problematic (if any) aspect of the book. This is in addition to the full written book review, discussed below.

The reading choice is yours... *But* it must (1) total at least 200 pages (if less, you must supplement with some additional reading); (2) be a book that you have not already read; (3) be a book which – to your knowledge – is not required in another RTS course; (4) be included in the recommended reading list in this syllabus, unless you get permission for an alternative text from the instructor.

D. Book Review (20% of grade).

Students are to write a 7–10 page review of the book selected for their presentation. It should be styled as a gracious and thoughtful ‘Amazon’ review with a ranking out of 5, and a clear recommendation to readers at its close (don’t buy it, read it weekly, etc.) This assignment is **DUE** at 11:59pm one week after the final day of class (December 8th).

E. Written work (45% of grade). All but the first week of class will require reading. Three of the weeks will entail a modest writing assignment, always including an effort to digest and respond to the reading up to and including the week in which the assignment is due. These assignments are **DUE** at 11:59 the evening before class on the 4th, 8th and last week of class (September 15th, October 20th, and December 1st, respectively).

1. Week 4 assignment (September 15): In a 5-10 pages explain how these authors have argued for the importance of sanctification and holiness. Page citations for every main point, and a **minimum** of 5 brief pertinent quotations, are required for the assignment as a whole.

2. Week 8 assignment (October 20): In a 5-10 pages explain how these authors understand the relationship between Christ and sanctification. Also explain how these authors variously understand helps, habits and means of grace and their relationship to sanctification. Page citations for every main point, and a minimum of 5 brief pertinent quotations, are required for the assignment as a whole.

3. Week 12 assignment (December 1): In a 5-10 pages explain how these authors and class lectures articulated (1) challenges to and proper perspectives towards sexual holiness, (2) the relationship between Christ and sanctification. Also explain (3) how these authors variously understand helps, habits and means of grace and their relationship to sanctification. Page citations for every main point, and a minimum of 5 brief pertinent quotations, are required for the assignment as a whole.

NOTE: (a) These assignments require you to express and assess ideas in your own words. *Do more than supply extended quotations.* **Nonetheless, page citations for every main point, and a minimum of 5 brief pertinent quotations, are required for the assignment as a whole.** (b) My expectation is that you will mention strengths and weaknesses, potential red flags, etc., in the required reading (or in my lectures!) Also indicate whether you liked the book or not, and if so, why. You can share whether it was helpful or not, and if so, how. You could state whether you’d recommend the book, to whom, and for what. Not all of these elements need to be included in every response. (3) Given the nature and purpose of this class, please also indicate how these ideas, authors or texts impacted you, or how you are praying that they will impact you.

F. Memorization (10% of grade). You must recite a selection from Scripture (in any translation) and catechism questions to a fellow student in the course. The selections are as follows:

Galatians 5:16-26

Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 1, 35, 87–88

Your fellow student must indicate in Canvas to the course TA in writing that you have successfully completed the assignment (i.e. that you have recited all of the following, from memory, without error). This statement should be as follows – “[Name (the one recited)] recited

[Bible verse(s) and catechism questions] to me, [your name], on [date]." This assignment is **DUE** by the end of day on our final week of class (December 1st).

Attendance

Class attendance is required for PT 5375. If a student anticipates an unavoidable absence, he should notify the instructor in advance. Each hour of unexcused absence subjects the student to reduction of his final grade by one-half of a letter grade. **Students missing more than three hours will fail the course.**

Grading Scale

The grading scale for this course is the seminary's grading scale. You may find it listed at https://rts.edu/academics/policies-and-procedures-at-rts/#Grading_System

Plagiarism

Please review the seminary's policy on plagiarism. Plagiarized work will subject the student to failure in the course and possible disciplinary action.

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**. 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 circumstance. A medical emergency is an example of an extenuating circumstance; a busy academic or work schedule is not.

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.

RTS Extension Policy

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.

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: PT5375

Professor: Chad Van Dixhoorn

Campus: Charlotte

Date: Fall 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	Emphasis on reflecting on sanctification through writing assignments
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.)	Moderate	The professor will exegete relevant passages, and students are expected to understand the biblical underpinnings for the theology and practice of sanctification. Students also memorize portions of Scripture.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	Students are expected to understand a reformed approach to sanctification within the framework of the Westminster Standards, and memorize part of those Standards.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	This is the main goal of the course.
Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. Includes ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Moderate	God's Word is the foundation for knowing what it is that pleases the Lord and how we grow in union with Christ.
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	The professor will communicate alternative approaches to personal Sanctification with fairness.
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 shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Christians..	Moderate	The role of personal sanctification in ministering to others will be emphasized.

