

Christian Ethics

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Covenant Theological Seminary

Course Information

I. Course Description

A study of the structure and content of Christian ethics: goal, motive, and norm of Christian life; with an analysis of ethical issues of authority, life, sexuality, property, and truthfulness. The lectures were recorded in Fall 1999.

II. Objectives

The goal of the class is to understand the overall structure and essential content of Christian ethics; to grow in grace and in knowledge of what God is calling us to be and to do; and to develop skills in the resolution of moral issues. In particular, when students have completed this class they will be able to:

- *Articulate the goal, motive, and standard of Christian practice and to understand how it relates to ethics in general.
- *Have a working knowledge of key biblical passages dealing with Christian character and practice.
- *Have an appreciation for the Reformed tradition in ethics as expressed in the Westminster Standards.
- *Develop a method for resolving moral conflicts and compare it with other approaches.
- *Develop a perspective on perennial and contemporary ethical issues following the principles of the Ten Commandments.

III. Themes

The biblical foundation and motive for righteous living; the role of believers in the home, the church, and culture at large.

IV. Texts

These books can be purchased from most Christian booksellers, or you can order them online from the Covenant Seminary bookstore by visiting www.covenantseminary.edu or by calling the bookstore at 314-434-0110 (toll-free 877-213-3353).

- *Jones, David. *Biblical Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994.
- *Lewis, C.S. *The Abolition of Man*. New York: Macmillan, 1947.
- *Sanderson, John. *The Fruit of the Spirit*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1985.
- *Douma, J. *The Ten Commandments*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1996.
- *The Westminster Standards (any standard edition.)
- *PCA Position Papers on Ethical Issues (available from CTS Bookstore).
- *A standard English translation of the Bible (NIV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NEB, etc.).

V. Additional Reading

Exodus 19-20 (the giving of the Law); Leviticus 19 (the exposition of the Law); Matthew 5-7 (Sermon on the Mount); Romans 12-14 (the Christian life); 1 Corinthians 13 (exposition of love); Mt 22:36-39; Rom 2:14-15; *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Ch. 16 (Of Good Works), Ch. 19 (Of the Law of God), Ch. 20 (Of Christian Liberty), Ch. 23 (Of the Civil Magistrate), Ch. 24 (Of Marriage & Divorce), *Shorter Catechism* Q. 39-87, *Larger Catechism* Q. 91-153.

VI. Class Calendar

Introduction: Course Information

- Lecture 1—The Subject Matter of Ethics (*Reading: Jones, ch. 1*)
 Lecture 2—The Goal of Human Life (I), (*Jones, ch. 2*)
 Lecture 3—The Goal of Human Life (II); The Motivation of the Christian Life (I), (*Jones, ch. 3; Sanderson, chs. 1-4, 14-17*)
 Lecture 4—The Motivation of the Christian Life (II), (*Jones, ch. 4; Douma, Appendix, 355-90*)
 Lecture 5—The Motivation of the Christian Life (III)
 Lecture 6—The Standards of the Christian Life (I)
 Lecture 7—The Standards of the Christian Life (II)
 Lecture 8—The Primary Forms of Love (*Jones, ch. 5*)
 Lecture 9—The Universal Norms of Love (I), (*Jones, ch. 6; Lewis, chs. 1-3*)
 Lecture 10—The Universal Norms of Love (II)
 Lecture 11—The Universal Norms of Love (III)
 Lecture 12—The Universal Norms of Love (IV)
 Lecture 13—The Resolution of Moral Conflicts (I), (*Jones, ch. 7; Douma, 313-335*)
 Lecture 14—The Resolution of Moral Conflicts (II)
 Lecture 15—Excursus: Cultural Relativism & The Moral Law
 Lecture 16—First Principles (*Douma, 1-160*)
 Lecture 17—Marriage & The Family (*Jones, chs. 8-9; Westminster Confession of Faith [WCF], ch. 24*)
 Lecture 18—Divorce & Remarriage
 Lecture 19—The State in God’s Design (*Douma, 161-206; WCF, ch. 23*)
 Lecture 20—The Death Penalty & The Just War (*PCA, Nuclear Weapons, Digest, 439-54*)
 Lecture 21—Respect for Human Life—Beginning (I), (*Douma, 243-283; PCA, Abortion, Digest, 140-45*)
 Lecture 22—Respect for Human Life—Beginning (II) & Respect for Human Life—End (I), (*PCA, Heroic Measures, Digest, 378-89; Douma, 243-83*)
 Lecture 23—Respect for Human Life—End (II), (*Issues in Human Homosexuality, syllabus*)
 Lecture 24—Homosexuality (*PCA, AIDS, Digest, 37-50*)

VII. Recommended Devotional Readings

Psalm 119

“It is an acrostic psalm, an alphabet of prayers and reflections on the Word of God, giving each Hebrew letter its turn to introduce eight successive verses on the subject.... Like a ring of eight bells, eight synonyms for Scripture dominate the psalm [Law, Testimonies, Precepts, Statutes, Commandments, Ordinances, Word, Promise], and the twenty-two stanzas will ring the changes on them. ... This untiring emphasis has led some to accuse the psalmist of worshipping the Word rather than the Lord; but it has been well remarked that every reference here to Scripture, without exception, relates it explicitly to its Author; indeed every verse from 4 to the end is a prayer or affirmation addressed to Him. This is true piety: a love of God not desiccated by study but refreshed, informed and nourished by it.” Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150* (London: InterVarsity, 1975), 417-19.

Matthew 5:3-10 (The Beatitudes), James 3:17 (wisdom from above), Colossians 3:12-15 (qualities of life in Christ), Galatians 5:22-23 (the fruit of the Spirit), 2 Peter 1:5-7, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 1 Timothy 3:2-3 & Titus 1:7-8 (character requirements for church office)

VIII. Select Bibliography

Recommended texts for term papers

- *Grenz, Stanley J. *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998.
- *Kimbrell, Andrew. *The Human Body Shop: The Cloning, Engineering, and Marketing of Life*.

Washington, D.C.: Regnery Pub., 1997.

- *Pohl, Christine. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999.
- *Rae, Scott B. *Brave New Families: Biblical Ethics and Reproductive Technologies*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996.
- *Sider, Ronald J. *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999.

Reference Works

- *Atkinson, David J., and David H. Field, eds. *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995.
- *Childress, James F., and John Macquarrie, eds. *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986.
- *Reich, Warren T., ed. *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*. Rev. ed. 5 vols. New York: Macmillan, 1995.

Histories

- *Holmes, Arthur F. *Fact, Value, and God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997.
- *MacIntyre, Alasdair. *A Short History of Ethics*. New York: Macmillan, 1966.
- *Warnock, Mary. *Ethics Since 1900*. 2nd ed. London: Oxford UP, 1966.

Christian Classics

- *St. Augustine of Hippo. *The Way of Life of the Catholic Church* (A.D. 388). Translated by Donald A. Gallagher and Idella J. Gallagher. In *The Fathers of the Church*. Vol. 56. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1966.
- *St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*, 1st of the 2nd part, 11-15. *Summa contra gentiles*, part III, chs. 1-113. *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*. Vol. 2. Ed. Anton C. Pegis. New York: Random House, 1945.
- *Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559). Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. McNeil, John T., ed. Philadelphia: Westminster 1960. See especially Calvin's explanation of the moral law (I, viii), the Christian life (III, vi-x), the chapter on Christian liberty (III, xix), and the chapter on civil government (IV, xx).
- *Edwards, Jonathan. *Ethical Writings*. Ed. Paul Ramsey. In *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8. New Haven: Yale UP, 1989. Contains "Charity and Its Fruits," "Concerning the End for Which God Created the World," and "The Nature of True Virtue."
- *Kierkegaard, Søren. *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses* (1847). Translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. New York: Harper, 1962.

Introductions

- *Frankena, William K. *Ethics*. 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice, 1973. See also the companion volume, *Introductory Readings in Ethics*. Frankena, William K. and John T. Granrose, eds. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice, 1974.
- *Grenz, Stanley J. *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997.
- *Rae, Scott B. *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.
- *Sommers, Christina, and Fred Sommers, eds. *Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life: Introductory Readings in Ethics*. 2nd ed. San Diego: Harcourt, 1989.
- *Stob, Henry. "Ethics: An Account of Its Subject Matter." In *Ethical Reflections: Essays on Moral Themes*, 7-27. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978.

Apologetics

- *MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2nd ed. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame Press, 1984. Cf. Richard J. Mouw, "Alasdair MacIntyre on Reformation Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 13 (1985): 243-57.
- *Midgley, Mary. *Can't We Make Moral Judgments?* New York: St. Martin's, 1991.
- *Mouw, Richard J. *The God Who Commands*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame Press, 1990.
- *Ramsey, Paul. *The Truth of Value: A Defense of Moral and Literary Judgment*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1985.

Systematic Treatises

- *Barth, Karl. "The Command of God." In *Church Dogmatics*. II, 2. London: Clark, 1957. "The Command of God the Creator" [Sabbath, Marriage and the Family, Respect for and Protection of Life, Vocation] In *Church Dogmatics*. III, 4. London: Clark, 1961. "The Command of God the Reconciler" (Lecture Fragments). In *Church Dogmatics*. IV, 4. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981. For analysis see Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening that Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).
- *Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Ethics* (1949). Translated by Neville Horton Smith. Bethge, Eberhard, ed. New York: Macmillan, 1955.
- *Davis, John Jefferson. *Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1985.
- *Feinberg, John S., and Paul D. Feinberg. *Ethics for a Brave New World*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993.
- *Geisler, Norman L. *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989.
- *Gustafson, James M. *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, 2 vols. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1981-1984.
- *Häring, Bernard. *Free and Faithful in Christ: Moral Theology for Clergy and Laity*, 3 vols. New York: Seabury, 1978-1981.
- *Harakas, Stanley S. *Toward Transfigured Life: The Theoria of Eastern Orthodox Ethics*. Minneapolis: Light and Life, 1983.
- *Henry, Carl F. H. *Christian Personal Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957.
- *McQuilkin, Robertson. *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*. Rev. ed. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1995.
- *Smedes, Lewis B. *Mere Morality: What God Expects from Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983.
- *Thielicke, Helmut. *Theological Ethics* (1958-59). Edited by William H. Lazareth, 2 vol. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966-69. Vol. 1: *Foundations*. Vol. 2: *Politics*. Published separately: *The Ethics of Sex*. Translated by John W. Doberstein. London: Clarke, 1964.

Biblical Studies

- *Butler, Roy F. *The Meaning of Agapao and Phileo in the Greek New Testament*. Lawrence, KS: Coronado, 1977.
- *Childs, Brevard S. "The Decalogue." In *The Book of Exodus*, 385-439. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974.
- *Clowney, David. "The Use of the Bible in Ethics." In *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate*, ed. Harvie M. Conn, 211-236. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988.
- *Cranfield, C. E. B. "St. Paul and the Law." In *New Testament Issues*, ed. Richard Batey, 148-172. New York: Harper, 1970.
- *Douma, J. *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life* (1992). Translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1996.
- *Fairbairn, Patrick. *The Revelation of Law in Scripture* (1869). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1957.
- *Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New*

Testament Ethics. San Francisco: Harper, 1996.

- *Kreeft, Peter. *Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992. Originally published as *For Heaven's Sake* (1986).
- *Longenecker, Richard N. *New Testament Social Ethics for Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984.
- *Muilenburg, James. *The Way of Israel: Biblical Faith and Ethics*. New York: Harper, 1961.
- *Murray, John. *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957.
- *Ogletree, Thomas W. *Hospitality to the Stranger: Dimensions of Moral Understanding*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985.
- *Rushdoony, Rousas John. *The Institutes of Biblical Law*. Nutley, NJ: Craig, 1973. Comprehensive exposition of the Decalogue. Many insights, but also many idiosyncrasies. Cf. review by John Frame, *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (1976): 195-217.

Virtue Ethics

- *Charles, J. Daryl. *Virtue amidst Vice: The Catalog of Virtues in 2 Peter 1*. Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997.
- *Dykstra, Craig. *Vision and Character: A Christian Educator's Alternative to Kohlberg*. New York: Paulist, 1981.
- *Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame Press, 1983.
- *Kotva, Joseph J., Jr. *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*. Washington, D. C.: Georgetown UP, 1996.
- *Meilaender, Gilbert C. *The Theory and Practice of Virtue*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame Press, 1984.
- *Roberts, Robert C. *The Strengths of a Christian*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984.
- *Wilson, Jonathan R. *Gospel Virtues: Practicing Faith, Hope and Love in Uncertain Times*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998.

IX. About the Professor

David C. Jones, Professor of Theology and Ethics. B.A., William Jennings Bryan College; B.D. and Th.M., Westminster Theological Seminary; Th.D. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. After serving for two years as a missionary-pastor on Grand Cayman Island in the West Indies, Professor Jones joined the Seminary faculty in 1967. His special interest, Christian ethics, is reflected in his publications and service on national church committees dealing with subjects such as nuclear war, medical ethics, divorce, and abortion. Dr. Jones' sensitivity to these issues and others that directly affect the church gives a special mixture of practical and theoretical material to his classes. He is the author of *Biblical Christian Ethics*.

X. Letter from the Professor

Dear Students:

The goal of this course is to grasp what God is calling us to be and to do in union with Christ. Admittedly this is an ambitious project. Beyond ambitious—it's awesome. To attain the goal, Christ Himself must be our Teacher. As the Shorter Catechism reminds us, Christ, in His mediatorial role of prophet, reveals to us by His Word and Spirit the will of God for our salvation. In the process He uses helpers, "attendants of the word," in Luke's provocative phrase (Lk 1:2). Think of me as an attendant, a subordinate helper of the word of Christ. I seek to be faithful to the task, but bear in mind that I am finite, fallible, and (worse yet) fallen. As we proceed, follow Paul's counsel: "Test everything. Hold on to the good" (1 Thess. 5:21).

Sincerely,
David C. Jones