



Christian Ethics

A Christian Theology of Morality

Syllabus

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Course Description

In a self-centered culture, how do we demonstrate a God-centered ethic? This course presents a Biblical model for ethics in a postmodern world, examining the ethical theories of obligation and value from a philosophical perspective. The lectures survey various ethical systems, identify unstated assumptions in ethical theories, and evaluate those theories for legitimacy, relevancy, and cogency. The goal of the course is to provide learners with a Christian framework of values and ethics, leading them to make God-honoring decisions in a truth-relative world.

Course Aims

1. Understand the concepts and principles of ethical theories and how they cohere with their theoretical assumptions.
2. Understand the concepts and principles of Christian ethics and their relationship to Biblical revelation and our *Weltanschauung*.
3. Apply the concepts and principles of ethical theories to contemporary problems.
4. Evaluate ethical systems by both internal and external criteria.

Course Goals

Students will learn to understand the concepts and principles, apply concepts and principles and evaluate concepts and principles in Christian ethics from:

1. Reading the three textbooks.
2. Listening to the lectures which expand the text.
3. Researching and writing a major paper that expands on the class.

Course Objectives

1. Cognitive Objectives
 - a. Know the basic concepts and principles of ethical systems.
 - b. Know methods and procedure in ethics.
 - c. Justify methods and procedures in ethics.
 - d. Apply concepts and principles of ethics to new situations.
 - e. Use methods and procedures correctly.



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- f. Identify unstated assumptions in ethical theories.
 - g. Recognize logical fallacies in reasoning.
 - h. Evaluate the relevancy of evidence to ethical assertions.
 - i. Integrate learning from other theological areas for ethical problem solving.
 - j. Judge the adequacy with which conclusions are supported by evidence.
2. Affective Objectives
- a. Show awareness of the importance of learning.
 - b. Demonstrate a high value on problem resolution in ethics.
 - c. Formulate and develop a ministry life plan in harmony with beliefs, abilities and interests.
 - d. Demonstrate industry, punctuality and self-discipline.

Course Texts

Davis, John J. *Evangelical Ethics*. 3rd ed., Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004.

Fletcher, Joseph. *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1997.

Geisler, Norman. *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Whether you sit in a traditional classroom or study from a distance, you will benefit from interaction, collaboration, and spiritual formation (ATS schools, note Standards 3.2.1.3; 10.3,3,3; 10.3.4.3). In order to meet this need in distance theological education, ITS is developing structures and resources to encourage spiritual formation and community interaction in our courses. In this course, we have included three collaborative learning features:

1. [ITS Online Interactivity Forum](#) (see course requirements) - fosters peer-to-peer interaction in a global, threaded discussion (required for all students)
2. [Spiritual Formation Project](#) (see course requirements) - fosters mentor-to-learner interaction in a mentor-guided reflection, discussion and application (required for all students)
3. [Learning Community Assignments](#) (see end of syllabus) - fosters peer-to-peer collaboration in a group approach to assignments (optional but recommended where possible)

Go to www.ITScourses.org/interactivity/ for the most up-to-date ITS resources.



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Course Requirements

1. **Lectures/Study Questions:** Listen to each of the twenty-three recorded lectures and interact with the corresponding study questions in the ITS Printed Study Guide. Although the study questions are not figured into the course grade, they are helpful as preparation for the examinations.
2. **Reading:** The three required texts for this course (to be read in their entirety) offer expanded studies beyond the lectures and either compliment, supplement, or contrast with the view presented.
3. **Research Project**
 - a. Prepare a research paper of **10 pages** of text on any of the following: a contemporary moral problem, the application of ethics to the ministry, the motivational dynamic of Christian life, or the ethics of a recent theologian/ethicist.
 - b. The paper is to be based on a minimum of **750 pages** of reading. Please turn in a reading report with the paper. Textbook reading which is relevant to your paper may be counted in the 750 page requirement. Please see the format and evaluation guide for research papers in the syllabus.
 - c. The paper is due with the final examination.
4. **ITS Online Interactivity Forum**

Participate with other students worldwide in an ongoing asynchronous threaded discussion of **two** major course topics. Go to www.ITScourses.org/interactivity/ to register for and enter the ITS On-Line Forum. In order to get the fullest benefit from the Forum, complete the assignment **after** you have listened to *all* the lectures. Be sure to return to the forum after finishing the course to see how others respond. Follow these steps to complete the assignment:

- ♦ Post an original answer to each question for your course (75 word min.).
- ♦ Post your response to any previous answer given to each question (75 word min.).
- ♦ Submit a document to your proctor that contains the original questions, your postings, and the postings to which you responded.

NOTE: Please read the "Assignment Instructions" in the Forum for details.



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Objective: to develop critical thinking skills through personal interaction with the content of the course and the responses of others within a diverse community of learners.

5. Spiritual Formation Project

RATIONALE: Ministry preparation and the Christian life require more than academic exercises. Learners also need personal, spiritual formation, which involves theological reflection and critical thinking on their current practices and assumptions. This process occurs as learners engage in self-reflection and interaction in a community of learning. **With this in mind**, ITS includes in all courses a capstone project addressing these issues and facilitating interaction beyond the formal learning environment (ATS schools, note Standards 3.2.1.3; 4.1.1; 10.3.3.3).

Write a **five-to-six page reflective essay** and **interview a mentor**, discussing the spiritual impact of this course on your life. *Identify your mentor early in the course*, and submit the essay to your grader when you take the final exam. This last project should not be a summary of course content, but an application of course principles. Complete the following:

- a. **Personal Reflection and Evaluation: *Reflect on the course*** – To integrate your academic studies with your walk of faith, reflect on the content of the course and evaluate your life in light of what you learned.
 1. Follow these steps in your reflection:
 - Step 1: What **one** theme, principle, or concept in the course is the most significant to you personally? Why is it significant?
 - Step 2: What portion(s) of the course brought this theme/principle/concept to light?
 - Step 3: Think about your past. Why is it vital now for you to deal with and apply this theme/principle/concept?
 - Step 4: How should this affect your thoughts and actions, and what *specific steps* should you take to *concretely* apply what you have learned?
 2. Write your answers to the above questions in full paragraph form. (Recommended length for this reflection: **approximately three pages**)
 3. Give a copy of this reflection to your mentor (see #2).



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b. Community Reflection and Interaction: *Interview a mentor* – Since the Holy Spirit uses the input of others to guide and form His people, interview a mentor according to the following guidelines:

1. Who should you interview? (a-c are required; d-f are recommended)
 - a. Someone with whom you have a reasonably close relationship.
 - b. Someone who is a mature Christian ministry leader (i.e. a pastor).
 - c. Someone who is **not** your grader or a family member.
 - d. Someone who values the spiritual formation process.
 - e. Someone who is familiar with and values the subject of the course.
 - f. Someone who has experience using the content of the course in ministry.

NOTE: ***Identify your mentor early in the course***, and give him/her the page entitled “Guidelines for Mentors.”

2. Focus of the interview – Your interview should focus on the issues and questions you raise in your essay. For example:
 - ◆ What feedback can your mentor give in response to your essay?
 - ◆ In light of the course content, are the conclusions you made appropriate? Why or why not?
 - ◆ What additional advice, deeper insights or broader applications might he/she suggest from his/her own life and ministry?

NOTE: Conduct this interview either in person (preferred) or over the phone. Do **not** use electronic communication (i.e. email, instant messenger, etc). Suggested length: 45 minutes.

c. Synthesis and Application: *Draw your final conclusions* – Having reflected on the course and the discussion with your mentor, synthesize what you have learned in these three sections:

1. Section 1: Begin your essay with the personal reflection from “a” above. This should be exactly what you gave your mentor for the interview.
2. Section 2: Comment on your interview, explaining what you discussed and the insights you gained from your mentor. Include the following:



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- ◆ What were the mentor's comments regarding your essay?
 - ◆ What advice did he/she give?
 - ◆ How did his/her comments expand or correct your application of the course?
 - ◆ Include the person's name, occupation, and the length of the interview.
3. Section 3: Conclude with a synthesis of what you have learned. Answer the following:
- ◆ If your mentor corrected any thoughts in your "Personal Reflection and Evaluation", how do you feel about these corrections? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
 - ◆ Synthesizing your thoughts from section one and your mentor's insight in section two, what final conclusions have you reached? How is this different from section one?
 - ◆ In light of the interview and further reflection, what additional, *specific* changes need to occur in your life and what *concrete* steps will you take to implement them?

NOTE TO STUDENTS: Your effort in this assignment will determine its benefit. If by the end of this course you have not yet reflected critically on your life in light of what you have studied, allow this assignment to guide you in that process. The instructor for this course will not score your essay based on the amount of spiritual fruit you describe; so do not exaggerate (or trivialize) what you have learned. **The primary grading criteria is that you have thoughtfully considered the principles of the course and realistically sought to apply them to your life.** If you have done this and met the minimal requirements (as noted above), you will earn the full points for this assignment.

Note on confidentiality: Perhaps the Holy Spirit is dealing with you in some very personal areas of your life. Because of this, your grader will keep your essay entirely confidential and either return or discard it.

Objective: to stimulate reflection and interaction on course principles in order to enhance personal spiritual formation.

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6. **Examinations:** Two exams will cover the lecture content of the course. The Mid-term will cover lectures 1-11; the final will cover lectures 12-23.



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Course Grading

1. Lectures/Study Questions
2. Required Reading..... 5%
3. Research Project 25%
4. ITS Online Interactivity Forum 5%
5. Spiritual Formation Project 15%
6. Examinations (each 25%)..... 50%

Guidelines for Mentors

(Students, give this sheet to your mentor for the Spiritual Formation Project.)

Thank you for your involvement in this student's ITS coursework. We believe the Christian life is more than an academic exercise, so we encourage students to critically reflect on their life in light of what they learn and then apply those insights to the daily life of faith.

Therefore, students taking ITS courses are required to complete a final assignment called the "*Spiritual Formation Project*." This assignment involves two parts: an **essay** and an **interview**:

The ESSAY: After completing their coursework, students reflect on the content of the course, evaluate their lives, and discuss the **one** theme, principle or concept that is most significant to them and why. Students are to identify specific ways this theme/principle/concept should apply to their lives and what action steps they plan to take in order to make these changes a reality.

The INTERVIEW: After writing this reflection, students give a copy to their mentor and meet with him/her to discuss their thoughts and get feedback. **The goal of this interview is to facilitate the student's growth through interaction with a mature believer.**

NOTES ON THE INTERVIEW:

- ♦ You do **not** need to be familiar with the course to participate in this interview. You will primarily respond to the thoughts of the student. (However, general knowledge of the subject matter of the course and/or experience applying it to ministry is valuable.)
- ♦ Prior to meeting with the student, read his/her "Personal Reflection and Evaluation" and prepare to discuss the following:
 1. What feedback can you give the student in response to his/her essay?
 2. Are the student's conclusions from the course appropriate? Why or why not?
 3. What additional advice, deeper insights or broader applications would you suggest from your own life and ministry?
- ♦ Meet with the student either in person (preferred) or over the phone. Do not use electronic communication (i.e. email, instant messenger, etc.).
- ♦ Suggested length of the interview: 45 minutes

Thanks again for participating in this project! You have a real opportunity to guide this student in the application process and to help him/her connect academics to life – a *valuable process for all who wish to grow in Christ.*

NOTE: If the student's school makes any changes to this assignment, their requirements should replace those described here.



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Suggested Moral Problems for the Research Project

1. **War.** What is a just war? Is the Christian ever justified in killing during war? Pacifism. Non-resistance. Conscientious objection. Revolution.
2. **Social Justice.** Race relations. Civil disobedience. Population control. Capital punishment. Penology. Ecology. Right to privacy. Funeral practices. Pornography. Mental health. Violence. Communication media. Hunger.
3. **Right to Life.** Abortion. Mercy killing. Spare parts surgery. Genetic manipulation. Birth control. Suicide. Transplants. Artificial insemination. Embryonic Stem-Cell Research.
4. **Sexual Problem.** Homosexuality. Lesbianism. Masturbation. Voyeurism. Pre-marital sexual relations. Marriage. Sex change operations. Transvestianism.
5. **General Problems.** Hair length. Clothing styles. Drugs. Tobacco. Alcohol. Movies. Theater. Television.

Course Outline

1. Introduction: the present moral crisis and its causes, basic words and distinctions, normative obligation, normative values, and basic logical tools.
2. Analysis of Current Ethical Systems.
3. Deontological Theories of Obligation.
4. Theological Theories of Obligation.
5. Theories of Value.
6. Christian Ethics: An Introduction and Philosophical Overview.
7. A Biblical Statement of the Summum Bonum.
8. A Biblical Statement of Obligation.
9. The Dynamic of Biblical Ethics.



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Format and Evaluation Guide For Research Papers

I. Format

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 5th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

All papers should conform to this guide. You may use endnotes or parenthetical footnotes.

If you need help in writing style, please consult: *The Elements of Style* by Strunk, William and White, E.B. New York: MacMillan, 1979.

II. Evaluation

Content60%

Depth of Research
Quality of Ideas
Lucid Presentation
Interaction With Sources
Ability to Make Theological Judgments

Format20%

Table of Contents
Thesis Statement/Theme
Introduction, Body, Conclusion
Transitions and Headings

Mechanics20%

Neatness
Spelling
Grammar and Style
Consistency of Form



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Notes Regarding This Downloaded Syllabus

This downloadable syllabus is not exhaustive. It is designed to provide learners with a picture of the course, not a full outline of the course. Grader Guidelines, Appendixes, Bibliographies, Lecture Outlines, and Review Questions have been removed. The complete course syllabus is included with purchase of the course in either a digital or hard-copy format.

Likewise, individuals taking the class for credit are responsible for the syllabus requirements of the specific institution through which the course is offered. Each individual institution has reserved the right to alter or change the syllabus as deemed necessary.