

Intensive Issue Seminar: Marriage and Divorce

CHR 444

MWF 11 a.m., PAC A-1

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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

An intensive analysis of one major issue or cluster of issues in contemporary Christian ethics, taught in seminar style. *2004 Subject: Marriage and Divorce.*

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

- A. To develop a deeper understanding of the discipline of Christian ethics.
- B. To explore in some depth a particular cluster of important issues in contemporary Christian ethics.
- C. To nurture the early growth of a constructive Christian ethical approach to the issues under consideration in this course--marriage and divorce--and to learn to integrate both "head" and "heart" in responding to these issues.
- D. To develop intellectual flexibility and openness to diverse perspectives within the context of appropriate confessional and biblical boundaries.
- E. To become better prepared for graduate level work, especially in Christian ethics.
- F. To achieve personal moral growth, especially with regard to marriage and family life.

III. TEXTBOOKS AND REQUIRED READING

You are required to read the following books this semester. They are available in the bookstore.

David Gushee. *Getting Marriage Right*. Baker, 2004 (available in March).

Craig Keener. *And Marries Another*. Hendrickson, 1991.

Mike Mason. *The Mystery of Marriage*. Multnomah, 1985.

Roderick Phillips. *Untying the Knot*. Cambridge, 1991.

Judith Wallerstein et al. *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*. Hyperion, 2000.

Barbara DaFoe Whitehead. *The Divorce Culture*. Knopf, 1997.

Other readings will be suggested and/or provided during the course. These will be required readings unless otherwise indicated.

IV. METHOD OF INSTRUCTION

This class is taught as an advanced seminar. Students will share in a common body of reading, present papers, and respond to each other's work.

V. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Learning Activities/Means of Evaluation

Each of your learning activities this semester will be assigned a point value, with a total of 500 available points, excluding extra credit. Detailed descriptions are found below.

1. Seminar Papers	100
2. Interview Paper	100
3. Movie Reflection	50
4. Term Paper	150
5. Final Exam	100

6. Attendance/Participation	+/- 25 points
7. Extra Credit	up to 25 points

B. Grading Scale (point values are equivalent to the standard university grading scale)

A 475-500 points

B 425-474 points

C 375-424 points

D 325-374 points

F below 325

C. Description of Assignments

1. *Seminar Papers*. You will lead class discussion two times during the semester. You will present a 4-5 page double-spaced paper on the day's assigned reading. This paper should very briefly summarize the content of the reading, interact critically with it, say what was most important about it, perhaps bring the reading into dialogue with other class readings, and suggest several discussion questions for the day's class period. *You will need to make a copy of your seminar paper available for me to read on the day it is discussed.* On the day of class, you will read your paper aloud and we will use it as a jumping off point for class discussion.

2. *Marriage/Divorce Interview Paper (4/28)*. One of the best ways to learn about contemporary marriage and family life is through direct encounter with married and divorced people, or those who have been directly affected by divorce. Your project is to interview someone (other than yourself) who has (a) enjoyed a particularly good marriage relationship of at least 10 years duration, or (b) gone through a divorce, or (c) been a child of divorce. Your task is to construct an interview questionnaire, interview someone (on tape) for at least an hour, transcribe the interview, and offer some concluding reflections on what you learned about marriage and divorce and its implications for Christian ethical response. While paper lengths may vary, my guess is that the transcribing of an interview lasting at least one hour, along with 4-5 pages of commentary and reflection, will likely amount to a paper between 15 and 20 pages.

Interview questions on marriage should cover *at least* the following areas:

- basic biographical data on the interview subjects
- their dating/courting history
- their preparation for marriage
- their experience of marriage in various stages of life
- major challenges and difficult times faced during marriage
- key principles/norms they employ to govern their marriage
- their own sense of the "secret of their success"
- their hopes, dreams, and goals for the future of their marriage
- major lessons they would want to pass on to others
- their spiritual and religious convictions and impact on their marriage

Interview questions for the divorced should cover:

- questions 1-4 above
- sense of when things began to go wrong in their marriage
- process of estrangement and/or movement toward divorce
- the process of divorce itself—what happened, how long it took, what it was like

what life has been like after the divorce
impact of the divorce process on them and their ex-spouse
impact of the divorce process on their children
life after divorce—residence, lifestyle, economic status, health and well-being
dating and/or remarriage and/or second divorce
role of the church in helping with marriage or during/after divorce
moral reflections on marriage, divorce, remarriage
reflections now on what to do and avoid to make marriage work
where was God amidst this process of marriage and divorce
major lessons they would want to pass on to others

Interview questions related to children of divorce should cover (for fuller questionnaire, see me):

basic biographical data on the interview subject
description of their parents' marriage and their own life before divorce
the reasons for the divorce
the legal and familial process of divorce
the personal experience of divorce
the short- and long-term impact of divorce
reflections on the religious and moral implications of divorce
where was God amidst this process of marriage and divorce
reflections now on what to do and avoid to make marriage work
major lessons they would want to pass on to others

You will need to work from a specific list of questions, which should be included when you transcribe the interview.

I will need you to turn in 2 copies of your paper, one for me to keep and use in my research. You need to obtain the interview subject's written permission for you and for me to use the interview. I will give you the form needed for that purpose, which should be turned in with the paper. Interview subjects should be assured that no names or particular identifying details from their interviews will ever be published.

Remember that these are sensitive issues in people's lives. Be prayerful, approach and talk with people sensitively, and back off from overly painful topics if necessary during the interview. Remind people that their reflections have the potential to be used by God to make a difference in people's lives. Be open to the opportunity to minister to people as you talk with them.

3. *Movie Reflection.* We will gather at the Gushee homestead on April 1 at 7 p.m. to see one of the many films that deal with the issue of marriage and divorce. Students are required to attend this experience unless absolutely unable to be present--in such cases, arrangements can be made for you to view the film on your own. The 4-5 page paper is due on **April 16**. It should reflect on

the film and discussion in light of course materials to that point in the semester, and should cover such issues as:

- how the depiction of divorce and its impact squares with what we find in the literature
- the tone and spirit of the treatment of divorce in the movie
- the way in which children's experience of divorce is depicted
- the vision of marriage that is implicitly or explicitly presented
- ways the movie deepened or illuminated your understanding of the subject

This is a modified version of the "Ethics in Film" tradition. Please bring something to eat or drink and prepare to spend the evening watching the film, munching, discussing key themes, and having fun.

4. *Term Paper (5/14)*. This is your other major project for the semester. Your task is to produce a significant, well-researched, reflective, and well-written 18-20 page paper on an issue that is discussed in class or emerges during the semester. The paper must include careful discussion of relevant biblical, historical, and social scientific data on this subject as well as elements of your own constructive/normative Christian ethical response. This is a research paper as well as a reflective essay, so you will need to read in sources beyond those we read together in class.

A proposal for this paper is due on March 12. That proposal should name the topic and include at least 10 bibliographical entries, not including course materials. If I think you need to change the topic, I will let you know at that time.

5. *Final Exam (TBA)*. A one-hour exam, broadly covering all course materials, will be given during the final exam period.

6. *Attendance/Participation*. In a class of this nature, exemplary attendance and participation are crucial. I assume you will be here unless an emergency prevents you from attending, and that you will inform me if such occasions arise. I also assume you will undertake serious preparation for class and offer significant and constructive class participation. See below for full and official statement of attendance policy.

7. *Extra Credit*. Several extra credit opportunities will be available this semester, including Mars Hill, the Henry Center Baptist identity conference, a planned campus-wide discussion of my new book on marriage, and a road trip to Wheaton College March 17-20. Others may be announced if good opportunities arise. One piece of extra credit work per student is encouraged and happily received. More details on the Wheaton trip will be announced during the term.

Extra credit papers should be 3-4 pages in length, offering a summary of the event's content, major issues raised and new learning experienced, and, if possible, critical interaction with the material.

ACADEMIC POLICY STATEMENTS

Note: Apply all items below that are relevant to this course.

On Papers and Their Presentation: I prefer to receive papers in 12-point Times New Roman font, printed on a well-functioning printer, stapled in the upper left-hand corner, no plastic covers needed. Term papers should be double-spaced, follow the Chicago Manual of Style (Turabian), with a full bibliography including all works cited. While small variations in referencing style are common, be consistent with whatever form you employ throughout the paper. Paper grades include consideration of both literary/presentation quality and substantive content. Use inclusive language with reference to human beings.

On Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft in which a writer passes off someone else's words as his or her own, either intentionally or unintentionally (through inadequate quotation use and footnoting). While intention is sometimes hard to judge, intentional plagiarism is expressly forbidden and will result in automatic failure, as discussed in the Union catalog. All other forms of cheating are, of course, forbidden as well.

On Late Work: All papers and assignments are due at the start of class on the date assigned. Papers lose 5 points credit for every day that they are late, excluding Sundays. Papers turned in after the start of class are treated as if turned in the next day. If you turn in a late paper, be sure to note on the paper the date and time it was turned in. The *only* exceptions to this policy include family emergencies and bereavement. Absence from class due to official college functions does not constitute grounds for a no-penalty extension on a paper, nor do computer problems, relationship hassles, or other common stresses of university life.

On Lost Papers: Students are wise to keep both a hard copy and a computer version of every paper they write. If a paper turns up missing in this class, you are responsible for turning in a replacement version as soon as we discover the paper is missing.

On Attendance and Participation:

A. Regular class attendance is required for the successful completion of this course. The student is expected to attend classes regularly in accordance with Union's attendance policies. See catalog for official policy statement.

B. Class absences will be considered in two categories: excused and unexcused.

C. Excused absences include the following: emergencies, bereavement, documented illness, or official college functions approved by the Academic Affairs Office. The professor reserves the right to determine the validity of all absences.

D. Request for an absence to be excused must be made *in writing* either in advance of the absence or at the next class attended after the absence. Verbal communication of the absence or its reasons is insufficient.

E. If an exam is missed because of an excused absence, it may be made up. If the absence is unexcused, the student receives a 0 on that exam. This includes exams missed due to oversleeping. Whenever a student has advance knowledge that an exam must be missed due to an excused absence, the professor should be informed so that arrangements can be made.

F. Excessive absences by a student will be reported to the appropriate officials for counsel with the student.

G. Attendance and participation generally will be rewarded/punished as follows:

0-1 absences-- +15-25 points	2 absences – no effect on grade
3 absences – -15-20 points	4 absences – -20-25 points
5 absences – -25-30 points	6 or more absences – fail the class automatically

H. Tardiness--arrival in class at any point after it starts--will be counted against the attendance grade. *Three tardies=one absence.*

I. Participation--The criteria of quality participation include the following: obvious completion of reading prior to coming to class, intelligent and informed participation in classroom discussion and any assigned projects or tasks,

evidence of note-taking and active listening, and general quality of demeanor, engagement, and enthusiasm for course activities.

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MWF 11
Course Schedule, Spring 2004
Dr. David P. Gushee

2/4 Course Organization and Requirements

2/6 Lecture: Marriage and Divorce: The Contemporary Landscape
reading: prefatory material in all books

I. THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE: KEENER ON THE RIGOROUS MERCY OF CHRIST

Many of our congregations see divorce as a matter of uncleanness rather than a matter of sin; we neither call the guilty to account for sin nor defend the oppressed, but we lump them together into a category called 'unclean' that we do not wish to touch. –Craig Keener

2/9 Keener, ch. 1-2
seminar paper:

2/11 Keener, ch. 3, appendix A,B
seminar paper:

2/13 Keener, ch. 4
seminar paper:

2/16 Keener, ch. 5
seminar paper:

2/18 Keener, ch. 6
seminar paper:

2/20 Keener, ch. 7, final words
seminar paper:

II. THE HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY: PHILLIPS ON “UNTYING THE KNOT”

Divorce probably dates from the same time as marriage. I think, though, that marriage is a few weeks older; that is to say that a man fought with his wife after a fortnight, beat her after a month, and they separated after living together for six weeks. –Voltaire

2/23 Phillips, ch. 1
seminar paper:

- 2/25 Phillips, ch. 2
seminar paper:
- 2/27 Phillips, ch. 3
seminar paper:
- 3/1 Phillips, ch. 4
seminar paper:
- 3/3 Phillips, ch. 5
seminar paper:
- 3/5 Phillips, ch. 6
seminar paper:
- 3/8 Phillips, ch. 7
seminar paper:
- 3/10 Phillips, ch. 8
seminar paper:
- 3/12 Phillips, ch. 9, conclusion
seminar paper:
Term Paper proposal due
- 3/15-19 *Spring Break*

III. OUR DIVORCE CULTURE: WHITEHEAD ON ITS INTELLECTUAL ROOTS

Divorce is now part of everyday American life. It is embedded in our laws and institutions, our manners and mores, our movies and television shows, our closest and most important relationships...Divorce has become so pervasive that many people naturally assume it has seeped into the mainstream over a long period of time. Yet this is not the case. –Barbara Dafoe Whitehead

- 3/22 Whitehead, intro, ch. 1
seminar paper:
- 3/24 Whitehead, ch. 2-3
seminar paper:
- 3/26 Whitehead, chs. 4-5
seminar paper:
- 3/29 Whitehead, ch. 6

seminar paper:

3/31 Whitehead, ch. 7
seminar paper:

4/1 **Movie Night, 7 pm**

4/2 Whitehead, ch. 8
seminar paper:

IV: WALLERSTEIN ON “THE UNEXPECTED LEGACY OF DIVORCE”

I could have been a Daddy’s girl. –“Melinda,” student interviewee

4/5 Wallerstein, part 1
seminar paper:

4/7 Wallerstein, part 2
seminar paper:

4/9 *Good Friday, class cancelled*

4/12 Wallerstein, part 3
seminar paper:

4/14 Wallerstein, part 4
seminar paper:

4/16 Wallerstein, part 5
seminar paper:
Movie Reflection Paper due

V. MASON: A POET'S VISION OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

The wedding is merely the beginning of a lifelong process of handing over absolutely everything, and not simply everything one owns but everything that one is. –Mike Mason

4/19 Mason, chs. 1-2
seminar paper:

4/21 Mason, chs. 3-4
seminar paper:

4/23 *CLASS CANCELLED*

- 4/26 Mason, chs. 5-6
seminar paper:
- 4/28 Mason, ch. 7-10
seminar paper:
Interview Paper due

V. GUSHEE: A CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL ETHIC OF MARRIAGE

The Western Christian church's approach to marriage...is failing. The church is getting along with jury-rigged and increasingly ineffective versions of a dying paradigm. Thus Christians are increasingly confused about marriage, prone to serial divorce and remarriage, and miserable both in marriage and divorce...The church needs to undertake a thoroughgoing rethinking of its perspective on marriage. –David P. Gushee

- 4/30 Gushee, chs. 1-2
seminar paper:
- 5/3 Gushee, ch. 3
seminar paper:
- 5/5 Gushee, ch. 4-5
seminar paper:
- 5/7 Gushee, ch. 6
seminar paper:
- 5/10 Gushee, ch. 7
seminar paper:
- 5/12 Gushee, ch. 8-9
seminar paper:
- 5/14 Gushee, ch. 10, epilogue
Term paper due
- TBA FINAL EXAM**