

Introduction to Christian Ethics

ETHC 5300

*Dr. Steve W. Lemke
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
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Course Description

In this introduction to the study and practice of Christian ethics, the student will examine philosophical and theological backgrounds for ethics, the role of biblical authority, and the historical relation between church and culture in order to develop a valid method of moral decision making, examine the importance of ministerial ethics, evaluate ethical issues, and lead the church in applying the gospel to life.

Contacting the Instructor

Dr. Lemke may be contacted through any of the following means:

Office: HSC 270
Telephone: (504)-816-8150
E-mail: slemke@nobts.edu
Facebook: Steve Lemke

Mission Statement, Core Values, and Key Competencies

- The NOBTS Mission Statement is to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandments through the local church and its ministries.
- The primary NOBTS core values addressed in this class Doctrinal Integrity and Spiritual Vitality.
- As part of the larger Seminary goal of equipping effective leaders of healthy churches, this course addresses the key competency of *spiritual and character formation* in the Seminary's curriculum.

Course Objectives

In order to provide moral leadership by modeling and mentoring Christian character and devotion, by the end of the course successful students should be able to:

- Apply their knowledge and comprehension of the following concepts to the process of providing moral leadership by modeling and mentoring Christian character and devotion:
 - A biblical Christian ethic.
 - The major current ethical issues confronting contemporary Christians and society.
 - Comprehend the key thinkers, models, and ideas in ethics.

- Value the following concepts:
 - Godly living through personal morality.
 - Voicing Christian ethical and moral truths to the church and the world.
 - Address moral issues.

- Accomplish the following:
 - Discuss and argue moral issues competently and convincingly.
 - Practice Christian ethics for decision making and character development.
 - Achieve competency in spiritual and character development.
 - Have a stronger commitment to godly living in personal morality.
 - Have a stronger commitment to voicing Christian values in ministry and in the community.

- Identify and discuss the key thinkers, models, and ideas in Ethics.
 - Apply sound hermeneutics in interpreting key ethical passages in Scripture.
 - Understand the major current ethical issues confronting contemporary Christians and society.
 - Discuss and argue ethical issues competently and convincingly.
 - Have greater clarity in where Christians should stand on key ethical issues.

Texts

Feinberg, John S., and Paul D. Feinberg. 2nd ed. *Ethics in a Brave New World*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010.

Foster, Richard. *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life: Christian Reflections on Money, Sex, and Power*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1985.

Lemke, Steve. *Learning the Virtues: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*. New Orleans: NOBTS, 2000. Available free in .pdf format in Blackboard; a hard copy or computer CD may be ordered.

Course Policies

Participation in Class with preparation and attentiveness are crucial not only to your own success in the class, but to those who sit around you. Each student has a positive contribution to make to the class. Use of laptop computers for note taking is fine, but playing computer games, checking email, social networking, or doing work not associated with the class is not appreciated and is strictly prohibited. We will be dealing with some complex issues, and we need your undivided attention. Participation in the online discussions is strongly encouraged.

Appropriate Conduct in Class is especially important so that all students can have a chance to hear and participate meaningfully in class discussions. Holding private conversations in class or other rude behavior is not appreciated. In an Ethics class in which moral issues arise about which some of us will disagree, it is essential to treat each other with Christian charity and kindness. Rude behavior disrespectful of the instructor or other students will not be tolerated in class or in Internet discussions.

Seminary Computer/Phone Texting Policy – The student is to demonstrate appropriate classroom behavior at all times. This includes the usage of cell phones and computers during class time. The opportunity for students to use these items within the classroom is contingent upon their proper usage. Students are also reminded that phones are to be silenced during the class and other Seminary functions. Proper usage includes note taking and tasks specifically assigned by the professor. Improper utilization includes all other usages such as surfing the Internet, playing games, texting, and emailing. If a student is engaged in improper usage of a cell phone or computer during a class, the professor has the right to prohibit the student from bringing the item to subsequent class meetings. Application: Silence your phone and put it away before class. No text messaging, no phone or computer email, no games, no surfing, no Facebook, no Twitter, no distractions that would distract your focus on the class.

Grades will be determined on the basis of the NOBTS grading scale— an A for 93-100, B for 85-92, C for 77-84, D for 70-76, and F for 69 or below. Borderline grades will normally be determined by the numerical grade received, unless the student's promptness and faithfulness in class attendance, positive attitude and contribution in class discussions, and preparedness and attentiveness in class warrants special consideration. These factors only apply when the student is within a few points of the next highest grade.

Extra Resources and Extra Credit are available at the class Blackboard web site, which provides a number of resources related to the class, including a gradebook to get your grades, use links for further information on topics in Ethics, access class information, or participate in online discussions in which the student can earn extra credit. To sign up, follow these steps:

- Open your web browser to the NOBTS home page, <http://www.nobts.edu>.
- Click on the Blackboard link. Enter your login information or follow the instructions to create and account.

- Your personal NOBTS Blackboard home page should now appear. To enroll in a class, click on the Courses tab at the top of the page.
- Click the Browse Course Catalog link on the right-hand side of the page. Scroll down the page and click on the Enroll button beside Introduction to Christian Ethics.
- Enter the enrollment code: ETHC5300SL (Note: the enrollment code is case sensitive, so type it in exactly this way). Click OK when the confirmation page appears.

Late Work will be penalized. No assignment will be accepted that is over two weeks late, and all late work will be assessed a proportional penalty (two points per office day).

Absences may not exceed nine hours for a three credit hour class if the student is to receive credit for the course, according to the NOBTS catalog, and a student's grade may be penalized for excessive absences. Three times tardy or leaving early equals one absence.

Extra Credit – Some extra credit may be granted to students who have meaningful participation in classroom and online class discussions.

Class Assignments

Three Unit Tests, 100 points each. Each test is limited to the material in that unit. Listening guides are provided concerning the primary material to be covered and the direction of the questions asked.

The first two exams will test both *mastery of content* (significant thinkers and their contributions, summaries of models presented in class, philosophical vocabulary, etc.) and *critical thinking skills* (the ability to articulate and defend a position in an essay). For some perspectival test questions, students will be able to write out their answers outside of class and bring the answers with them for the test day. Listening guides are provided later in the syllabus to help you prepare for the exams.

One fourth of the first exam will be a *critique of the Foster text*. This critique should be about 2-4 pages, single-spaced, and should answer the questions listed under the other book critique assignment listed below (i.e., What ethical insights did the book teach or remind you? What are the strengths of the book? What are the weaknesses of the book?). Test 1 is 2/19, Test 2 is 3/28.

For the final exam, the student will include two component parts, both of which can and should be completed before the actual final examination meeting time.

(a) *Letter of Christian Counsel* – (10 points. 12 possible)

Question one of the final exam is an embedded assignment which will be used to assess how well students are meeting the standards set by the course objectives.

The assignment is:

Write a letter to a young believer (spiritual age, not necessarily physical age) who is struggling with how to relate to a friend who practices homosexuality or has strong same sex attractions. The friend makes statements like, "I believe Jesus is real and he died for me and all that, but I don't understand how he could make it a sin for me to be a homosexual when I honestly can't help it."

The rubric which will be used to grade this assignment is attached to this syllabus. Please complete the assignment according to this rubric and the following instructions:

- Single-space type your letter.
- Do not type more than 2 single-spaced pages.
- In your response, draw from the facts, concepts, judgments, and so forth that you have been learning in your readings and class notes in regard to the issue of homosexuality. Use some of the terminology from your studies.
- Incorporate Scripture into your response, utilizing good hermeneutical principles.
- Remember the tools you have been learning and use them when and where appropriate. Now is the time to apply what you have been learning
- Be alert to your tone. Be redemptive, while clearly communicating biblical moral truth.
- You may know personally people who practice homosexual behavior. You might keep them in mind while crafting your letter.
- This is your letter, so you have some liberty in what you say and how you say it. You will not be able to say everything, so be fluid and succinct in what you do say. However, you must demonstrate that you can communicate moral truth effectively and clearly in a difficult conversation.

(b) *Case Studies Critique* (10 points each – 90 points)

Write a critique of any nine ethical case studies in *Learning the Virtues*, with each critique being a length of about 1 page single-spaced. The critique should be a thoughtful, informed response, taking into account biblical and ethical principles and sound reasoning. The case study critiques should reflect an acquaintance with resources such as the class discussions, the class texts, and the external links on the class web site, all of which are valuable resources for writing a thoughtful response. The case studies should be completed during the third unit, and turned in on or before the day of the final exam. Due by 12/7 or 12/11.

Term Project, 100 points. Complete one of the following projects. Due: 5/2

- *Ministry Track* — The student will prepare a seminar dealing with one of the ethical issues covered in class that can be taught in four to six one-hour sessions in a church or discipleship study group setting. All teaching materials should be included that would make for an effective presentation, including a full outline of lesson plans and all teaching materials (handouts, presentation programs, and materials for activities). It may be focused on youth or adult aged pupils. A premium will be placed on accuracy and depth of the material presented, as well as the

attractiveness, creativity, and usability of the materials.

- *Academic Paper* – Research and write a paper on a specific ethical issue or ethicist. The paper should be approximately 10-15 pages, typed double spaced, in proper Turabian form. The research paper should show adequate research from a number of books and scholarly journals reflected in footnotes and bibliography. Plagiarism, as stated in the NOBTS catalog, is strictly prohibited. About two-thirds of the paper should be descriptive, and at least one-third should be evaluative, reflecting the student's own perspective on the issue.
- *Book Critique* – The critique should interact with one of the books listed below that the student has not previously read. The critique should be approximately 10-15 pages, typed double spaced, in proper Turabian form. The first reference to the book and to any other sources should be footnoted, but utilize parenthetical references for later references to the book being critiqued. The following questions should be addressed in the critique:
 - What ethical insights did the book teach or remind you?
 - What are the strengths of the book?
 - What are the weaknesses of the book?

The critique may be chosen from one of the following books which the student has not read:

- Meilaender, Gilbert C. *Faith & Faithfulness: Basic Themes in Christian Ethics*. South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991. – Proposes a virtue-based ethic.
- Akin, Daniel. *God on Sex: The Creator's Ideas about Love, Intimacy, and Marriage*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003. The title tells what it is about.
- Swartley, Willard. *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation*. Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1983. -- Compares how different views addressing these three ethical issues have interpreted some of the same biblical materials differently.
- Gudorf, Christine E. and James E. Huchingon. *Boundaries: A Casebook in Environmental Ethics*. Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2003. -- Some interesting case studies in Environmental Ethics.
- Mitchell, C. Ben, and D. Joy Riley, *Christian Bioethics: A Guide for Pastors, Health Care Professionals, and Families*. B&H Studies in Christian Ethics, ed. Daniel R. Heimbach. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014. – A helpful survey of bioethics issues.
- Struthers, William M. *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2009. – The title is self-explanatory.
- Ludlum, Robert. *The Bancroft Strategy*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006. (Note: this is a secular suspense novel, not a Christian work. It provides an example of how contrasting ethical perspectives impact choices. However, do not choose this book if you would be offended by the sexual situations or language utilized).

Plagiarism – Plagiarism is prohibited in this class and every other serious academic institution. It is an ethical issue. Instances of plagiarism will be addressed according to the Plagiarism policy in the NOBTS Student Handbook, which describes plagiarism in the following way:

Students are given the task of writing papers in order to help them learn how to think critically about the ideas of others and to present the result of their analysis in a readable form. Plagiarism defeats these purposes by cheating the student out of an opportunity to grow. Plagiarism is, therefore, a failure to distinguish between the work of the student and the work of others, either intentionally or unintentionally. It may take several forms:

- a. Taking one or more sentences verbatim from a source and inserting it into a paper without the proper citation obviously is plagiarism. The student should note that a failure to document credit for a direct quotation is also a violation of copyright law. (See Student Handbook section on Electronic Reserves.)
- b. Representing the words or ideas of another person as your own words or ideas is plagiarism, even if you summarize. However, loosely paraphrasing a sentence without proper citation also is plagiarism.
- c. Borrowing without proper citation such things as an outline, an idea, or an approach to dealing with a problem that is unique to an author is plagiarism. This type of plagiarism often results from poor note taking on the part of the student.
- d. Plagiarism also can result from improper methods of citation. The student is responsible for learning the appropriate rules for citing sources and for following those rules throughout the paper. Ignorance of rules of citation is not an excuse.
- e. In addition plagiarism is a violation of the use of the seminary's computing resources. (See Student Handbook section on Computer Use Policy Violations.)

For other definitions of plagiarism and ways to avoid it see Robert A. Harris, *The Plagiarism Handbook: Strategies for Preventing, Detecting, and Dealing with Plagiarism* (Los Angeles, CA: Pyczak Publishing, 2001.)

Note: papers in this class are subject to being evaluated by SafeAssign, a tool which identifies plagiarism from a wide range of publications and internet pages when students quote this material without giving credit to the original author.

UNIT 1: BIBLICAL APPROACHES TO ETHICS				
Date	Class Discussion Topic	Reading Assignment		
		FF 2nd	LV	Foster
8/21	Introduction to the Class The Vocabulary of Ethics	11-19, 21-28, 49-61	1-4	
8/23	Views of Freedom		3-4	Chap. 1&2
8/28	Old Testament Ethics: Law and Prophecy	40-49	29-36	Chap. 3&4
8/30*	Old Testament Ethics: Wisdom and Narrative	40-49	29-36	Chap. 5&6
9/4	New Testament Ethics: Gospel and Parable	40-49	36-39	Chap. 7&8
9/6	New Testament Ethics: Epistle and Apocalyptic	40-49	36-39	Chap. 9&10
9/11	Ministerial Ethics, Christian Virtues	52-55	40-46	Chap. 11&12
9/13	Discussion of <i>The Challenge of the Disciplined Life</i>			Chap. 13 & Epilogue
9/18	Test over Unit I, including Foster Critique			Foster critique due (1-248)

UNIT 2: APPROACHES TO MORAL DECISION MAKING				
Date	Class Discussion Topic	Reading Assignment		
		FF 2nd	LV	Foster
9/20	The Church and the World		47-52	1-248
9/25	The Church and the World		47-52	1-248
9/27	Summum Bonums – The Moral Law Standard: The Rational and Intuitive Moral Law, and Divine Command Ethics	28-40, 49-61	5-6	
10/2	The Virtuous Character Standard: Teleological and Virtue Ethics The Personal Choice Standard: Darwinian, Emotivist, Community/ Relational and Situational Ethics	28-40, 49-61	7-10	
10/4	The Personal Choice Standard: Subjectivist (Existential and Postmodern) The Pleasure Standard: Hedonism, Utilitarianism, and Pragmatism	28-40, 49-61	9-10	
10/9	The Pleasure Standard: Hedonism, Utilitarianism, and Pragmatism	28-40, 49-61	20	
10/11	The Pleasure Standard: Hedonism, Utilitarianism, and Pragmatism	28-40, 49-61	20	
	October Break Week			
10/23	Other Approaches to Ethics	28-40, 49-61	21-28	
10/25	Conflicting Moral Absolutes	28-40, 49-61	21-28	
10/30	Test over Unit 2			

UNIT 3: A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO ETHICAL ISSUES				
Date	Class Discussion Topic	Reading Assignment		
		FF 2nd	LV	Foster
11/1	Personhood Issues: Personhood and Abortion	63-155	53-63	
11/3	Sexual Issues: Sexuality and Pornography	267-306	66-78	114-171
11/6*	Sexual Issues: Homosexuality and Biblical Marriage	307-385	73-80	114-171
11/8	Marriage and Divorce	583-633	73-75, 81	
11/13*	Male and Female Roles in the Home and Church		82-97	
11/15*	Personhood Issues: Reproductive Technologies, Genetics and Cloning	387-582	64-67	
	Thanksgiving Break Week			
11/27	Societal Issues: Euthanasia and the Economics of Health Care	157-226	66-67	
11/29	Societal Issues: Church and State and Freedom of Religion	635-736	102-106	Paper due
12/4	Societal Issues: Racism, Drug Abuse, and Gambling		98-101	
12/6	Societal Issues: Just War, Capital Punishment, Environmental Issues	227-266, 635-736	107-109	
12/11	Final Exam, 9:00 (an earlier final can be arranged for individuals who desire to do so)			

** Some of these topics may need to be adjusted in order to accommodate guest speakers or other ethical issues in which the class has interest.

Listening Guide for Unit I: Biblical Approaches to Ethics
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1. Terms and names to know:

holiness code	covenant code	deuteronomic code
apodictic law	casuistic law	ceremonial law
occasional document	genre	parable
Tertullian	Albrecht Ritschl	Martin Luther
Thomas Aquinas	John Calvin	theonomy
principlism		

2. Distinguish two basic approaches concerning the relationship of the New Testament Christian to the Old Testament law.
3. Identify and defend your position about the authority of the Old Testament law for Christian ethics.
4. Provide a defensible hermeneutic to interpreting passages such as Leviticus 19, which have both commandments we tend to obey and commandments we tend to ignore.
5. Discuss the appropriate use of narrative passages in addressing ethical issues.
6. Identify and discuss the key hermeneutical error often made in interpreting narrative passages, especially in the book of Acts.
7. What part of the preaching/teaching of the prophets relates most to ethics? Why?
8. According to Fee and Stuart, what are seven guidelines for interpreting the ethical teachings in the New Testament properly?
9. List five principles discussed in class for interpreting the parables of Jesus.
10. Discuss the ethical teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).
11. Identify six key characteristics of Jesus' ethic.
12. Articulate a hermeneutical principle(s) which account for what is permanent and what is culturally specific in the New Testament.
13. Identify five Scriptures which discuss the character of a godly person, and identify the character traits (or conduct) encouraged in these passages.

Listening Guide for Unit II: Approaches to Moral Decision Making

1. Terms/names to know (for matching):

worldview	epistemology	anthropology
axiology	motive	means
consequences	end	deontological ethics
teleological ethics	consequentialist ethics	descriptive ethics
prescriptive/normative ethics	subjectivist ethics	relativist ethics
objectivist ethics	human law	natural law
morally permissible	value judgments	divine law
judgments of obligation	morally obligatory	legal
morally supererogatory	civil disobedience	moral
summum bonum	incompatibilism/libertarianism	compatibilism
categorical imperative	principle of autonomy	cognitivist
principle of humanity as an end	principle of universality	noncognitivist
eudaemonia	golden mean	bad faith
teleological suspension of ethical	transvaluation of all ethics	emotivism
Social Darwinism	Hedonism	Epicureanism
ethical hedonism	psychological hedonism	egoistic hedonism
altruistic hedonism	hedonistic paradox	principle of utility
hedonistic calculus	act utilitarianism	rule utilitarianism
greatest happiness principle	qualitative standard	Aristotle
Immanuel Kant	Soren Kierkegaard	Jean-Paul Sartre
Friedrich Nietzsche	prima facie duties	

- Identify and briefly discuss three challenges to human freedom and moral accountability.
- Identify and contrast the four major ethical approaches/summum bonums presented in class.
- Describe how each of the four major ethical approaches would use their principles to argue through a contemporary issue (for example, abortion).
- Describe the three examples of the Moral Law standard.
- Discuss the views of three representatives of the Existential Personal Choice standard.
- Contrast the views of two representatives of utilitarianism.
- Discuss the similarity and dissimilarity between Christian ethics and Virtue ethics.

9. Was Jesus' ethic deontological or teleological? Defend your position with Scripture.
10. List and briefly describe eight major emphases of postmodernism.
11. Describe the ethic of process theology.
12. Describe the ethic of liberation theology.
13. Identify and describe six approaches to dealing with moral absolutes which appear to conflict.
14. Describe the theology, anthropology, and ethic of five major worldviews in America.
15. Which of the summum bonums is closest to your ethic? Defend why you think it is the best model.
16. Identify and discuss the Niebuhr's five views of the relationship of Christ and culture.
17. Discuss what your stance would be among Niebuhr's five views of the relationship of Christ and culture, and defend your position. You may utilize the two poles discussed in class in your discussion.

Listening Guide for Unit III: A Christian Response to Ethical Issues

1. Terms and names to know:

constitutional homosexuality
 homophobic
kephale
 egalitarian

arsenokoites
 genetic predispositions
hupotasso
porneia

malakoi
 Pauline privilege
 complementarian
 exception clause

2. Contrast a Greek/Victorian approach to sexuality from a robust Hebrew perspective on sexuality.
3. Be able to identify the Scriptural basis of the rejection of homosexuality as an appropriate lifestyle.
4. Explain the hermeneutical tools used by those in the Christian homosexual community to reinterpret the Scriptural passages which seem to speak against homosexuality.
5. Identify Scriptures which suggest that while of equal worth, male and female appropriately should live out different roles.

6. Identify your points of agreement or disagreement with the Danvers Statement. Explain and defend your answer.
7. Identify Scriptures which assert the equality of men and women before God.
8. Contrast the beliefs of the two major evangelical organizations which specifically address the issue of the role of women (Christians for Biblical Equality and the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood).
9. Identify Scriptures which suggest that God has used women in His kingdom work throughout the Old and New Testament eras.
10. Utilizing the list discussed in class, identify where you would “draw the line” in the three lists of positions regarding women’s service in ministry. Explain your answer.
11. Be able to provide a biblical Christian response to a case study involving any of the ethical issues addressed in class.

Assessment Rubric for Assignment (a) of the Final Exam

Domain	Level	Inadequate (0 pt)	Basic (1 pt)	Competent (2 pts)	Good (3 pts)	Excellent (4 pts)
UNDERSTANDING	Able to understand the biblical and philosophical basis for a Christian ethic					
APPLICATION	Able to apply a Christian ethic to contemporary issues					
COMMUNICATION	Able to communicate Christian ethical and moral truths competently and convincingly					