

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
**ST5500 – J1 Pastoral and Social Ethics Syllabus**  
*Fall Semester, 2026 \* Ligon Duncan*

### Course Description

The official RTS description of this course is as follows: “A detailed survey of Christian ethics, including the major contemporary ethical theories and the major issues confronting Christians today. Special attention will be given to the use of the Scriptures in ethics and the ten commandments.” We will consider the nature of sanctification, the office and work of the Spirit, the relationship between law and gospel, the role of the law in the Christian life, as well as the nature of true Christian liberty. Basic concerns and current issues in social ethics will also be covered.

### Course Objectives

To assist the student in obtaining a knowledge of, commitment to, and proficiency in communicating the content of Christian ethics from a Reformed perspective, as well as challenging the student to the pursuit of holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord.

### Contact Information

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Assisting me to facilitate this course will be my TAs: George Herndon: [georgeh@fpcjackson.org](mailto:georgeh@fpcjackson.org)  
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### Academic Policies

*A. Policy on extensions for assignments.*

1. 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.
2. Extensions are granted only for significant emergencies or unforeseen circumstances, and a grade penalty may be applied.
3. *All extension requests must be made **prior to the assignment deadline**.* No retrospective extensions will be granted.

*B. Policies on plagiarism and the use of artificial intelligence for coursework.*

1. Please note RTS’s plagiarism policy in the RTS Catalog.
2. Please consult the document “Artificial Intelligence Policy Students Feb 2025” on [MyPortal](#) for details of RTS’s AI policy. Bottom line: “Illegitimate uses of AI are subject to penalties in line with the severity of the violation, ranging from letter-grade reductions, a grade of F for a course, or academic probation.”

**All assignments must be submitted via Canvas in pdf format.** George and Tim are available to answer questions for you about logistical matters related to the course.

**Course Requirements**

Required Texts:

Denny Burk, *Mere Complementarianism: Male and Female in the Image of God* (Christian Focus Publications) OR Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church* (Crossway)John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Eerdmans)J.I. Packer, *Keeping the Ten Commandments* (Crossway)**Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms**

Reading of Westminster Standards:

*Confession of Faith* 13: Of Sanctification

16: Of Good Works

19: Of the Law of God

20: Of Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience

21: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day

22: Of Lawful Oaths and Vows

23: Of the Civil Magistrate

24: Of Marriage and Divorce

*Shorter Catechism* Questions 39-84*Larger Catechism* Questions 91-153**Class Attendance:**

Class attendance is, of course, an absolute imperative for successful completion of the course. If you must be absent or are providentially hindered from attendance, please contact the instructor. Faithful class attendance will be a part of your class evaluation, as reflected in your final grade.

**Evaluation:**

1. **Participation (15%).** Each student is required to attend course, answer questions when asked, and participate in class discussions. The following rubric explains how students will be evaluated:

<b>A to A- (100-94)</b>	<b>B+ to B- (93-86)</b>	<b>C+ to C- (85-78)</b>	<b>D+ to D- (77-70)</b>	<b>F (69 – 0)</b>
Provided many good ideas for class consideration; inspired others; clearly communicated desires, ideas, questions, and comments. Was respectful of others.	Participated in discussions; shared questions and comments. Was respectful of others.	Listened mainly; occasionally asked a question or offered a comment. Was respectful of others.	Seemed bored with discussions; rarely spoke up, and questions or comments were off topic. Was disrespectful of others. Or, dominated class time by not permitting others to ask their questions.	Failed to attend class—missed more than three lecture periods total.

2. **Dossier (15%).** A *dossier* [“a collection or file of documents on the same subject”] containing at least 30 total articles on each of the following ethical issues should be prepared for the student’s own use (more details explained in lecture). The *dossier* is to be submitted on the last class day electronically. Extra points for identifying other topics for which prospective pastors ought to have a resource file.

1. Scripture and ethics
2. Natural law
3. The Decalogue
4. Christian liberty and conscience
5. Marriage
6. Divorce and remarriage
7. Sexual holiness
8. Homosexuality
9. Gender identity
10. Pornography
11. Singleness
12. Parenting
13. Abortion
14. IVF
15. End-of-life care
16. Euthanasia
17. Disability and human dignity
18. Racism
19. Ethnicity and nationalism
20. Poverty and mercy ministry
21. Economic justice
22. Religious liberty
23. Church and state (Christian Nationalism)
24. Civil disobedience
25. Just war
26. Capital punishment
27. Technology and social media
28. Artificial intelligence
29. Environmental stewardship
30. Consumerism and materialism

3. **Term Paper (40%).** A 12-15 page research paper (at least 3000 words in the main text, not counting notes) written in a 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with 10-point Times New Roman footnotes, single-spaced. You must use at least ten sources, three of which should be journal articles. Paper should be on a topic from the approved list below. Get approval from the professor via Canvas.

### I. Foundations of Christian Ethics

- Varieties of Ethical Systems
- The authority of Scripture in ethics
- Natural law and general revelation
- The Ten Commandments as a moral framework
- Virtue and character
- Christian liberty and conscience
- Genetic engineering
- Artificial reproductive technologies
- Organ donation

### II. Personal and Family Ethics

- Marriage
- Divorce and remarriage
- Sexual ethics
- Pornography
- Homosexuality
- Gender identity/transgenderism
- Singleness
- Parenting
- Family worship
- Education

Key contemporary questions:

- Same-sex marriage
- Gender dysphoria
- LGBTQ+ identity claims
- Cohabitation
- Reproductive technologies

### III. Bioethics and Life Issues

- Abortion
- End-of-life decisions
- Physician-assisted suicide
- Euthanasia
- IVF
- Embryo adoption

### IV. Social and Political Ethics

- Justice
- Poverty
- Racism and ethnicity
- Christian Nationalism
- Immigration
- Religious liberty
- Church and state
- Civil disobedience
- Capital punishment
- Economic ethics

### V. War, Peace, and Public Responsibility

- Just war theory
- Pacifism
- Military service
- Nuclear weapons
- Policing and use of force

### VI. Contemporary Emerging Issues

- Artificial intelligence
- Technology and human identity
- Social media ethics
- Critical theory
- Transhumanism
- Environmental stewardship
- Consumerism
- Surveillance and privacy
- Addiction (digital and substance)

4. **Final Examination (20%)** Specific directions for study preparation will be given. Here are some representative questions.

1. Identify and discuss the **standard**, the **dynamic**, the **motivation**, and the **goal** of Christian Ethics as discussed in class. Include Scripture references.
2. Summarize the content of the Ten Commandments, in proper order. Note where their biblical locations, and where they are elsewhere cited in both the Old and New Testaments.
3. Is the Christian “under the law?” In what sense? Is he obligated to keep the moral law? Why or why not?
4. Discuss the Biblical grounds for marriage, divorce, and remarriage. How would you address the situation of one of your church members seeking an unbiblical divorce? What if one of your elder’s children wanted to marry an unbeliever?
5. Indicate what percentage of the required reading you have completed.

5. **Westminster Shorter Catechism Exam (10%):** Students will memorize and be tested on WSC Q&A 39-84. Due Friday, December 4, 2026, at 5:00pm. (last week of class)
1. You should try to memorize the answers to questions 39–84 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism (original version, not modern version).
  2. You will take a quiz at the end of the semester in which you will be asked to answer *12 randomly-selected questions* from WSC 39–84.

### **Some Recommended Reading:**

Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*.

Basil the Great, *On Social Justice*.

Martin Luther, *Treatise on Good Works* (trans. Scott Hendrix; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012). ISBN 9780800698935.

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, especially Book III, chapters 6–10 and Book II, chapter 8.

Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, Vol. 3 (sections on sanctification and the Decalogue).

Richard Baxter, *Christian Directory*

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*. Vols. 1-4 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021). ISBN 978-0801098222

Louis Berkhof, *Christianity and Social Problems* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947).

Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983 reprint; originally 1957).

Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*.

Jochem Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Philadelphia: P&R, 1996). ISBN 9780875522371

Jochem Douma, *Responsible Conduct*.

**Course Objectives Related to MDiv\* Student Learning Outcomes**

Course: ST5500 – J1 – Pastoral and Social Ethics  
 Professor: Rev. Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III  
 Campus: Jackson  
 Date: Fall 2026

<b><u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u></b> <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>		<b><u>Rubric</u></b> • Strong • Minimal • Moderate • None	<b><u>Mini-Justification</u></b>
<b>Articulation (oral &amp; written)</b>	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	Reading, term paper, and final exam test ability to communicate in written form. Class discussion provides opportunity for oral articulation.
<b>Scripture</b>	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 readings focus upon biblical ethics as interpreted in the Christian tradition (classical and Reformed).
<b>Reformed Theology</b>	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	STRONG	Lectures and readings focus upon Reformed distinctives regarding the nature of sanctification and good works.
<b>Sanctification</b>	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	STRONG	Every facet of class addresses the nature of, motivation for, and power for sanctification.
<b>Worldview</b>	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.	STRONG	Readings, lectures, and term paper address the construction of moral principles and a moral imagination that is conformed to Holy Scripture as its final authority, and informed by historic Christianity.
<b>Winsomely Reformed</b>	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	Readings and lectures address Christian ethical instruction from beyond the Reformed world.
<b>Pastoral Ministry</b>	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.	STRONG	Ministers will be better informed in Christian ethics, which shapes worship, pulpit ministry, shepherding, and engaging the world.

\*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.