

# *Tree of Life School*

*"Wisdom is a tree of life to those who embrace her."  
Proverbs 3:18*



## *Contemporary Issues Course Outline*



## Table of Contents

Introduction	Page 4
How to Work Through the Course	Page 5
Calculating Your Final Grade	Page 5
Monthly Schedule	Page 6
Essay Topics and Resources	Page 8
Assignment Mark Sheet	Page 11

## Introduction

In a sense there is no such thing as an entirely new “issue”. The writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes informs us that there is nothing new under the sun and, as followers of Jesus Christ, we know that the struggles we are dealing with in Western culture are simply nothing more than recurring themes of situations that all declining civilisations have faced before. This is not to say that history is cyclical, as many in Eastern cultures might say, for we know that God is moving history to its inevitable conclusion. However, there are few variations on the central theme of human sin and despair.

Issues such as abortion, homosexuality, political corruption, deceit, poverty, unjust wars, and all other rebellion against God have plagued mankind since the Fall. We should not be surprised that this is so. God, in His Word, has not promised a *yellow brick road* for those who will take up their cross and follow Him.

However, God does call us to understand our culture, seeing it through the eyes of one with a well developed Christian worldview, and He does call us to be in this world (though not of it). This makes it imperative that believers *know* the issues and be prepared to articulate a Biblical response to them in thought, word, and deed.

*For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.*  
2 Corinthians 10:4,5

The purpose of this course is to further extend the your thinking in the development of a Biblical mindset and lifestyle, begun in the Worldview and Culture course, and to help apply this learning with wisdom and compassion to the contemporary issues you encounter daily.

*But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.*  
Jude 1:17-24

## How to Work Through The Course

We have divided the material to be covered into seven units, and worked out a suggested schedule for approximately nine months. (Most of you will complete this from September to May.) Of course you may work more quickly if you wish, but the main thing is not to get behind and have to rush through the final assignments.

The text for this course is *Postmodern Times* by Gene Edward Veith Jr. It bills itself as a Christian guide to contemporary thought and culture. Veith traces the development of our culture from pre-modern to modern to postmodern. He concludes that we are standing on the threshold of a new era. The world as we know it is about to change, and Veith challenges the reader to meet this situation with faith and courage. Reading this text may not be the easiest thing you've ever done but it is definitely a book worth studying and applying its lessons to your life...now!

You will be asked to write five short summaries of the five major sections of Veith's book. These papers are intended to help you understand the issues in our culture from a Biblical worldview, and should survey the major themes, with some concluding applications or thoughts. In the schedule beginning on page 10 you will find the details for each assignment.

Secondly, you will complete a research paper on a topic of your choice relating to a present-day issue. As a way to help you get an early start, we assign a proposal to be submitted a couple of months before the essay is due. In this way you will have to think ahead about the final paper even before the textbook is completed. The advantage of this is obviously to successfully complete the course before summer, but also to read the last chapters of Mr Veith's book with a particular issue in mind. Beginning on page 12 there is a list of possible topics and resources for this essay.

## Calculating Your Final Grade

Your final mark in the course will be based on the following percentages:

Five summaries of the chapters in <i>Postmodern Times</i>	50%
Essay proposal (intended topic, bibliography, and outline)	10%
Final essay	40%
	-----
	100%

\*\*\*See the **Tree of Life Student Handbook** for instructions on accessing tests / course material, preparing and formatting essays, and submitting all assignments.

# Monthly Schedule

## **September (1<sup>st</sup> Month): Assignment 1**

Read the Table of Contents of *Postmodern Times* to gain an idea of what will be covered in the book. Then read chapter 1. Take notes of the important points that the author is making.

In about 500 words, summarize the main ideas in chapter 1, and conclude by speculating what you hope to learn from this course. Send this composition to us for evaluation.

## **October (2<sup>nd</sup> Month): Assignment 2**

Read chapters 2 to 4 of *Postmodern Times*. Take notes of the important points, making sure you grasp the key ideas in each section of each chapter.

In about 750 words, summarize the main ideas presented.

- Trace the development of worldviews from the Enlightenment, to romanticism, to modernism to postmodernism.
- Briefly explain the postmodern views on language and truth, humanity, personality, and group identity.
- Conclude by discussing how Christians may in some ways agree and in other ways disagree with postmodernism.

Send the essay to us for evaluation.

## **November (3<sup>rd</sup> Month): Assignment 3**

Read chapters 5 to 7 of *Postmodern Times*. Take notes of the important points, making sure you grasp the key ideas in each section of each chapter.

In about 750 words, summarize the main ideas.

- Outline the differences between modern and postmodern art and architecture.
- Explain briefly how postmodernism is shown in television and film.

Send the essay to us for evaluation.

## **December and January (4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Months): Assignment 4**

Read chapters 8 to 10 of *Postmodern Times*. Once again, take notes to help you focus on the key ideas.

In about 750 words, explain the main points of these chapters.

- Explain what is 'tribalism' and why is it undesirable.

