

I want to begin this message by anticipating something we'll see towards the end of it. I want us to see what the apostle Paul does in Ephesians 5. It's significant how Paul connects ethics to theology. When addressing a controversial ethical dilemma, before talking about *what* to do, he first speaks to the *why* question. He shows believers the basis for the counsel that follows.

In Ephesians 5 Paul addresses the issue of how to deal with church members who are sexually active. This is a topic of great interest in the world (then and now). What should a Christian do? How does Paul address the question? First, he spends four chapters talking about other foundational matters, which are *doctrinal* matters, such as the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man and sin, the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of the church, and so forth. Then he walks out on to that theological platform and starts building his ethical response regarding sexual activity.

The platform for ethics is always doctrine. That's true for Hollywood, as much as it is for the Christian, and the Muslim, the Hindu, and even the atheist too. We do what we do because of what we believe, and specifically what we believe regarding the subjects of God, man, sin, salvation, and how we know the truth about these things (for us, this is bibliology).

In Ephesians 5, Paul is going to talk plainly about sex, but he first reminds his readers of the person of God and the redemptive work of Christ. This is the best foundation upon which we can meaningfully talk about this (and any other) ethical dilemma. Listen as I read Ephesians 5:1–17:

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. <sup>3</sup> But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. <sup>4</sup> Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not become partners with them; <sup>8</sup> for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, <sup>14</sup> for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” <sup>15</sup> Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

Do you see how Paul connects ethics to theology? He talks about God in verse 1, and the sacrifice of Christ in verse 2. That's theology. Then he talks about various forms of sexual immorality in verses 3-4, including joking about it, and fantasizing about it, and says this is out of place for the Christian. That's ethics. And why is it out of place? He returns to theology in verse 5 and talks about the kingdom of God.

This is how we ought to approach an ethical dilemma. Not by taking a poll to see what the majority of people think. Not by going to the shelf and seeing what the latest experts are saying either. We need to put on the cap of the biblical theologian.

In our first lesson I mentioned an observation by 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."<sup>1</sup>

So how to express our sexuality is a matter of our religion. The atheist has a set of beliefs regarding God, man, sin, and salvation, and what he believes affects what he considers to be acceptable regarding sexuality. The same is true for the worshipper of Baal in the Old Testament, and those who believed in the Roman gods in New Testament times, as we saw last time.

*A brief review of what we've seen so far...*

Three weeks ago we began this series, "***Christian Ethics: Learning to Think Christianly about Ethical Dilemmas.***" We've been using one particular dilemma as a touch point. A young lady (she could be your granddaughter, or your friend) invites you to her wedding. She says she is marrying a woman. Should you go? What's the *right* thing to do?

Last time I suggested that this series will not serve us well if all we do is provide *answers* to pressing ethical dilemmas. Why? Because next year there will be new dilemmas. What we need is to learn to *think Christianly*, that is, theologically or biblically.. How do we do that? It takes work, and this work involves several steps of action.

From week one...

*1. To think Christianly, we must resolve to take a Biblical approach when addressing an ethical dilemma.*

We must develop and apply the **theological pyramid** when we make decisions. That means that 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.

From week two...

*2. To think Christianly, we must operate with a correct view of the person and purposes of God Himself.*

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<sup>1</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, p. 5.

Since God is infinite, this will always be a work in progress. There's always more to know about God! But what we know, we know. And we should be able to articulate what we know, and apply it as we make ethical decisions. Here's a brief starting point.

**Theological Proper** – Who is God? He is the Creator of everything. All things are from Him, through Him, and to Him. He is a triune God, and has existed eternally as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, who are equal in essence, but distinct in function. That statement has great significance when it comes to matters of gender and sexuality.

**Bibliology** – How does God speak to us? He makes some of His attributes known through creation (such as His power and wisdom), which is often called general revelation. But it's through the Scriptures, His special revelation, that He gives us everything we need for life and godliness. Ultimately, this Book introduces us to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our greatest need.

**Anthropology** – the doctrine of man. Man is created in the image of God, male and female. We exist for God, for His purposes, to reflect His likeness, to care for His world, to serve and enjoy Him.

**Hamartiology** – What is sin? Sin is displeasing God. The Bible teaches that we have inherited a sin nature from Adam, and enter this world cut off from God. Then from birth, we immediately begin to go our own way, and experience the consequences of sin.

**Soteriology** – Is there a solution for man's problem with sin? Praise God, yes! Christianity has a clear soteriology, and says that God has provided the remedy for man's problem of sin, and the remedy is His Son, and His work on the cross. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And once saved, we joyfully live for the glory of God alone.

Towards the end of our previous study, we began to connect our theology to our ethical dilemma. Should we go to our granddaughter's (or friend's) wedding? And we asked some questions.

What do I know about the **doctrine of God** that will help me make this decision? I know He is holy and righteous, that He hates sin, for it's displeasing to Him, and He knows it's not in our best interest. I know that He is a triune God, and that our male-female distinction is part of how He intends for us to rightly image Him. I know that a "same sex couple marriage" fails to recognize this beautiful distinction, and distorts it.

I also know God is loving and merciful and gracious, and calls me to be the same, even towards those who are sinning against Him. How can I best do that in this situation? Is there a way to exhibit both grace and truth?

What do I know about the **doctrine of the Bible**? I know that the Bible is God's Word, that it is His Owner's Manual for life, that it's good, good for me, and for my grand-daughter, too. I know I am never to call something "good" that He says is "evil", nor to call it "evil" if He calls it "good."

What do I know about the **doctrine of man and sin**? I know that I am a sinner, meaning I'm prone to go my own way rather than God's. I know that because of the noetic effect of sin, I'm prone to think wrongly (apart from grace, that's my bent). So I certainly understand what's happening in my grand-daughter's life. I know how much we both need grace.

What do I know about the **doctrine of salvation**? I know that this is my greatest need, and my grand-daughter's, and everyone else's. It's not merely to live a moral life (hell will be full of moral people). It's to know Christ as Lord and Savior. And God freely offers this salvation by His grace, to all who will repent and believe in His Son.

This is how I must view my ethical dilemma, *as an opportunity* to see the true and living God put the glory of His saving grace on display. What can I do that would most contribute to that glorious end?

But there are other steps to consider before we're ready to make our decision, including this one. We must take a closer look at the various biblical texts that undergird our systematic theology.

*3. To think Christianly, we must identify and examine specific Bible passages that address our ethical dilemma. We are looking for biblical instructions and principles that will help us determine what is the most God-pleasing way to think and act in this situation.*

I'll first mention the key texts, and then we'll consider them one by one:

- The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5)
- The book of Proverbs, which gives us another category, "wise" versus "unwise"
- Jesus' sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7)
- New Testament "one another" commands, especially "Love one another"
- Christian liberty passages (Romans 14-15; 1 Corinthians 8-10)
- The book of Ephesians, which provides a concise framework for approaching ethics
- Ephesians 5:1-5, which shows us in specific terms how to deal with sexual sin

Also from week two...

### **The Ten Commandments**

When it comes to ethics, this is a vital place to begin, for two reasons. First, the Ten Commandments show us what God is like. We learn that He is a revealing God (1). He is a personal God (2). He is a redeeming God (2).

Second, the Ten Commandments show us what God expects. In commands #1-4, He deals with our relationship with Him. #1 He is exclusive (so, no other gods). #2 He is unique (so, no images). #3 He is holy (so, no profanity). #4 He is the Creator (so, remember the sabbath).

Then in commands #5-10, He deals with our relationships with others. #5 He is pro-authority (so, honor your parents). #6 He is pro-life (so, no murder). #7 He is pro-family (so, no adultery). #8 He is sufficient (so, no stealing). #9 He is the truth (so, no deceiving). #10 He is worthy (so, no coveting things).

Wayne Grudem rightly uses the term "protecting." He suggests that this is what God is doing in the Ten Commandments, and I agree. God didn't give these commands merely to restrict (that's a negative purpose), but protect (that's a positive purpose). These ten commands protect God's honor, human authority, human life, marriage, property, and the purity of heart.

Protect. That's a good word to keep in mind as we are considering how to respond to our dilemma. If protecting is God's aim, that should be our aim as well.

But there's more. God has given us other key biblical texts to consider that pertain to ethics.

New material week three...

### **The book of Proverbs**

Proverbs gives us another vital category. Not right/wrong, but "wise" versus "unwise". Proverbs isn't law, but wisdom literature. It's not "Thus says the Lord," but "What's the wisest way to respond in this situation?"

Let's look at a couple of examples. In Proverbs 4:10-11 "Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness."

So, here is a dad (Solomon) giving counsel to his son. He says this counsel is like a path or road. He calls it “the way of wisdom.” Think of wisdom, then, like a path or road. With any road, there are ditches to avoid on both sides. But there’s also some freedom on a road, regarding how fast to go, how close to the edge, etc.

Let’s look at a more specific example. Proverbs 5:7–9 says, “And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house,<sup>9</sup> lest you give your honor to others and your years to the merciless.”

Is it wrong for a man to walk down a certain street at night, near the home of a certain woman? No, but it certainly isn’t wise. And if you do, bad things are likely to happen.

Here’s another example. Proverbs 6:6–11 says, “Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise...How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?<sup>10</sup> A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,<sup>11</sup> and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.”

Is it wrong to sleep in until 10:30 in the morning? No, it’s not morally wrong. But it’s not wise. And rather than just saying, “Don’t do it, because I said so!”, wisdom gives reasons as to why it’s not wise. If you just do what you feel like doing, like sleeping in, you’ll likely end up in poverty.

The point is, not every issue is a right/wrong issue. In Proverbs, God shows us there are wisdom issues too. And life is certainly filled with situations where wisdom is needed.

This should prompt us to ask a key question, any time we’re facing an ethical dilemma. Am I facing a right/wrong ethical dilemma, or a wise/unwise situation? Is this a clear moral issue, or a wisdom issue?

There’s something else to consider, something the Lord Jesus shows us in a third passage.

### **Jesus’ sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7)**

This certainly is a very familiar sermon, and we’ve spent months looking at it in the past. Based on that study, I want to ask a question pertinent to our current study. What do we learn about ethics from Jesus’ sermon on the mount?

In this sermon Jesus gives essentially “Kingdom Living 101.” He makes it clear how His followers are to live, and that the standard is certainly high. In fact, His standard prepares us for what follows in Matthew 8-28, namely, His redemptive work on the cross, for only redeemed people have the power to live the kind of life that pleases God.

We also see a progression in this sermon. Jesus starts with the beatitudes (what we’re to be) and similitudes (what we’re to be like, salt and light). Then He moves to concrete examples of ethical situations, such as lust, divorce, anger, etc [to learn more, see the sermon transcript of Matthew 5:1-3].

But Jesus does something quite interesting in this sermon. He quotes Old Testament law several times, as well as citing how people interpreted the law, by saying, “You have heard that it was said.” But then He goes deeper, saying, “But I say to you.”

For instance, the Law says it’s wrong to commit adultery, but I say it’s wrong to lust in one’s heart. The law says murder is wrong, but I say so is anger toward your brother in your heart.

This is vital for us to see as we’re facing an ethical dilemma. We must start with, “Is there a God-given command that addresses this situation?” If so, we must obey it. It’s as simple as that. Or is it? Jesus says, “Yes, we should obey God’s commands, but what’s going on in the heart matters too.”

In other words, the Ten Commandments show us we should be concerned about what is right/wrong. Proverbs show us that wisdom matters (“What’s the wisest way to handle this situation?”).

But Jesus now shows us that, in whatever we do, *the heart matters to God*. God sees the heart. He cares about what's going on in our hearts. He holds us accountable for the thoughts and desires of our hearts.

So, I can do the right thing (like not going to the wedding), even the wise thing, but displease God if my heart is not right. For instance, if I'm condescending, or making an idol out of peace, etc.

Yet there's more to see. God has given us another group of passages we need to consider.

### **New Testament "one another" commands, especially "Love one another"**

We've studied these forty or so commands before as well [see transcripts]. Edify one another. Pray for one another. Serve one another. Exhort one another. And the one that pulls them all together. *Love one another*. Jesus Himself said this command sums it all up for His followers (John 13:34-35).

So, concerning ethics, what's the take away? The take away is that, in every situation, in every dilemma, we must always seek to do the most loving thing, towards God and others. When the ethical waters get muddy, and the best course of action isn't clear, this helps. What course of action could I take right now that would demonstrate love for God (first) and for others (next, ahead of myself) most clearly?

Here's what we've learned so far. When facing an ethical dilemma, I must choose the right option, and make sure my heart is right. If there's no direct command from Scripture, I should choose the wisest option. If I'm not sure, I ought to choose the option that would most demonstrate my love for God and others. If I'm still not sure, perhaps it's because there are two other categories that need consideration. The first is Christian liberties. The other is personal preferences.

### **Christian liberty passages (Romans 14-15; 1 Corinthians 8-10)**

What is a "Christian liberty"? It's when we face a situation where there are no clear biblical commands, nor clear wisdom principles, to show us what to do. Instead, it's a situation where two Christians simply differ, primarily because of backgrounds, and there's not a right way or a wrong way to handle this. When that happens, there must be liberty.

For instance, in Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8-10, Paul addresses a matter of ethical concern pertaining to food. Suppose someone sacrifices an animal to a pagan god. That's clearly wrong, but it happens. So if it does, what about the meat? Is it appropriate for a Christian to go to the market and buy a piece of meat that came from an animal that had been offered to a false god? Or, suppose a Christian is invited to his non-Christian-neighbor's house, and the neighbor grills some meat that came from the pagan temple. Should he eat it?

As with the previous categories, we've taught on this subject before [see transcript, "*Christian Liberties: What to Do When Christians Differ*"]. For our purposes now, let's remind ourselves of the bottom line. Based on 1 Corinthians 10:23-33, here are eight questions we should ask ourselves to determine if we should do something...

1. *Is it beneficial? (23)*
2. *Is it constructive? (23)*
3. *Is it for the good of others? (24)*
4. *Will it violate my conscience? (25-26)*
5. *Will it violate someone else's conscience? (27-30)*
6. *Can I do it for the glory of God? (31)*
7. *Will it cause anyone to stumble? (32)*
8. *Will it contribute to the salvation of others? (33)*

Now back to the question. Is it okay to eat that meat? Paul says, essentially, sometimes yes, sometimes no. Christians may differ in this decision, and that's okay. This is not a matter where there's only one right option. This is a matter of Christian liberty.

So, in ethical dilemmas, there are clear moral issues, wisdom issues, and Christian liberty issues. There may be a fourth, called *preference/personal perspective* issues, which we'll talk more about in a moment. But first, there's another key biblical text to consider.

### **The book of Ephesians**

In the book of Ephesians, the Lord provides us with a concise framework for approaching ethics. Ephesians isn't really a book, but a letter, and not just any letter, but a God-breathed letter from an apostle to a local church. And the people in this local church were facing some problems. Paul addresses those problems in chapters four through six, problems such as communication challenges, marriage challenges, parenting challenges, work challenges, and more.

We're not going to take time to read and study the letter now (we've done that before). I want us to think of Ephesians like a pair of glasses. When making ethical decision, we need to put on our Ephesians glasses. We need to think Ephesianly. In other words, we must do what I mentioned at the beginning of this message. We must connect our ethical response to our theology. Before talking about *what* to do, we must first remind ourselves *what we believe*.

### **Ephesians 5:1-5 shows us in specific terms how to deal with sexual sin.**

In Ephesians 5 Paul addresses the issue of how to deal with church members who are sexually active. How does Paul address the question? First, he spends four chapters talking about *doctrine*, such as the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man and sin, the doctrine of salvation, and the doctrine of the church. Then he puts on those theological glasses and gives his ethical response regarding sexual activity.

The platform for ethics is always doctrine. We do what we do because of what we believe, and specifically what we believe regarding the subjects of God, man, sin, salvation, and how we know the truth about these things (for us, this is bibliology).

So with his theological glasses on, in Ephesians 5 Paul talks plainly about sex. And he does so by reminding his readers of the person of God and the redemptive work of Christ. This is the best foundation upon which we can meaningfully talk about this (and any other) ethical dilemma.

[If you want to know more about the answer he gives, see the transcript "Straight Talk about Overcoming Sexual Sin"]

But we're still not quite ready to make our ethical decision. What have we seen so far? If we're going to think Christianly in making this decision, we must...

1. We must resolve to take a Biblical approach by applying the theological pyramid.
2. We must operate with a correct view of the person and purposes of God Himself.
3. We must examine specific Bible passages that address our ethical dilemma. We are looking for biblical instructions and principles that will help us determine what is the most God-pleasing way to think and act in this situation.

Then comes a fourth step. I mentioned it earlier, but now it's time to elaborate.

*4. To think Christianly, we must recognize that the Bible provides us with four categories (and there may be others) that pertain to decision-making.*

Not all decisions are created equal. Specifically, there are **moral** issues, **wisdom** issues, **Christian liberty** issues, and **preference/perspective** issues.

In **moral issues**, the options are clearly right versus wrong. Case in point, the Ten Commandments, which show us the divine, objective standard regarding certain things that are right and wrong. These are not ten *suggestions*. It's always wrong to make an idol and worship it. It's always wrong to commit adultery, and murder, and covet.

Samuel had this category in mind when he told the people in 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*."

We see another example in 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."

In **wisdom issues**, the options are wise versus unwise. As we just saw in Proverbs, it's not morally wrong to keep turning over in bed, but it's not wise.

Then there are **Christian liberty issues** where both options may be right depending on timing and maturity. In Romans 14:23 Paul says, "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." So a situation may be wrong for me (like eating meat), not because it is inherently wrong, but because of my weak conscience.

Here's the fourth category, **preference/personal perspective issues**. For example, when someone tells you, "Now that's the right way to cook a steak, medium well!" He's not talking in moral terms, but sharing his preference.

We see this language in the Bible in 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.'"

Sometimes we're not facing a moral issue, nor a wisdom issue, not even a Christian liberty issue, but a preference issue. For instance, when I was an RA at a Christian college, and even more so later, when I was an RD in a men's dorm at another Christian college, we had rules. For the sake of good community life, we had to have rules. Everyone has rules. *No taking a shower after midnight*. Why such a rule? If you lived in our apartment, or Room 101 right next to the community bathroom, you were glad for such a rule. Otherwise, you'd have a hard time getting to sleep at night.

But we get into trouble when we put all rules into one category. What's the purpose for that rule? Because God says so? No. We used to talk about three categories. Some rules are based on biblical absolutes. Some on biblical principles. Still others are simply institutional/personal preferences.

This is true for a church like WBC. One way to visualize this is by using the "hierarchy of beliefs." Draw a vertical line and number it 1 to 10. When it comes to our beliefs, there are numbers 9 & 10 issues, which are biblical absolutes (such as, we believe in the Deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, etc). Moving down the line we come to biblical principles, numbers 4, 5, and six (such as, we believe in baptism by immersion, and congregational rule). Then there are bottom level, institutional preference issues (such as, we believe the ESV is a good Bible translation to use for preaching; others might say, the KJV; still others might say, "We believe we should use a praise band in our corporate worship," while for others, "We believe in using piano and organ").



The point is, when it comes to an ethical decision, we need to think through the categories. What are we dealing with here: a moral, wisdom, Christian liberty, or preference issue? This brings us to another vital step.

*5. To think Christianly, we must develop and apply a biblical model for decision-making.*

An ethical decision is just that, a *decision*. Here's another area where we tend to get into trouble. We've never really developed a biblical approach to decision-making.

I urge you to exercise caution regarding the "traditional" model of decision-making 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. As long as I'm not violating Scriptural commands, I have freedom in developing legitimate options.

What does this look like? I recommend using a decision-making model developed by Professor James Grier (you can find it in our WBC Counseling Training track 2). This model stresses the importance of identifying the values we hold, and then applying those values in a very intentional (and prayerful) way to the decision. It also emphasizes the importance of considering as many options as possible before making the decision.

To put it another way, when the Bible is not clear, we are free to do the most loving thing.

*6. To think Christianly, we must seek to apply biblical principles to our contemporary ethical dilemmas.*

To put it simply, if a decision has to be made, then let's prayerfully work through the above steps, and then make decision. We must act. So let's do this regarding our hypothetical dilemma.

Should I go to the wedding? There are actually several layers to this dilemma.

Your friend says she's marrying another woman. That's a moral issue, right? It's a violation of clear biblical texts (like Genesis 1:26-27 and Genesis 2:24). It's also a misrepresentation of Theology Proper, for when an image-bearer of God chooses "to marry" someone of the same sex, it's a choice that distorts the Triune nature of God which He intends marriage to portray.

So my friend's choice is a moral issue. What about my choice? Should I go to the wedding? Is this a moral issue, a wisdom issue, a Christian liberty issue, or a personal preference issue? It's not as clear as the previous question.

Is this simply a preference issue? That's what the world would say. But no, it's not merely a preference issue because the Scriptures address it. How?

Is it a Christian liberty issue? Can two Christ-followers differ on this matter, and both be choosing a God-pleasing option? Perhaps. But if it's truly a Christian liberty issue, it means I must carefully apply the questions we posed earlier, particularly, "Will it violate my conscience? Or will it violate someone else's conscience?"

Is this a wisdom issue? It sure seems to be, and if so, here's what I need to ask myself. Would it be wise or unwise for me to attend this wedding? What would my presence at this wedding communicate, to the couple, to the other guests, to other people who don't go but know I did? On the other hand, what would my absence communicate to the same people?

But there's certainly also a moral element to this scenario. Does the Bible address which wedding ceremonies are appropriate for God's people to attend? Not directly, but it does give biblical principles that may help us. For instance, Isaiah 5:20-21 says, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil." What will I say when the wedding ceremony ends and I approach the couple? Can I say in all honesty, "Congratulations? I wish all the best for you both?"

Perhaps there are other options to consider. If so, what are they? Here's where the decision-making model comes in. Clearly, one option is to go, and a second option is *not* to go. But is there a third option, and a fourth, and fifth?

Yes, there are many options. Like, I could *not* go, but send a gift. Or, I could *not* go to the ceremony, but go (with the couple's permission) to the reception.

I'm not suggesting this option, but I could go, with the hope that the minister offers the traditional, "Should anyone present know of any reason that this couple should not be joined in holy matrimony, speak now or forever hold your peace," and I could say, "Yes, I know a reason. This isn't holy matrimony. But praise God, there's hope for people like us who do unholy things, through His holy Son, Jesus Christ."

Here's the option I think I prefer. How about, as soon as you get the wedding invitation, inviting the couple to your own home, giving them a nice meal, and affirming your love for both people, while also expressing your concerns, and the source of these concerns, which is God's good purpose for marriage? And saying, "You know I can't come, for I can't call something 'good' unless I'm convinced that God's Word says it is good. But I do love you, and I want what's best for you, and I will be here for you in the future, no matter what you need."

#### Recommendation: Where to go next?

I encourage you to consider participating in an online course at Tri-State Bible College, called **Ministry Ethics**. This course will build on what we've addressed in this series on Christian Ethics, and address more specific challenges facing ministers. Such as, 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?

In this course, we'll be asking, what contribution does the following supplemental reading add to our understanding of Christian ethics?

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

We'll also work on some case studies as we seek to grow in our ability to take a biblical approach to addressing various contemporary ethical challenges.

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?