Christian Ethics
ET501

Spring 09

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Description

An exploration of how pastors and Christian leaders can make good ethical choices and develop moral character in the midst of a complex, postmodern society. The course will examine: (1) the foundations of Christian Ethics; (2) the contexts of contemporary ethical choices; (3) the methods of moral decision-making; and (4) the relationship of biblically informed norms, values and virtues to culture and society, and the Church’s role therein. Lectures, case studies, and discussion will be employed in an attempt to gain wisdom, understanding, character, and a prophetic voice relative to the moral issues in church and society.

Course Objectives

1. To gain a working knowledge of the various ethical theories and concepts utilized in grounding and making ethical decisions and developing Christian character.
2. To understand and appreciate the ways a Christian world view (i.e. Theology) can guide our moral judgments and actions.
3. To understand the contemporary contexts in which Christians make ethical decisions, and how those contexts can shape our thought and response for good or ill.
4. To personally develop a Christ-culture stance for applying Christian Ethics in a complex, changing world.
5. To develop sensitivity to issues of justice, compassion and righteousness in our world.
6. To develop an understanding of the church’s role in society and culture.
7. To develop wisdom in being able to make wise moral decisions in the pastoral context, including attention to one’s own pastoral responsibilities.
8. To gain a grasp of how the above concept can provide guidance in several of the pressing issues of our time.
9. To develop an in-depth understanding of one issue through research on the issue.

Textbooks


Course Requirements

1. Read and reflect on the readings. Be prepared to integrate them into class lectures and discussion. At the final exam meeting turn in a 3x5 card indicating the % of reading completed
for each book.
2. Faithfully attend class and participate in case studies and class discussion.
3. Take the mid-term exam. It will focus primarily on lectures with a few broad questions from readings.
4. Take a final exam covering the entire semester, including readings since the mid-term.
5. Write a 7-8 page paper on an ethical issue of your choice. The paper should clearly set forth the (1) nature of the issue, (2) various positions, (3) a defense of your own view, and (4) how the church should address this issue. You should attempt to apply as many concepts from the course and readings as possible (minimum of four) to demonstrate your grasp of significant ethical concepts. You should consult at least six different sources from a variety of sources (books, journals, internet articles) and use endnotes with proper citations. Due: April 14.

Alternate in place of above: Write a 7-8 page sermon on an ethical issue of your choice. The sermon should reflect the same amount of research as the paper. The sermon should attempt to translate ethical theory and concepts into everyday language, a pastoral context, and be appropriate for preaching on a Sunday morning. Note: This is not an easier way out, for the same research and care should go into this sermon as a formal paper. The sermon can be topical or expository in nature. At the end of the sermon list all books consulted in a bibliography.

Note: A detailed rubrics guideline is forthcoming for the paper. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary like all academic institutions expects student research to reflect integrity and specifically prohibits plagiarism, taking others’ ideas and passing them off as your own. Thus proper documentation is necessary.

Grading

Major Paper (or sermon)- 30%; Mid-term Exam- 30%; Final Exam- 40%  (Failure to complete your reading or attend class may lower your grade if you are on the border)

A 93-100; A- 90-92; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-82; C+ 77-79; C 73-76; C-70-72; D+ 67-69; D 63-66; D- 60-62; F 60 and below

Course Outline

Jan. 27- Introduction: The Nature of Ethics; Foundations of Ethics (Hollinger Intro and ch. 1; Davis 1; Sider 1)
Feb. 3- Foundations of Ethics II (Hollinger ch. 2; Wogaman 20)
Feb. 10- A Christian Worldview Foundation for Ethics (Hollinger 3; Sider 2-3; Wogaman 14,24(123-128),36,54)
Feb. 17- Reading week, no class
Feb. 24- The Contexts of Christian Ethics: Modernity and Postmodernity; Historic Approaches in the Church to Decision Making (Hollinger 4-6; Davis 2,6; Wogaman 3,4,28(144-149),53,61,67,69)
March 3- How Should We Use the Bible in Ethical Decisions? (Case issue: Homosexuality) (Hollinger 7; Davis 4,5; Sider 8; Wogaman 37,44)

March 10- Mid-term Exam; Judging the Facts in Decision Making (Case issue: hunger and poverty) (Hollinger 8;)

March 17- Christ and Culture: How Do We Put Them Together? (Hollinger 9; Wogaman 6,9-12,15,17,18,24(128-133),26,27,28(149-155),29,39,50,56,64)

March 24- Reading week, no class

March 31- The Call to do Justice (Case issue: Racism) (Hollinger 10; Sider 4-6; Wogaman 42,43,45-48,55,57,59)

April 7- Christian Ethics and Pluralism; Models of Christian Influence (Case issue: Church and State) (Hollinger 11-12; Sider 9,13; Wogaman 38,52,65,68)

April 14- Application to issues: War; Environmental Ethics (Davis 8-11; Sider 10-12)

April 21- Application to Issues: Reproductive Technologies; Euthanasia (Davis 3,7,12; Sider 7)

April 30- Final Exam

Selected Bibliography


Curran, Charles and McCormick, Richard, S.J. Readings in Moral Theology, No. 4: The Use of


Wells, David F. Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision.

Journals to consult on Ethics and Society:
- Christianity Today
- Evangelical Review of Theology
- First Things
- Journal of Religious Ethics
- Sojourners
- The Third Way
- Transformation

Dictionaries and Encyclopedias on Ethics
