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BIBLICAL ETHICS AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

A GUIDED LEARNING BOOK

**BY
JAMES E. GILES**

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

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BIBLICAL ETHICS and CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

**FIRST COURSE
CHRISTIAN ETHICS**

by James E. Giles

CARIB BAPTIST PUBLICATIONS



Dedication

To David, Karen, Gary, and Debbie,
Now parents also,
Treasures from God
in human vessels.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Biblical Ethics and Contemporary Issues was first published in 1978. It has been a useful tool for students over the years as a good general introduction to ethics with an overview of the field and applications to Christian life and counselling. However, it has become evident that questions concerning life (in its beginning), living (in an increasingly complicated world), and death and dying (issues relating to the termination of life), have brought more difficulties in making ethical decisions, though the need for such decisions and a pragmatic or situational approach to those decisions have become more generalized. Some have perhaps thought that the author supported this situational or pragmatic view, through the error of reading only very small parts of this work and taking some statements out of their context. This practice can distort anyone's understanding of any text. Just as we advocate taking a Scripture text in its context and in the context of the whole Bible, so we advocate taking any one topic in this text in its context, and in the context of the book as a whole.

The author has made revisions in the text. One entire chapter on bioethics has been added and substantial material on the sources of authority in Christian ethics as well. This has made it necessary to combine two former chapters of the text in order to maintain the twelve lesson format. Since the new chapter treats an area that has only recently begun to be written about extensively and for which the original supplementary text, *Introducing Christian Ethics* by Henlee H. Barnette, is inadequate, the editor has found an additional resource for the supplementary and advanced activities for Chapter 12. The additional text used, and which students of Levels 2 and 3 should obtain for their use, is *Understanding Christian Ethics* edited by William Tillman, published by Broadman Press, Nashville, Tennessee.

The student learning activities have been prepared by the staff of the Multilingual Department of the Baptist Spanish Publishing House, which is responsible for languages other than Spanish, under the imprint of Carib Baptist Publications.

The editor hopes that this course will continue to be a useful tool for those seeking understanding of and guidance in making decisions based on Biblical ethics.

1994

DONNA M. ENGE

PREFACE

No area of knowledge has experienced as much turbulence in the last quarter of century as that of ethics. The moral revolution that has transpired during this time will have long lasting results upon the present and future generations. The disintegration of marriage and family relations, the increase in crime and violence in our streets and neighborhoods, conflicts resulting from racial tensions throughout the world, and corruption among civil and political leaders all are symptomatic of a world that is lacking in ethical and moral underpinnings that would give a sound basis for happiness and harmony in human relations. The present work is an attempt to delineate the basic ethical principles of the Christian faith which, if applied, can transform the world.

The Christian population of Africa is estimated to triple to a total of 350 million by A.D. 2000. This number will be nearly half the total estimated population of 768 million people. The Christian Church there is trying to prepare for this growth and anticipates being able to use this study guide with English-speaking people on that continent. This fact alone is motivation to prepare the manuscript. But when I think of all the other English-speaking people in the world who will also be using the text, I count it a privilege to be a part of this significant enterprise.

The original work was written in Spanish with the realization that it would be used principally in evangelical theological education in Latin America. For this reason, the original work made frequent references to Latin America and Roman Catholicism. In the English edition, I have tried to make the application of principles as general as possible in order for them to apply to any part of the world.

The purpose of this volume is to provide an introduction to Christian ethics. This study guide is an attempt to recognize that biblical revelation must be rightly interpreted in order for it to give us adequate ethical and moral guidance. The first part of the volume is a summary of the ethical teachings of the books of the Bible. The Old Testament as well as the New Testament are dealt with in this section. A study of the ethics of the Old Testament will help us to appreciate more fully our heritage from the Hebrew people and their ethical sensitivity as revealed in the Old Testament.

Also, the ethical teachings of Jesus, Paul, and the other writers of the New Testament are discussed at length. These biblical teachings provide the bases of ethical authority for us today. An attempt is made to apply these teachings to life in the twentieth century.

The second part of the book subjects contemporary issues to the scrutiny, judgement, and correction of the ethical principles discovered in the Bible. These judgements and suggested patterns of behaviour for the contemporary Christian are based on Christian teachings and the use of intelligence and scientific knowledge. The chapters have to do with man in his responsibilities towards the various institutions of society, including a sane attitude towards himself, Christian principles for family relations, economic problems, civic and social relations, and a brief mention of some special problems for the last quarter of this century. While this section will neither answer all the questions nor solve all the problems, it will throw some light upon the issues, thereby enabling one to find the courage to make his own decisions and to live more comfortably with them.

I have chosen to use the King James Version for the Bible references. The student may wish to compare this version with any of the several other versions in English in current usage.

I would like to express gratitude to various people who have contributed notably to my formation through the years. Among the many professors in college and seminary to whom I am indebted, I mention two: Drs. T. B. Maston and C. W. Scudder, my major professors in Christian ethics in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Their mature insight and guidance helped me to become oriented as a young adult and to be awakened to many of the ethical issues which face us today.

I have lived and worked the greater part of my adult life in one of the developing nations. Some refer to these nations as the Third World. Seeing the struggles of the masses of these people has made me more sympathetic with them, their needs, and their hopes. I think that I have evolved through the years into a more understanding and flexible person because of what I have seen and experienced.

I would also like to express appreciation to my wife and four children, who have been a constant source of stimulus and inspiration to me. They have been sympathetic and supportive of this project all along the way.

This volume is sent forth with the prayer that it may help people to understand better their duties towards God and their fellow-man. This is a worthy goal, and its realization will bring satisfaction to the writer.

JAMES E. GILES

El Paso, Texas
May, 1994

MINISTERIAL TRAINING BY GUIDED STUDY

Ministerial Training by Guided Study is designed to introduce students on various levels of academic preparation to the Bible and related areas. This is not a correspondence course, nor the traditional lecture to make quality theological training available to all students. Family and church responsibilities and lack of academic prerequisites and finances prevent many men and women who have been called of God from improving their ministry through training. These obstacles can be overcome by an approach which emphasizes self-study and weekly small group discussions. The study guides are designed for students on three levels of preparations:

1. Students with some primary education
2. Students with some secondary education
3. Students with some university qualifications

Although this course is designed primarily for pastors and ministerial candidates with no seminary training, laymen and lay preachers can also benefit from some of the courses. Pastors with divinity degrees might use some of the study guides as refresher courses while serving as leaders of study groups and conveners of the weekly seminars.

Study guides are used to direct private and group activities in the mastery of the content of a subject. They contain the basic content for each subject and recommend supplementary sources for a more advanced study. Questions are included to direct the attention of the student to the important facts in the lessons and to provide an immediate response to the material read. Weekly seminars of approximately an hour for each subject provide opportunities for the discussion of issues related to the subjects and their practical application in contemporary life. A teacher or tutor guides the seminar discussions, but the students from all three levels present and discuss their ideas. When students come to the seminar with a basic understanding of the lesson, the seminar can be dedicated to enrichment of the subject and to discussion of the practical use of the material in the life of the Church.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THE STUDY GUIDE

Text and learning activities

The study guide is designed primarily for home study. When the guide is opened, the text appears on the left side of the page, and questions requiring an immediate response to the material read are on the right. The student should read a paragraph before reading and answering the question or questions for that paragraph. If there are no questions for a paragraph, he may wish to make a few notes on that paragraph and move on to the next. The questions and answers should be covered with a strip of paper (see following page) until the paragraph has been read and the student is ready to answer each question. Then the cover sheet should be moved down the page far enough to enable the reading of the question and the writing of the answer. The answer according to the text appears immediately under the question. After the student has written his own answer, he may then compare it with the given answer. If the two are not the same, the paragraph in the text should be read again.

Home study exercises

A **home study exercise** appears at the end of each lesson. The study guide contains the basic content for each lesson, and the questions of the **basic assignment** are to be answered by all three levels. After reading the text and doing the learning activity on each page, the student should be able to answer most of the home study questions without further reference to the text. These questions are self-testing exercises. If a student is unsure of the correct answer, he has not adequately learned the material in that particular section, and he should review until he is sure that he understands the content. Some questions call for more extensive answers and require concentrated effort for mastery. The completed questions serve as a summary of the lesson and should be helpful as a review.

Students on *Levels 2 and 3* are required to do **supplementary assignments** in addition to the basic exercises. The supplementary activities sometimes include a reading assignment in another book with questions to be answered.

Level 3 is required to do **advanced assignments** in addition to the basic and supplementary work. This work will vary according to the availability of library resources. Sometimes there will be questions over a parallel reading assignment in a recommended resource book. At other times, the questions will require independent or individual research. Bible dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and books on the subjects of the study guide are sources which should be consulted. A **bibliography** at the end of the study guide indicates where additional material may be found.

Seminar

It is suggested that the students of all three levels in a geographical area meet for an hour each week with a teacher or tutor to discuss the lesson with reference to—

1. problems encountered in home study in answering questions or in understanding the textual material;
2. the application of the lesson to the practical work of Christian ministry and conduct;
3. the significance of the lesson as a whole and its place in the total programme of ministerial training.

The fragmentary questions of the lesson may sometimes be answered without getting a picture of the lesson as a whole. It is also possible to learn the facts about Christianity without seeing their application in the life of the Church. The student is responsible for getting the detailed information of the lesson in his home study. Understanding the overall meaning of the lesson and its practical application should be the goal of the seminar.

Some seminar questions have been included with each lesson. Their purposes are—

1. to stimulate interest (some are controversial questions which have not been resolved by scholars);
2. to guide in the beginning of the seminar discussions;
3. to direct attention to problems related to the materials studied;
4. to require original thinking which will lead to suggestions for the practical application of the material.

Teacher or tutor

The teacher or tutor may offer other seminar questions which are more relevant in a given situation. He should feel free to use any approach he chooses as long as the discussion remains related to the material of the lesson. It is his responsibility to prevent the seminar discussion from departing from relevant issues.

The teacher may find that a brief test at the beginning of the seminar will be helpful. The test will encourage students to more adequately prepare their home study assignments and enable the teacher to evaluate the progress of each student. Two or three questions from the basic studies should be sufficient. Students who are not making satisfactory progress may need personal help and encouragement in preparing their lesson. They should not be overlooked!

LEARNING ACTIVITY

Use this sheet of paper to cover the learning activity on each page.

When you have finished reading each paragraph, slide the sheet down just far enough to expose the learning activity for that paragraph.

If there is no activity, continue to the next paragraph.

Write your answers

Then slide the sheet down farther to expose the suggested answers.

Compare your answers with the suggested ones. If they do not agree, reread the paragraph.

Continue to the next paragraph.

Cut to separate

LEARNING ACTIVITY

Use this sheet of paper to cover the learning activity on each page.

When you have finished reading each paragraph, slide the sheet down just far enough to expose the learning activity for that paragraph.

If there is no activity, continue to the next paragraph.

Write your answers

Then slide the sheet down farther to expose the suggested answers.

Compare your answers with the suggested ones. If they do not agree, reread the paragraph.

Continue to the next paragraph.