

Christian Ethics
TH 4313
Austin Graduate School of Theology
Fall 2019

Tuesdays 7:00-9:40 pm

Instructor: Dr. K. Stanglin
Office phone: 476-2772
Email: stanglin@austingrad.edu

I want you to do well in this course, so please let me know if you are having difficulty with the class material.

Course Description:

This course pursues the practical implications of the Christian faith: doing the good. It surveys the ethics of the Old and New Testaments, and investigates moral theories, practices, and decisions from a biblical perspective.

Expanded Description:

This course pursues the practical implications of the Christian faith: doing the good. It surveys the ethics of the Old and New Testaments, and investigates moral theories, practices, and decisions from a biblical perspective. The goal is to provide a biblical basis for ethics, to foster a desire to be holy as God is holy, and to equip students to evaluate and engage contemporary social issues. Since moral theology is one of the few areas in which Western society still engages Christian thought, the ability to dialogue about ethical issues is requisite for engaging the world effectively.

Special attention will be given to the Decalogue, Sermon on the Mount, and love commands as the biblical bases for ethics. These sources will inform discussions on ethical decision-making, so that students can make responsible moral decisions in difficult situations, and counsel others through similar processes. The topics to be discussed include bioethics, beginning and end of life issues, sexual ethics and homosexuality, war and peace, and technology.

Course Objectives:

1. Gain a biblical, foundational understanding of ethics from both philosophical and theological perspectives.
2. Know the scope and force of each of the Ten Commandments.
3. Students can make responsible moral decisions in difficult situations and counsel others through similar processes.

4. Be able to evaluate contemporary social issues.
5. Use moral vocabulary with precision.

Required Course Textbooks:

Rae, Scott B. *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.

Bring this book to each class meeting. A Bible will also be helpful for many lectures.

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend classes regularly. In the event of illness, family emergency, or an extenuating circumstance, it is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor as soon as possible of the reason for the absence. A doctor's note is required for excusing personal illness. Provide a hard copy for my records. Excuses will not be accepted more than one week after returning to class. It is the student's responsibility to find out what was missed in class.

If you have 2 unexcused absences, your final course grade will be dropped by one letter grade. After 3 unexcused absences, a student may be dropped from the course.

You will be considered tardy if you are not present when the roll is checked or if you leave during class. **3 tardies = 1 unexcused absence**. If you are tardy, it is your responsibility to make sure you were not counted absent. If you come in more than 10 minutes late, or leave before the end of class without telling me why, you will be counted absent, and will not be allowed to take the test or quiz. Take care of all business before and after class and during the break.

Academic Honesty:

AGST places a high priority on honesty and a biblical commitment to truth. Incidents of **cheating, plagiarism**, or any other activities deemed dishonest will result in penalties. These penalties may range from receiving a zero (0%) on the assignment to failing the course or dismissal from the school. (According to Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, to "plagiarize" is to steal and use as one's own the ideas, words, etc., of another. Collaborating on written assignments that should be done individually, as well as turning in work done for another class, would fall under this category of dishonesty.)

Classroom Expectations and Decorum:

I expect all students to behave in a Christian manner in and out of the classroom. Turn off cell phones. Do not eat distracting food in the classroom. If you make a mess, it is your responsibility to clean it up or pay for it to be cleaned.

You may use laptops for taking notes only.

Class will begin promptly at the set time, so be ready. It will be dismissed when I finish.

Course Requirements:

1. Reading and preparation. You are responsible for completing all the readings assigned for each week. Note important vocabulary words and the reading questions at the beginning and end of each chapter.
2. Quizzes may be given in class that assess your grasp of the readings and vocabulary, the previous lecture, or any other assignment. Notes on lectures and readings may be used. (10-20 pts each = ca. **50 pts.**) There will be no make-up quizzes, so make sure you are here on time.
3. There will be two unit exams and a comprehensive final exam. Exams will normally consist of short answer questions, vocabulary definitions, and a couple of essays. Study reading questions and lecture notes. (Unit exams = **100 pts. each**; Final exam = **ca. 110 pts.**) Make-up Policy: A test may be made up for full credit only if the absence is excused (see “Attendance Policy” above). Contact or see me as soon as possible to arrange it. All make-up tests will be entirely essay format. In general, there will be no make-ups for unexcused absences. In certain cases, though, I reserve the right to allow unexcused make-ups, but only with a significant deduction of points.
4. Presentation on Decalogue. Each student will be assigned a commandment from the Decalogue to teach to the class in a ten-minute presentation. At least the following issues should be addressed:
 - a) Exegesis that situates the text in its original historical context and discusses key terms;
 - b) the scope of the commandment;
 - c) a broad, positive statement of the commandment;
 - d) the best biblical texts for preaching this commandment;
 - e) modern application, including at least one example of how the commandment is commonly broken by Christians.

Prepare a handout that summarizes your presentation. Bring enough copies for everyone in the class. **Due Oct. 8. 100 pts.**

5. Topical paper and presentation. Write a paper on a topic of your choice that takes a stand on an ethical position. You will select some ethical issue and do independent reflection concerning it during the course. You will write a **6 to 8 page** paper. Topics that arise from the readings will be appropriate, or you may suggest your own topic of interest. I will have the final right of approval. **Topics are due, in writing, Sept. 17.**

The content must be based on an ethical claim over which there may be some reasoned disagreement, and you must defend a particular viewpoint. For example, “A discussion of abortion” would be an unacceptable thesis, but “I oppose abortion for the following reasons...” would be acceptable. The thesis should be stated in one sentence and include at least one of the following words: support, oppose, permissible, impermissible, obligatory.

The paper should be divided into two main sections. **In the first section, you will make your positive case in favor of your viewpoint. In the second, you will raise and refute the strongest objections to your claim.** N.B.: Do not short-change the second section. You must convince me that you have read deeply and thought seriously about your **opponents' points of view**, and that you can credibly refute their best objections.

You should explore your topic fairly deeply—consulting a variety of reputable sources would be appropriate. **Due Nov. 19.**

Additional guidelines:

- a. 6-8 pages (Times New Roman, double-spaced, not including cover page and bibliography).
- b. Use Turabian style footnotes and proper, academic English style.
- c. Assessment criteria will include such things as: clearly stated purpose, logical organization, faultless style, evidence of research, and interaction with sources.
- d. At least five scholarly sources should be consulted. These sources may include relevant surveys, special monographs, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Do not cite unsigned articles (whether online or in print). Do not cite sources in the bibliography unless they are used in the paper.
- e. Papers are due at the beginning of class, Nov. 19. A penalty of 10% each week will be assessed to late papers. Papers will not be accepted after Dec. 3.

75 pts.

After the paper has been returned to you, present the core of your paper to the class in a five- to ten-minute presentation. The presentation must be polished and professional. Visual and other aids may be used sparingly and must contribute to understanding the issue. Be prepared to answer questions and objections. **25 pts.**

6. Reflection Paper. Each student must write a paper that consists of two parts. a) The first part is a personal code of ethics. It should include principles by which you live your life and the reasons for them. It should also be specific to your chosen vocation, enumerating practices that are obligatory and others that are prohibited. This first part of the paper should be at least two pages (“page” means double-spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman).

b) The second part of the paper is a response to a case study to be selected by the teacher. In light of your personal code of ethics, how would you address the situation? How does your response differ now from when the course began? This part of the paper must be at least two pages in length.

Due Nov. 26. 75 pts.

7. **Extra Credit:** Attend the Austin Grad - First Things Lecture (Monday, Sept. 30, 7 pm) and write a reflection paper that summarizes the lecture and interacts with the ideas, especially as they relate to Christian ethics. The paper should be at least 1,000 words. Points earned will be commensurate with the accuracy of the summary and depth of the reflections. Due Oct. 8. Late work will not be accepted for extra credit. (up to **15 pts.** on first exam)

Grading Scale: ca. 635 points total

90-100% = A 80-89 = B (“Good”) 70-79 = C (“Average”) 60-69 = D 0-59 = F

Course Schedule:

Week 1, Aug. 27 Course Introduction; Basic Terms

For Week 2, watch Phil Thompson, “Introduction to Ethics,” at https://youtu.be/q9mB_sRy-Uc

Week 2, Sept. 3 History of Moral Philosophy (Socrates through Neo-Platonism)

Rae 1

For Week 3, watch Phil Thompson, “Relativism,” at <https://youtu.be/HEdWurnFUK8>

Week 3, Sept. 10 Ethical Systems; Goal of Christian Ethics

Read Stanglin, “Is There Such a Thing as Right and Wrong?” [handout]

Rae 3

Week 4, Sept. 17 Ethics without Rules; Moral Decision Making

Rae 4

Week 5, Sept. 24 What Does Love Require?

Exam 1

Week 6, Oct. 1 Use of the Bible in Ethics; Old Testament Ethics: Decalogue

Martin Luther, “Small Catechism,” section on Ten Commandments, at <http://bookofconcord.org/smallcatechism.php#tencommandments>

Rae 2

Week 7, Oct. 8 Student Presentations on Decalogue

New Testament Ethics: Golden Rule and Love Commands

Stanglin, “The Historical Connection between the Golden Rule and the Second Greatest Love Command,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 357-71 [ATLA]

Week 8, Oct. 15 Medical Oaths; Abortion

Read handouts on Hippocratic Oath and Medical Ethics

Read Wesley Smith, “Infanticide Becomes Justifiable,” at <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2019/02/infanticide-becomes-justifiable>

Rae 5

Week 9, Oct. 22 Artificial Reproductive Technologies; Sickness and Suffering

Rae 6

For Week 10, Watch the talk by J. Budsizewski, at <http://youtu.be/51gfsE0M45I>

Week 10, Oct. 29 Euthanasia; Sexual Ethics

Rae 8, 11

Week 11, Nov. 5 Homosexuality

Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 379-403 [on reserve]

Exam 2

Week 12, Nov. 12 Divorce; Just War and Pacifism

Rae 10

Read <https://providencemag.com/2016/01/early-church-on-war-killing-books-culture-response/>

Week 13, Nov. 19 Wealth and Economics; Technology and Social Media

Rae 13

Postman [handout]

Topical paper due.

Week 14, Nov. 26 **Reflection paper due.**

Week 15, Dec. 3 Student Presentations

In the World but Not of It

Dec. 10 Final Exam

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