

American Baptist Churches of New York State
Lay Study Program

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course shall give the student an understanding of what is Christian Ethics and what makes it different than societal norms. The course shall contain some history of ethics and introduce great thinkers on this subject. The instructor shall not seek to impose his/her own ethics on the class, but to help each student generate their own process which leads to problem solutions.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The student shall learn how to evaluate contemporary, controversial, issues from an ethical perspective and develop his/her own evaluation of the issue from a biblical perspective. While it is not the goal of the course for any student to radically change the belief structure, at the conclusion of the course the student should have a better understanding of their own positions and an appreciation of other perspectives on the subject.

OBJECTIVES FOR EACH SESSION

The lesson plan and objectives for each session will some what depend on the text selected. Each session should open and close with prayer.

Much of the first lesson time will be taken with filling out paperwork and getting to know one another. The instructor should set a tone that all perspectives are encouraged and will be respected (if not agree to). A home work assignment should be given which contains both reading from the text and the subject for an ethical paper.

The following sessions should consist of discussion of both the reading and the papers. The instructor should encourage all to speak and ensure that no one is being shutout or disrespected in the conversation. There two parallel paths to be followed. The first is to develop the understanding of how Christian ethics developed and how Christian ethics differ from societal norms. The second path is to discuss contemporary issues and how they are viewed through Christian ethics and their impact upon the church.

Subjects to be assigned/discussed include those related to human sexuality. The subjects of "just war" and beginning and ending life should be used. Economic issues such as consumerism, environmentalism, gambling and caring for the poor are to be included. Discussions of the writings of ethicists such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Dietrich Bonhoeffer will add to the scholarship of the course.

The last class shall be used by both the instructor and the students to evaluate the course and materials, and to discuss lessons learned.

SUGGESTED TEXTS

The following texts have been used previously for this course. It is suggested that the instructor use the internet to search for and evaluate texts that fit her/his teaching style, give multiple perspectives to issues, will fit within a ten week course and are affordable to the students.

Christian Ethics - Norman L. Geisler 442 pages

In this thorough update of a classic textbook, noted Christian thinker Norman Geisler evaluates contemporary ethical options (such as antinomianism, situation ethics, and legalism) and pressing issues of the day (such as euthanasia, homosexuality, and divorce) from a biblical perspective. The second edition is significantly expanded and updated, with new material and charts throughout the book. There are new chapters on animal rights, sexual ethics, and the biblical basis for ethical decisions, as well as four new appendixes addressing drugs, gambling, pornography, and birth control. The author has significantly updated his discussion of abortion, biomedical ethics, war, and ecology and has expanded the selected readings, bibliography, and glossary.

An Introduction to Christian Ethics - Robin W. Lovin 133 pages

A few years ago, the first distinction that ethicists drew was the line between Christian ethics and philosophical ethics. However, in our global context, Christian ethicists must now, in addition, compare and contrast various ethics. Christian ethics has become increasingly multivocal not only because of a plurality of faiths but also because of a plurality of Christianities.

Beginning with five key ideas about God's relationship to humanity and history, Dr. Lovin shows how these work together to shape the Christian stance. In the first three chapters, he then shows how those ideas took shape in relation to other ways of thinking about ethics in the world of early Christianity and identifies four major variations: Synergy, Integrity, Realism, and Liberation. The six remaining chapters cover historical and contemporary developments in the three ways of thinking about moral choices: teleology, deontology, and areteology. Test cases are also included.

The purpose of the book is to indicate what is possible in Christian ethics, rather than to prescribe one way that it ought to be done. The aim is not to get readers to choose one among the Christian possibilities and use it exclusively, but use this introduction as a resource to arrive at their own ways of thinking about moral problems in order to act with integrity.

Christian Ethic in the Protestant Tradition - Waldo Beach

This 1988 book has been used for years to teach this course. It does fit well into the ten week format and covers many relevant issues. It is getting dated and may be out of print.

STUDENT EVALUATION/EXPECTATIONS

At the conclusion of the class students should be able to:

1. Define Christian ethics and differentiate it from cultural norms.
2. Intelligently discuss the development of Christian ethics and how they both are steadfast and adaptive in society.
3. Intelligently present both in writing and orally, their Christian perspective on issues and why others may look at these issues through a different lens.

SUGGESTED METHODOLOGY (IES)

Both text readings and examples/readings from the Bible should be used to investigate ethics development and applications. Each week's homework should consist of both readings from the text and the writing of a paper on an assigned issue/topic. The course format should be more of discussion and less of lecture. Both text readings and student papers should be discussed in an open and lively format. The instructor should introduce other sources to augment and enhance the course materials.

