

ST5500 – Pastoral and Social Ethics

Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte

Fall 2026

I. Details

- A. Schedule: Fridays, 9:00am–12:00pm
- B. Professor: Dr. James N. Anderson
- C. Contact: janderson@rts.edu
- D. Availability: If you wish to discuss some aspect of the course, please speak to me after class or email me to arrange an office appointment. (I'm also available for lunches with students to chat about any topics of interest or concern, theological or otherwise.)

II. Goals

- A. To familiarize the student with standard terminology, concepts, and issues involved in ethics, both Christian and non-Christian.
- B. To provide the student with a survey and critique of non-Christian theories of ethics.
- C. To equip the student with a biblical model for ethical decision-making.
- D. To assist the student in thinking through the application of God's Word to a wide range of contemporary ethical issues, primarily through the lens of the Ten Commandments.
- E. To develop the student's ability to think critically about contemporary ethical issues and to articulate a well-reasoned Christian position on those issues.

III. Course Overview

- A. Introduction: What Is Ethics? Why Study Ethics?
- B. Non-Christian Ethics: Survey and Critique
- C. Christian Ethics: A Biblical Model for Ethical Decision-Making
- D. Applied Ethics: The Decalogue

IV. Course Requirements

- A. *Class attendance and thoughtful participation.*
 - 1. As per seminary policy, you are required to attend all the lectures. If you know that you will be unable to attend class on a particular date, please inform me in advance, otherwise you may be penalized for your absence.
 - 2. There will be opportunity for class participation and questions during the lectures.
 - 3. You will be expected to use the internet in the classroom *only for appropriate class-related activities*. Please consult **Appendix A** regarding the RTS Charlotte policy on classroom technology usage.
 - 4. A proportion of your final grade (see below) will depend on your attendance record and your participation in the classes (thoughtful interaction with the professor and other students).
 - 5. **Important:** If you want to ensure that you receive the credit for participation that you deserve, please update your [Canvas profile](#) to include a recent, recognizable headshot.

- B. *Westminster Shorter Catechism memorization.*
1. You should try to memorize the answers to questions 39–84 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism (original version, not modern version).
 2. Some resources will be provided on Canvas to help you with this assignment.
 3. You will take a quiz at the end of the semester (during the exam period) in which you will be asked to answer *12 randomly-selected questions* from WSC 39–84.
 4. A proportion of your final grade (see below) will depend on your quiz score.
- C. *Reading assignments.*
1. The required reading is listed below (Section VIII).
 2. A proportion of your final grade will depend on how much of the required reading you have completed.
 3. A reading report indicating the *percentage completed* of each required reading item is due on **December 3**. The report should be submitted via the course website (look for the link on the **Modules** page) on or prior to this date.
 4. Late submissions will be penalized *5 percentage points for each day beyond the deadline*.
 5. A reading schedule will be provided at the start of class.
- D. *Class presentation.*
1. You will record and upload a 10-minute (max) video presentation in which you will give (from a Christian standpoint to an assumed Christian audience) a defense of a particular ethical thesis (e.g., that lying is always sinful, that artificial contraception is not intrinsically wrong, or that divorce is never permissible).
 2. The thesis and submission date for your presentation will be assigned at the start of class.
 3. One of your classmates will be assigned an *opposing* thesis (e.g., that lying is *not* always sinful, etc.) so that the class can hear “both sides” of the argument.
 4. **Note:** You may not personally agree with the thesis you are assigned to defend! Nevertheless, you should try to present the best defense you can. Either way, you will find it a helpful exercise. Note that you will not be penalized if your assigned thesis is one that would normally be considered difficult for a Christian to defend!
 5. Instructions for recording/uploading your presentation will be available on Canvas.
 6. You will be expected to watch and comment on *at least three presentations* (other than your own) before the end of the semester.
 7. Your presentation will be graded according to the following criteria, in no particular order: responsible use of Scripture, familiarity with the issues and arguments (both pro and con), creativity, clarity, and coherence.
 8. I will not provide written feedback on your presentation unless requested.
- E. *Writing assignment.*
1. You should write a paper (3500–4500 words, excluding footnotes) in the form of an extended letter to a friend who, on hearing that you have taken a seminary course in ethics, has written to ask your opinion on an ethical matter of personal concern to him/her (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1).
 2. You are free to choose the ethical issue to write on, but you should ensure that it gives you the scope to produce a satisfactory paper based on the criteria below. You may wish to base the paper on a real-life situation from your own experience;

if you can, so much the better, but be careful to preserve anonymity where appropriate!

3. Your paper should include all of the following:
 - i. A clear explanation of the issue that demonstrates your understanding of its various dimensions.
 - ii. A survey of the different conclusions that Christians have reached on the issue (and the reasons for those conclusions).
 - iii. A defense of the position *you* advocate, which (a) engages with the course material, (b) engages with the other positions you have mentioned, (c) makes good use of Scripture, and (d) makes use of external sources (ethics textbooks, journal articles, biblical commentaries, etc.).
 - iv. Any appropriate practical advice for your friend as he/she continues to wrestle with the issue.
4. Your paper will be graded according to the following criteria, in no particular order: responsible use of Scripture, responsible use of sources, extent of research, creativity, clarity, structure and coherence, cogency of argument, evidence of critical thinking, pastoral sensitivity, and good writing style (inc. grammar, spelling, and punctuation).
5. The paper should cite *at least 8 scholarly sources*.
 - i. For the purposes of this paper, a scholarly source is a book or article by a recognized expert in the field (and not aimed at a popular level for a general audience)—ideally one that has been peer-reviewed.
 - ii. You are strongly encouraged to include 2-3 journal articles among your scholarly sources. (Search the [library databases](#) for relevant articles.)
 - iii. Wikipedia is clearly *not* a scholarly source. That said, with sufficient discernment, Wikipedia can be a *useful pointer* to scholarly sources and is generally reliable for fact-checking on uncontroversial issues.
 - iv. Please consult me if you have any doubts about whether a source is scholarly.
 - v. You should not rely heavily on internet sources. Use the library!
 - vi. The paper should include a properly formatted bibliography.
6. The paper should be word-processed, not hand-written.
 - i. Use a 12-point font and double line-spacing for the main text.
 - ii. Use section headings where applicable to improve readability.
 - iii. Use footnotes (10-point font) rather than endnotes.
 - iv. Use a recognized scholarly style for citations (e.g., Chicago/Turabian, SBL).
7. The paper should be submitted with a title page containing all of the following: the name and year of the course; your name; the professor's name; the title of the paper; and the *exact word count* for the main text of the paper (obtained from your word processor's word-count feature).
8. You will be penalized if you do not observe the requirements and guidelines above.
9. For good examples of scholarly papers using scholarly sources, take a look at the online papers from the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* ([here](#)) and the *Westminster Theological Journal* ([here](#)). For good examples of research papers from RTS Charlotte students, visit the *Pen and Parchment* webpage ([here](#)).
10. Your paper is due on **December 3**. It should be uploaded to the course website (look for the link on the **Modules** page) on or prior to this date.

11. Late submissions will be penalized *5 percentage points for each day beyond the deadline*.
- F. *Final exam*.
1. The final exam should be taken with a proctor during the exam period: **December 3–8**.
 2. The exam will consist of a series of short-answer questions plus one longer essay question based on all of the class material and all of the required reading. You will have three hours to complete it.
 3. You may refer to an English translation of the Bible (but not one with study notes, etc.). You may not refer to any class notes or other study resources.
 4. You will be asked to sign a declaration that you have not discussed the content of the exam with anyone who has previously taken the exam.

V. Course Documents

- A. *Instructions for accessing course documents*.
1. Log in to the [RTS Canvas website](#).
 2. Select “Pastoral and Social Ethics” from the **Courses** menu.
 3. All of the course documents will be accessible from the **Modules** page.
- B. *Course outline*.
1. Other than the syllabus, the course outline is the most important document. You will need a copy (either electronic or printed) in front of you throughout the class.
 2. You are strongly encouraged to supplement the outline with your own notes.
 3. The outline will be uploaded to the course website the week before class.
- C. *Supplementary documents*.
1. The reading schedule and some of the required and recommended readings (see below) will be available on the course website.
 2. You should also consult the document “Research Paper Checklist” *before* you write your paper.

VI. 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.”

VII. Grading

- A. Class attendance and participation — 10%
- B. Westminster Shorter Catechism quiz — 10%
- C. Reading assignments — 15%
- D. Class presentation — 15%
- E. Writing assignment — 30%
- F. Final exam — 20%

VIII. Required Reading

You should obtain copies of all the items below. You should also bring an English translation of the Bible to class. ESV is preferred, since that is what I'll be using. NIV, NASB, and CSB are acceptable; KJV and *The Message* are not!

- A. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (P&R, 2008).
[Available as an [eBook via EBSCO](#).]
- B. John M. Frame, "How to Write a Theological Paper," Appendix F in *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (P&R, 1987). [Available on the course website.]
- C. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 2nd ed. (Crossway, 2010).
[Available as an [eBook via EBSCO](#).]
- D. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Eerdmans, 1957).
[Available as an [eBook via EBSCO](#).]

IX. Recommended Supplementary Reading

You are not *required* to read any of the items below, but you may find them useful to consolidate the course material and for further study as your interests dictate. For many of these, the table of contents can be viewed on Amazon.com or Google Books. Further recommendations for specific topics are included in the course outline.

- A. David J. Atkinson et al, eds., *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology* (IVP Academic, 1995).
[A useful reference work for definitions and overviews of issues in Christian ethics.]
- B. Francis J. Beckwith, *Defending Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[A "moral and legal case against abortion choice" from a natural law perspective. Beckwith does a fine job of refuting the popular and scholarly arguments for abortion.]
- C. J. Budziszewski, *What We Can't Not Know* (Spence Publishing Company, 2004).
[A winsome defense of natural law understood as the moral law of God "written on the heart". Budziszewski was an evangelical when he wrote this, but has since converted to Roman Catholicism—perhaps in part because Catholics are generally more sympathetic to the idea of natural law.]
- D. David K. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw, eds., *Readings in Christian Ethics*, 2 vols (Baker, 1994/1996).
[The first volume offers a selection of readings on theory and method, the second on issues and applications.]

- E. John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 3rd ed. (P&R, 2004).
[Very useful in providing background information relevant to ethical decision-making, but weak on methodology.]
- F. Jochem Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (P&R, 1996).
[A helpful and insightful exposition of the Decalogue by a Dutch Reformed theologian.]
- G. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 2nd ed. (Crossway, 2010).
[A highly regarded textbook on major topics in applied ethics from a conservative evangelical perspective. Updated and expanded in the second edition.]
- H. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics* (Westminster Press, 1966).
[An influential text from a liberal Christian perspective. Fletcher was an Episcopal priest and Harvard professor who later declared himself an atheist.]
- I. John M. Frame, *Medical Ethics* (P&R, 1988).
[An early application of Frame's triperspectival approach to specific issues in medical ethics.]
- J. Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Abingdon Press, 2002).
[A thorough defense of the traditional Christian reading of Scripture on this issue in the face of recent revisionism.]
- K. Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Baker, 1991).
[A respected evangelical treatment, notable for its defense of "graded absolutism".]
- L. Harry J. Gensler, *Ethics: A Contemporary Introduction* (Routledge, 1998).
[An accessible introduction to contemporary moral philosophy. Valuable for its critiques of relativism and subjectivism, but its objections to 'supernaturalist' ethics are weak. Gensler is a Jesuit philosopher who ends up defending a Kantian deontologist approach and, along the way, develops an argument against abortion.]
- M. Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics* (Crossway, 2018).
[On the whole, an excellent introduction to biblical ethics. Read my full review [here](#).]
- N. Richard Holloway, *Godless Morality* (Canongate Books, 1999).
[A hopelessly flawed attempt by a liberal Scottish Episcopal bishop to do ethics without God; fascinating and infuriating in equal measures.]
- O. David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Baker Book, 1994).
[An introduction to biblical ethics from a conservative evangelical perspective; more emphasis on theory and principles than on application to specific issues.]
- P. Michael Lefebvre, ed., *The Gospel & Sexual Orientation* (Crown & Covenant Publications, 2012).
[A short but very insightful summary of the biblical teaching on homosexuality and its pastoral implications. Includes a helpful analysis of the notion of "sexual orientation".]
- Q. John Murray, *Divorce* (P&R, 1961).
[A classic Reformed treatment.]
- R. Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (P&R, 1991).
[Part 2 of this excellent work offers an explanation of the rationale behind the specific penalties of the Mosaic Law and how they apply today. Appendix B provides a lengthy, nuanced critique of Greg Bahnsen's arguments for theonomy.]
- S. Scott B. Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Christian Ethics* (Zondervan, 2009).
[A generally solid introduction to the theory and application of Christian ethics from a leading evangelical ethicist. Currently in its third edition.]

- T. David VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* (Action Institute, 2006).
[A defense of natural law theory from a Reformed scholar; a useful counterpoint to John Frame's criticisms of natural law theory. The book can be purchased for a good price direct from the Acton Institute (<https://www.acton.org>).]
- U. David VanDrunen, *Bioethics and the Christian Life* (Crossway, 2009).
[A treatment of contemporary issues in bioethics from a conservative Reformed perspective.]
- V. *PCA Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Divorce and Remarriage* (1992).
<https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/divorce-remarriage.pdf>
[A very thorough and helpful treatment from historical, scriptural, and pastoral perspectives by a study committee of the Presbyterian Church in America.]
- W. *PCA Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality* (2020).
<https://pcaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/AIC-Report-to-48th-GA-5-28-20-1.pdf>
[A helpful summary exposition of biblical teaching on human sexuality, with particular reference to the issues of homosexuality, same-sex attraction, and transgenderism.]

Appendix A: RTS Charlotte Classroom Technology Usage

Academic Dean's Office

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.

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 are therefore expected to use technology in the classroom only for appropriate class-related activities.

From the Student Handbook: "Classroom etiquette also includes leaving cell phones turned off, refraining from surfing the Internet and laptop computer games and communicating to your neighbor during lectures. Student conduct is under the supervision of the Dean of Students."

Appendix B: Instructions for Exams with LockDown Browser

1. Install the LockDown Browser application on the computer you intend to use for exams, prior to sitting for the exam, using this link:
<https://download.respondus.com/lockdown/download.php?id=998253613>
 - a. This link is ONLY for RTS students and covers Mac and Windows applications.
 - b. Be sure that you are able to log in to your Canvas account from the LockDown Browser before the day of the exam.
 - c. If you use internet filtering software (for example, Covenant Eyes) you may need to disable it before beginning an exam with LockDown Browser. Some types of filtering software can block your computer's connection to Canvas. Also, please be sure to add an exception for our Canvas URL: <https://rts.instructure.com>
2. The exam proctor should not be a current RTS student (current = taken a class within the past year but not yet graduated) or a member of the library staff.
3. The proctor must observe the student taking the exam and ensure that there are no devices or resources available other than the computer being used for the exam.
4. Access the exam during the date window specified for that exam.
 - a. Sign in with the proctor.
 - b. Start the LockDown Browser application using a wired or known reliable Wi-Fi connection. We do not recommend using restaurant or coffee shop Wi-Fi to take exams.
 - c. Have your student ID number and proctor details available to input into the exam.
 - d. Log in to your Canvas account.
 - e. Navigate to the exam. You will not be able to access the exam with a standard web browser. For additional details on using LockDown Browser, review this [Student Quick Start Guide \(PDF\)](#).
 - f. The time clock will begin once you open the exam.
 - g. The exam must be completed in one sitting. You may not exit and return to the exam later.
 - h. The exam will contain questions regarding an honor pledge, and certification that your proctor was present during the entire exam period.
 - i. Sign out with the proctor.
5. Proctors may be contacted to verify information regarding exam administration.
6. In the rare case of a technical issue (for example, if power goes out during exam) the proctor will document the date and time when the issue was reported. Once you open the exam using the LockDown Browser, you will not be able to access other programs on your computer.

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Pastoral and Social Ethics
 Professor: James N. Anderson
 Campus: Charlotte
 Date: Fall 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. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Moderate	1. Theory/application paper 2. Final exam tests knowledge and articulation of course topics 3. Student oral presentations with class discussion
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	1. Biblical framework for meta-ethics 2. Emphasis on exegetical basis for judgments on ethical issues
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	1. Interacts with WLC's exposition of Ten Commandments 2. Discusses Regulative Principle of Worship, Sabbatarianism, etc.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Moderate	1. Application for personal holiness 2. Covers "third use" of the Law
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	1. Ethics placed in broader context of biblical worldview 2. Ethics relevant to all aspects of life 3. Engages with prominent issues of public policy (abortion, euthanasia, marriage, church/state, economics)
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	1. Appreciation of ethical insights from non-Reformed traditions and non-Christian ethicists (common grace) 2. Emphasis on charity and humility as Christian virtues
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.	Strong	1. Discusses application of Ten Commandments to individual, family, and corporate worship 2. Covers many issues in pastoral ethics 3. Discusses importance of Christian virtues in pastoral ministry 4. Discusses Christian social activism