

Because we love Christ at WBC, we love His Word, for in His Word we get to know Him and what pleases Him. And because we love His Word, we are committed to expository preaching at WBC. Typically, that means we preach through books of the Bible, paragraph by paragraph, verse by verse, seeking to expose ourselves to two realities. One, what has God said? And two, what are the implications of what He has said in this passage for our thinking and living?

But there's another kind of expositional preaching. That's when we seek to expose what the Bible says about particular topics. To do this, we must first exegete (rather than eis-egete) the various passages that address a particular topic, and then engage in biblical theology so that we understand those texts properly, and then do systematic theology in order to develop a proper system or way of thinking as we draw conclusions regarding that topic. It's the latter that we'll be doing in this current series, "***Christian Ethics: Learning to Think Christianly about Ethical Dilemmas.***"

To begin, notice **Micah 6:8**, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Though we don't see the term "ethics" in this verse, we see the foundation of ethics ("He has told you, O man"), the description of ethics ("what is good"), the goal of ethics ("what does the Lord require of you"), and the visible outcome of ethical decisions that please the Lord ("to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God").

Introduction to Series:

Life is filled with decisions that have ethical roots and implications, such as...

Is it a sin to foul someone playing basketball? You deliberately violate the rules of the game. Isn't that a *wrong* thing to do?

You grow up in a home where pork is never eaten, but one day, after you've moved into your own apartment, you decide to eat a pork roast. Have you sinned?

Your granddaughter invites you to her wedding. She is marrying a woman. Should you go? Are you sinning if you do? Is she sinning? What's the *right* thing to do?

You're putting replacement shingles on your house. You grab for a hammer and your friend says, no, don't do that. That's the wrong hammer to use, because you're using a finish carpenter's hammer and this is rough carpentry work. That's wrong, he says.

But what does *wrong* mean? Can we overuse (or misuse) the words *right* and *wrong*? When is it appropriate to use those words? When is it inappropriate?

The church is the perfect place to address these kinds of questions. And that's what we're going to do as we launch this new Sunday evening series. We want to grow in our ability *to think Christianly about ethical decisions and dilemmas*.

Thought to consider: When it comes to ethical decisions and dilemmas, we need more than the two categories, right versus wrong. The word "wrong" is a big word. For instance...

Sometimes we mean, that's not wise.

Sometimes we mean, that's not pleasing to me, it's not my preference.

Sometimes we mean, that's not pleasing to God.

Sometimes, as opposed to right versus wrong, it would be better to use the categories accurate versus inaccurate. As in, did I make an accurate assessment of how much the mower was worth when I sold it for \$300, or was my assessment inaccurate, and therefore, wrong?

Purpose of Series:

This series seeks to provide a biblical framework for addressing ethical challenges facing Christians living in the contemporary world.

Series Objectives

This series will seek to help believers:

1. Identify and consider several of the key ethical issues facing believers today
2. Be able to respond to ethical issues by applying biblical truth in a Christlike way

Suggested Reading

-Grudem, Wayne, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning*, Wheaton: Crossway, 2018.

-Frame, John, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, Phillipsburg, NJ, P&R Publishing, 2008.

-Trueman, Carl R., *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution*, Wheaton: Crossway, 2022.

-ESV Study Bible, appendix, "Biblical Ethics: An Overview"

-Bush, Joseph E., Jr. *Gentle Shepherding: Pastoral Ethics and Leadership*. St. Louis: Chalice, 2008.

-Trull, Joe E., and R. Robert Creech. *Ethics for Christian Ministry: Moral Formation for 21st -Century Leaders*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017.

-ACBC Code of Conduct, available at: <https://biblicalcounseling.com/about/beliefs/positions/standards-of-conduct/>

Getting Started: Some Questions to Consider

During this series we will seek to address the following questions...

1. What is *ethics*?

By definition, the term "ethics" means, "a set of moral principles, a theory or system of moral values; principles of conduct governing an individual or a group; the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation"¹

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethic>

According to John Frame, in *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, "All ethics is religious, even when it tries hard to be secular. In the end, all ethics presupposes ultimate values. It requires allegiance to someone or something that demands devotion and governs all thinking."²

John Frame, "Down through the years, ethicists have tended to divide into conservative and liberal parties. For example, in ancient Judaism there were the schools of Shammai (conservative) and Hillel (liberal). Catholicism has had Jesuits (liberal) and Jansenists (conservative). The liberal tendency to find loopholes in the moral law, to justify apparent sin, has given casuistry a bad name. The conservative tendency toward harshness and austerity has given moralism a bad name...I urge readers not to side with either tendency. The point of Christian ethics is not to be as liberal as we can be, or as conservative. It is, rather, to be as biblical as we can be."³

In his book, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning*, Wayne Grudem adapts his definition from John Frame. "Christian ethics is any study that answers the question, 'What does the whole Bible teach us about which acts, attitudes, and personal character traits receive God's approval, and which do not?' This definition indicates that our study of Christian ethics will be God-centered and Bible-centered."⁴

So, ethics has to do with determining whether something is right or wrong. There is also the related question as to whether something is wise or unwise. How do we know? How do we make decisions?

2. What is Christian ethics?

We are Christ-followers. Christ-followers approach (at least *should* approach) ethical decisions differently than they did prior to declaring allegiance to Christ. The subject of ethics is very important for the Christian, for reasons we'll develop later.

Give a brief survey of various ethical models. Demonstrate how each makes decisions concerning what to do when facing an ethical issue. Here are some examples:

How would a secularist approach an ethical dilemma?

A Protestant Liberal?

A Roman Catholic?

A Muslim?

A Charismatic?

Joseph Fletcher?

Joel Osteen?

3. What are some examples of ethical dilemmas?

² John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, p. 5.

³ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, p. 6.

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning*, p. 37.

Current Ethical Dilemmas

We are facing many ethical decisions today, which often become dilemmas. I googled the phrase “ethical decisions we are facing today,” and found this top ten list of the significant moral issues facing America today (prepared by Chuck Colson at Breakpoint in 2006).⁵

- 1. Sanctity of Life:** Preserving sanctity of life by resisting the encroachment of abortion, euthanasia, cloning, and embryonic stem cell research.
- 2. Religious Liberty:** Defending the persecuted Church and others of faith around the world, and defending freedom of religion here at home.
- 3. Human Rights:** Protecting human rights, whether it’s stopping sex-trafficking, slavery in Sudan, or the spread of AIDS.
- 4. Marriage:** Protecting by law the traditional heterosexual definition of the family.
- 5. Terrorism:** Strengthening America in the War on Terrorism and in the clash of civilizations against radical Islam.
- 6. Judiciary Roles:** Restoring the constitutional role of the Supreme Court and restricting judicial activism.
- 7. Faith-based solutions:** Advocating faith-based solutions to societal problems.
- 8. Marginalized Citizens:** Caring for the poor and restoring prisoners. Preserving the financial stability of health care for the elderly and disabled.
- 9. Education:** Improving education and promoting choices within the educational system.
- 10. Media:** Challenging the negative impact of the mass media on culture — including speaking out against pornography, sexual exploitation, and violence.

Ethical Dilemmas in the Business World

I found another list from the business world, eight common ethical issues facing businesses in 2021.

1. Sexual Harassment
2. Diversity & Discrimination
3. Social Media
4. Health & Safety
5. Environmental Responsibility
6. Accounting Practices
7. Data Privacy
8. Nepotism
9. Theft

Ethical Dilemmas in technology

I found a 2021 article listing five dilemmas for the tech industry to navigate:⁶

1. Data usage
2. Environmental sustainability
3. Trustworthy AI
4. Threats to truth

⁵ <https://breakpoint.org/top-10-moral-issues-facing-america/>

⁶ <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/technology/ethical-dilemmas-in-technology.html>

5. Physical and mental health

Examples of ethical dilemmas in the Bible:

Biblical examples of Christian ethics: What's the right thing to do?

- When a church member is sexually involved with his step-mother (1 Cor 5)
- When a church has widows in need (Acts 6; 1 Tim 5)
- When wealthy people abuse the poor at church (James 2; 1 Tim 6)
- When a Christian is defrauded and considering legal action (1 Cor 6)
- When dealing with the opposite sex in a ministry context (Titus 2)
- When the government tells the church what to do (Acts 4-5, Rom 13, Titus 3)
- When deciding whether to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 10)
- When we can save money by neglecting copyright laws and tax laws (Rom 13)
- When Christians are at odds over gray areas (Romans 14-15)

Biblical examples of ethical challenges facing ministers:

- Whether to eat meat offered to idols (1 Corinthians 8)
- Which group of widows to care for first, Acts 6
- Whether to drink alcohol or not. Priests could not whenever they went into the tabernacle to work (Leviticus 10:9), but common people apparently could.
- Whether to marry a divorced person or not. Priests could not (Leviticus 21:7, 14), others could.
- Others?

Contemporary examples faced by Christians today, and specifically by pastors:

- Whether to take a married person of the opposite sex to lunch for a meeting
- Whether to counsel a woman, and if so, with what parameters
- Regarding money, whether to accept large gifts from church members
- Do I engage in the political process? Do I use the pulpit to address what particular parties are doing?
- Whether to accept an invitation to perform a wedding ceremony for a couple from the community? When neither are believers in Christ? When one person professes to be?
- Whether to allow other religious groups to use your church community center building?
- How to help a person struggling with same sex attraction?
- How to help someone who is considering "changing genders"?
- Others?

A Biblical Approach to Ethical Dilemmas

In light of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, how should we approach an ethical dilemma?

As Christ-followers, we ought to approach ethical questions from a different vantage point than our non-Christian friends. Why would that be? It's because we have an objective basis for approaching questions of right and wrong, namely, the person and character of God Himself, as well as the nature of

the Book He has given to us. But this takes work, hence the sub-title of this series, *“Learning to Think Christianly about Ethical Dilemmas.”*

What does it mean to think Christianly? It means we think like Christ, and for Christ’s honor. As we’ll see, it also means we think *biblically*, for Christ was a “Man of the Book” (time and time again we hear Him saying, “What do the Scriptures say?”).

But how does this happen? It doesn’t just happen. It takes work to think Christianly, and this work involves the following steps of action.

1. We must begin with a correct view of the person and purposes of God Himself.

As we seek to address ethical questions, it’s vital that we possess a proper understanding of who God is, how He communicates His purposes, who man is, and what sin is. Therefore, let’s reflect on the foundational doctrines of Theology Proper, Bibliology, Anthropology, Hamartiology, and Soteriology.

Q: What do we know about the doctrine of God that should affect this decision? His holiness, His righteousness, His love, etc

Q: What do we know about the doctrine of the Bible, the doctrine of man and sin, the doctrine of salvation, etc?

2. We must resolve to take a Biblical approach when addressing an ethical dilemma. Develop and apply the theological pyramid to demonstrate how to make decisions.

We build our answers upon the foundation of the Bible, then move to exegesis, then biblical theology, then systematic theology, then historical theology (as we look outside the Bible to see what others have said about the issue throughout church history), and then practical theology.

Practical Theology
Historical Theology
Systematic Theology
Biblical Theology
Exegesis
Hermeneutics
Canon

3. Identify and examine key passages that help us develop ethical guidelines that should shape how we determine what is right and wrong. This includes:

- Ten Commandments (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5)
- Jesus’ sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7)
- New Testament “one another” commands, especially “Love one another”
- Christian liberties (Romans 14-15; 1 Corinthians 8-10)
- Develop a “hierarchy of beliefs”
- Demonstrate how Ephesians provides a framework for ministry ethics
- Show how to deal with sexual sin, according to Ephesians 5:1-5

4. Develop and apply a biblical model for decision-making.

-Utilize the decision-making model provided by Professor James Grier (found in the WBC Counseling Training track 2)

-Encourage caution regarding the traditional model which sees every decision as hitting the bulls-eye in a target. A more biblical approach is to view decision-making as a field with a fence around it.

5. Demonstrate from the Bible the following distinction of categories. Here are four to consider initially. Should there be others?

A. Moral issues (where the options are right versus wrong): Use the Ten Commandments to show the divine, objective standard for whether something is right or wrong.

1 Samuel 12:23 Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the **right way**.

2 Chronicles 28:1 "Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was **right** in the eyes of the LORD, as his father David had done."

B. Wisdom issues (where the options are wise versus unwise): Use the book of Proverbs

C. Christian liberties issues (where both options may be right depending on timing and maturity): Use Romans 14-15

D. Preference/personal perspective issues (such as, "Now that's the right way to cook a steak, medium well!")

Esther 8:5 "And she said, "If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and if the thing **seems right** before the king, and I am pleasing in his eyes, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king."

6. Developing biblical principles that help us face ethical challenges:

-Our theology determines our ethics (Exodus 20).

-Character matters (1 Tim 3).

-What would Jesus do? = What does the Bible say?

-When the Bible is not clear, we are free to do the loving thing.

7. We need to apply biblical principles to our contemporary ethical dilemmas. So let's do it! What should we do when...?

-When we are offered a tax break to do something unethical?

- When government establishes laws that make it illegal to counsel someone regarding sexual orientation, discipline our children, call homosexuality sin, etc?
- When dealing with lawsuits?
- When deciding how to spend money (Would Jesus drive a Cadillac?)?
- When a church decides to call a woman to be its pastor?
- When a political candidate attends a church service?

What contribution does our supplemental reading add to our understanding of Christian ethics?

Participants will discuss during class time (as well as in an online chat format) highlights from the following required texts:

-Grudem, Wayne, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning*, Wheaton: Crossway, 2018.

-Trueman, Carl R., *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution*, Wheaton: Crossway, 2022.

-ACBC Code of Conduct

How do we take a biblical approach to addressing various contemporary ethical challenges?

Use case studies: Have participants work on the following case studies. They will do this work initially on their own, and then as a group project, which will then become a class presentation.

Case Study #1: A church member approaches you (a church leader) and says, “Pastor, as you know election day is coming. I’m concerned about the direction our country is going. I’d like to hand out these voter guides this coming Sunday after the service. I’d also like to make an announcement during the service inviting people to a political rally this Tuesday. Would that be possible? And by the way, I think it would go a long way if you would put your influence behind this.”

- How will you respond to this person? Will you approach this as a moral issue, a wisdom issue, a Christian liberties issue, or a preference/personal perspective issue? Or is it a combination of issues?
- What passages of scripture provide guidance for this situation?
- What biblical principles might be helpful?
- What lessons from church history, from other people’s experience, from my own experience, might be helpful to consider?
- Consider this situation from the perspective of other ethical models. How would a Protestant Liberal decide what to do in this situation? A Roman Catholic? A Muslim? A Charismatic? A Secularist? Joseph Fletcher? Joel Osteen?

Case Study #2: A young woman approaches you after the service one Sunday. You have never met her before. She has come at the invitation of a friend who is a member of the church. She says through her sobs, “I’m in trouble and I don’t know what to do. I’m a pre-med student and have been planning to being medical school in the fall. It’s been my dream for years to be a

doctor. But I just found out that I'm pregnant. I've already made an appointment to get an abortion. After all, the timing is just not right for a baby. Surely, God will understand. At least, that's what I've been thinking. But after coming to church today, I'm really confused. What should I do?"

- How will you respond to this person? Will you approach this as a moral issue, a wisdom issue, a Christian liberties issue, or a preference/personal perspective issue? Or is it a combination of issues?
- What does she need most from you, and how will you address this?
- What passages of scripture provide guidance for this situation?
- What biblical principles might be helpful?
- What lessons from church history, from other people's experience, from my own experience, might be helpful to consider?
- Consider this situation from the perspective of other ethical models. How would a Protestant Liberal decide what to do in this situation? A Roman Catholic? A Muslim? A Charismatic? A Secularist? Joseph Fletcher? Joel Osteen?

Case Study #3: [To be submitted by the students???)

- How will you respond to this person? Will you approach this as a moral issue, a wisdom issue, a Christian liberties issue, or a preference/personal perspective issue? Or is it a combination of issues?
- What does she need most from you, and how will you address this?
- What passages of scripture provide guidance for this situation?
- What biblical principles might be helpful?
- What lessons from church history, from other people's experience, from my own experience, might be helpful to consider?
- Consider this situation from the perspective of other ethical models. How would a Protestant Liberal decide what to do in this situation? A Roman Catholic? A Muslim? A Charismatic? A Secularist? Joseph Fletcher? Joel Osteen?