

Asbury College

Christian Ethics

Student Guide

ACHIEVE

Degree Completion Program



knowledge elements
educational products

(KEEP)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

A study of theoretical and practical problems of moral conduct and character, as well as proposed solutions, with an emphasis upon the nature of ethics, virtues, values, rights, obligations and opportunities.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The student will be able to:

1. Describe the role of ethics in decision making within organizations.
2. Differentiate between ethics and morality, as well as their role in relationship to Christian ethics, and share these differences.
3. Explain five alternatives to the Christian approach to ethics.
4. Articulate the relationship between personal values, ethical standards and ethical choices.
5. Summarize what human reason is and how it contributes to ethical issues.
6. Share contrasts between Old Testament and New Testament contributions to Christian ethics.
7. Express the ethical teachings of Jesus and Paul.
8. Explain how Christian ethics relates to such issues as human sexuality, life and death, ethnic minorities, the status of women, living in a democracy, punishment for crime, war and peace, and work, property and community.
9. Develop a written code of ethics for an organization.

TEXTS AND MATERIALS

Texts:

Holmes, Arthur F. *Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions*. Second Edition. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-8308-2803-6.

Smedes, Lewis B. *Mere Morality: What God Expects from Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987. ISBN 0-8028-0257-5.

Supplementary Materials (purchase not necessary):

Birch, Bruce C., and Larry L. Rasmussen. *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976.

Blanchard, Kenneth, and Norman Vincent Peale. *The Power of Ethical Management*. New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, 1988.

Campolo, Anthony. *Partly Right*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985.

Chewning, Richard C., ed. *Biblical Principles and Business: The Foundations*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1989.

Ferrell, O. C., and Gareth Gardiner. *In Pursuit of Ethics: Tough Choices in the World of Work*. Springfield, IL: Smith Collins Company, 1991.

Fletcher, Joseph. *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1966.

Freeman, R. Richard, ed. *Business Ethics: The State of the Art*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Greenleaf, Robert K. *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1977.

Haines, Byron L. *Ethics: Elementary Readings*. Dubuque, IO: Hunt Publishing Co., 1990.

Horn, Carl. *Whose Values? The Battle for Morality in Pluralistic America*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1985.

Moreland, J. P., and Norman L. Geiser. *The Life and Death Debate: Moral Issues of Our Time*. New York, NY: Praeger, 1990.

Newton, Lisa H. *Ethics in America: Source Reader*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989.

O'Dell, William E. *Effective Business Decision Making*. Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Business Books, 1991.

Pfeiffer, Raymond S., and Ralph P. Forsberg. *Ethics on the Job: Cases and Strategies*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1993.

- Phillips, W. Gary, and William E. Brown. *Making Sense of Your World from a Biblical Viewpoint*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1991.
- Satris, Stephen. *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Moral Issues*. Guilford, CT: Dushkin Publishing Group, 1988.
- Sire, James W. *The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View Catalog*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988.
- Taylor, Daniel. *Letters to My Children: A Father Passes on His Values*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989.
- Thielicke, Helmut, edited by William H. Lazareth. *Theological Ethics, Volume I: Foundations*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979.
- Thielicke, Helmut, edited by William H. Lazareth. *Theological Ethics, Volume II: Politics*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979.
- Thielicke, Helmut, translated by John W. Doberstein. *Theological Ethics, Volume III: Sex*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979.

STUDENT EVALUATION

Students in this accelerated course will be evaluated by the College's standard grading system. Refer to the Student Handbook or the College Catalog for further details. The criteria for determining your grade will be as follows:

1. (20%) Completion of assigned written exercises and reading (see Student Assignments pages for exact assignments).
2. (20%) Participation in class discussion and group activities. The criteria will be the quality and quantity of the contribution to the group.
3. (50%) Final Paper—Refer to the next page for information on how the Final Paper is to be prepared. The Final Paper will be due one week after the final class period delivered to the College, sent by e-mail, or postmarked on that date. Turning in the Final Paper late will result in a penalty on the grade for the Final Paper.
4. (10%) Quality of comments, insight and extent of learning as reflected in the student's journal. The student is required to write in the journal at the close of each class session and may add to it at other times such as after reading an assignment or completing an exercise. The journal is to be handed in with the Final Paper.

Attendance: Any class missed must be made up. The student is obligated to contact the instructor to make suitable arrangements in case of any absence or tardiness. Unexcused absences and absences not made up will adversely affect the student's grade.

Late Work Or Work Not Handed In: Any written exercise or the Final Paper handed in after 6 p.m. on the due date will result in a reduction of the grade for that item. Any item not turned in will result in an "F" for that item and a reduction in grade for the course.

FINAL PAPER

Each student must complete a Final Paper. Students may use any material in developing the Final Paper, but every word (unless expressly quoted with appropriate credits given) must be that of the student submitting the paper. Any use of material written by another person without credit given will be considered plagiarism which is a serious offense in the academic community. Plagiarism will result in an "F" for the Final Paper.

Students are encouraged to take notes on how they will respond to the Final Paper as they progress through the course including making notations in their class notes or in their journals. The journal is intended to be a major help in producing the Final Paper. As a result, it is very important that the journal writing be taken seriously. In addition, the journal itself constitutes a part of the student's grade for the course.

The Final Paper is to be submitted in typewritten, double-spaced form on one side only of 8½" x 11" white paper. A cover sheet should clearly indicate the student's name, course name, instructor's name and the date submitted. The Final Paper will be due one week after the final class period.

Each question is to be repeated prior to stating the response. Each question and response is to begin on a separate page. All pages are to be stapled together and appear in numerical order. Please respond to the following:

1. What is ethics and how does it have an impact upon daily life (both professional and personal)?
2. Of the alternatives/approaches to Christian ethics, which makes the most sense to you and why?
3. Discuss the implications of at least five of the teachings of Jesus for setting ethical standards (give the Scripture reference).
4. Discuss the implications of at least five of the teachings of Paul for setting ethical standards (give the Scripture reference).
5. What is the most serious ethical issue (either for you personally or for society as a whole) faced today? Defend your choice with information about the issue and how it relates to ethical standards and choices. Make it clear as to whether this is a personal issue or a societal issue.

COURSE OVERVIEW

In this course we examine one aspect of philosophy, the field of ethics. Ethics is a major theme of this program. It is one of the fields in which Christians and their studies can contribute significantly to understanding how organizations can function within standards set by society.

Most organizations today have a considerable interest in ethics and how it can contribute to their decision-making process. Part of this is motivated by legal issues (new legislation, discovery of current or prior issues) or a growing interest by business and industry in desiring to live by a code of ethics which can guide their decision making. In fact, there is a tendency to believe that doing business in accordance with accepted ethical standards is also good business (e.g., profitability and meeting the organization's mission statement).

In this course you will come to a deeper understanding of what ethics is and what it means to look at ethics from a Christian worldview.

It is intended that the study of ethics will be helpful for managers or supervisors, and Christian leaders who have a framework based upon Christian ethics to be continuously used in the decision-making process. Each student should be able to carry away from this learning experience both a theoretical and a practical framework for making decisions.

You will conclude your course in Christian ethics with the experience of preparing a code of ethics (or editing an existing one) for the organization where you work (or another organization) which you can bring back to the organization for possible implementation. The process of writing it will cause you to examine what your values tell you should be included in ethical standards for decision making.

LOGISTICS CHART

| Hour | Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 | Week 5 |
|------|--|--|--|--|--|
| 1 | Introduction to Christian Ethics Ethical Choices Are Based on Values | The Bible as a Source of Guidance Ethics and the Ego | Justice and Human Rights | Human Sexuality and Marriage | The Status of Women A Code of Ethics |
| 2 | (continued) The Moral Revolution | (continued) Personal Judgment Break | Moral Knowledge Break | The Covenant in Relationships Break | (continued) War and the Quest for Peace Break |
| 3 | Break Cultural Relativism Emotivist Ethics | (continued) Writing a Code of Ethics Utilitarianism | Faith and Ethics Love and Ethics | Life and Death: Biomedical Issues | Legislating Morality Integrity, Self-Discipline and Virtue |
| 4 | (continued) What Is Ethical in the Work Setting? Journal Entry | (continued) Developing a Christian Ethic Journal Entry | The Basis of Obligation Journal Entry | Human Rights and Punishment Journal Entry | Making Ethical Choices Journal Entry Course Evaluation |

STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS

Week One

1. Read the Course Overview in the Student Guide.
2. Read Smedes, Chapter 1 ("Commands for Fiddlers"), and complete written responses to the following study questions:
 1. Discuss the difference between a code of law with property as the center (Hittites and Assyrians) and a code of law with human beings as the center (Moses).
 2. What are the three questions relating to biblical commandments Smedes proposes for addressing the ethical issues in the remainder of the book?
3. Read Holmes, the Preface, Chapters 1, 2 and 3, and complete written responses to the following study questions:

Chapter 1, "The Moral Revolution"

1. Holmes states: "Ethics is about the good . . . and about the right." Discuss the meaning of this statement from Holmes' perspective.
2. What does the Bible contribute to the study of philosophical ethics from the viewpoint of Holmes?

Chapter 2, "Cultural Relativism"

1. What do you think Holmes means when he says ethics is "a normative discipline interested in the truth or falsity of moral beliefs"?
2. Explain Holmes' statement: "Diversity seems to be more widespread in specific application than in principle."

Chapter 3, "Emotivist Ethics"

1. What is ethical emotivism?
 2. After reading this chapter, what do you think is the Christian's best response to ethical emotivism?
4. Read "Ethical Choices Are Based on Values" in the Student Guide and complete a written response to the following study question:

Explain how the writer relates values we hold to behavior.

Week Two

1. Read Holmes, Chapters 4, 5 and 6, and complete written responses to the following study questions:

Chapter 4, "Ethical Egoism"

1. How does egoism compare with utilitarianism?
2. Comment on Holmes' statement: "True self-love . . . does not conflict with loving people and things for their own sake."

Chapter 5, "Utilitarianism"

1. What is the "problem of distributive justice"?
2. Explain one of the attractions of people to utilitarianism.

Chapter 6, "Toward a Christian Ethic"

1. Holmes asks, "Is doing good deeds all that counts in a Christian ethic?" What is your response?
2. In citing the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Holmes indicates what a Christian ethic must put first. What is this?
2. Locate at least three references to ethical standards in the Bible. Turn in a list of these references. Bring your Bible to class.
3. Bring a code of ethics from an organization.

Week Three

1. Read Holmes, Chapters 7 and 8, and complete written responses to the following study questions:

Chapter 7, "Moral Knowledge"

1. What role does the human conscience play in developing an ethic?
2. According to Holmes, what is "the third question, about how we should pursue the good ends for which we are created"?

Chapter 8, "The Basis of Obligation"

1. How did Plato define *good*?
2. Holmes: "But what of those who believe no such God exists? Are they then freed from all moral obligation? Indeed not." What is your reaction?
2. Read Smedes, Chapters 2 and 3, and complete written responses to the following study questions:

Chapter 2, "Respect for People's Rights"

To what extent is justice a biblical concept?

Chapter 3, "Care for People's Needs"

What does it mean to "love one another as I have loved you"?

Week Four

1. Read Holmes, Chapters 9, 10 and 12, and complete written responses to the following study questions:

Chapter 9, "Human Rights"

1. What is the difference between "human rights" and "special rights"?
2. How do you determine what to include within the concept of "human rights"?

Chapter 10, "Criminal Punishment"

1. How does the "morality of punishment" relate to the human rights issue of the previous chapter?
2. Holmes: "Justice we must always seek, but a justice tempered by love." What is your reaction to this statement?

Chapter 12, "Sex and Marriage"

1. What does Holmes say about God as the third party to any sexual relationship?
2. How does the person who remains unmarried relate to sexual ethics?

2. Read Smedes, Chapters 5 and 6, and complete written responses to the following study questions:

Chapter 5, "Respect for Human Life"

"The letter of this commandment asks us only to 'live and let live,' hardly a summons to heroic moral sacrifice" (p. 103). What does Smedes have to say about this?

Chapter 6, "Respect for Covenant"

How does covenant keeping as used by Smedes relate to the Seventh Commandment?

Week Five

1. Read Holmes, Chapters 11 and 14, and complete written responses to the following study questions:

Chapter 11, "Can We Legislate Morality?"

1. What does Holmes mean by the statement, "This equation of sin and crime may well make sense for a confessedly theocratic society where an overwhelming moral consensus exists"?
2. What is your response to Holmes' proposal to the issue of legislating morality?

Chapter 14, "Virtue Ethics"

1. Holmes: "There is more to morality than doing what is right." What does he mean by this?
2. What is the relationship between forgiveness and love?
2. Prepare a code of ethics that could be used in an organization.
3. Read Smedes, Chapter 9 ("Obedience and Grace"), and complete a written response to the following study question:

How can the Bible provide an ethical standard for both A.D. 30 and today?

4. Read "Making Ethical Choices" in the Student Guide and complete a written response to the following study question:

What does it mean to be "wise?"

ETHICAL CHOICES ARE BASED ON VALUES

By Kenneth W. Oosting

Every person has a value system. It tells us what we value, what we think is right and wrong as well as the intensity of our conclusions. For many of us, our value system centers on our religious faith. Even in the absence of faith, however, the value system still tells us how we should relate to the rest of the world as well as how we should regard ourselves.

Our conscience tells us when our behavior deviates from our value system. Reasons as to why we would deviate from our value system include emotion, peer pressure, fright, confusion, fear of penalty and others. The strength of our conscience varies from one individual to another while those with strong religious convictions are likely to have a strong conscience because of strongly held values. It is the gap between the extent of our faith and other values (A) and the extent of the deviation (B) that determines the strength of the conscience (C). If either the value (faith) is not strongly held (A) or the behavior deviation (B) is very slight, the conscience (C) has little effect on us. If the value (faith) (A) is intensely held, then the slightest behavior deviation (B) could cause the conscience to activate even if the behavior deviation is very acceptable behavior to the majority of the population.

Our value system (including our religious faith) is a result of our worldview. Each of us has a worldview which is how we see the world in which we were born and in which we find ourselves living. Our worldview tells us whether people are basically good or basically bad. It helps us sort out how to react to all of the complexities of the world as we give meaning to that which we see, experience and perceive. Worldview explains how two people will approach the same set of circumstances in very different ways and thus with very different results.

When we make choices (decisions), many but not all of these decisions are based on the core of our value system. Some decisions we make each day are simply routine, how we will grip our toothbrush in the morning. Other more important decisions e.g., from deciding whether to brush our teeth to how we will spend the time we have each day do have ethical implications. Most of our important decisions are likely to have an ethical implication. What is an ethical implication? What is an ethical choice or decision?

Being ethical implies a standard by which behavior can be measured. Ethical behavior meets that standard. How do we set that standard? Christians set that standard from biblical teachings. Non-Christians can still have an ethical standard by selecting some other source as the basis for their standard. For a Christian there would no discernible difference between doing what faith prescribes and what is considered ethical. Christian ethics sets a standard for the value system of all Christians. When we veer from this standard, as explained above, our conscience will set off the alarm bell to tell us that we have a gap between what behavior our ethical standard requires and what our actual behavior is at the moment. When the alarm bell goes off, we know that we need to adjust our behavior in order to put actual behavior in line with the ethical standard we have accepted as part of our faith. As a result, Christian faith and Christian ethics are inseparable. Faith is about our relationship with God. Ethics sets a standard for our behavior in relationship to the world God created.

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MAKING ETHICAL CHOICES

By Kenneth W. Oosting

A choice is a decision to select between two or more alternatives or simply whether to take action on a given choice before us. An ethical choice is one in which the decision is based on an ethical standard.

There are also wise versus unwise or dumb decisions. Wise decisions are based on wisdom possessed by the decision maker while unwise decisions are made on some other basis such as emotion rather than wisdom. Wisdom could primarily address how a decision is made or its planned effect as well as the timing of such decisions. However, there is a high correlation between ethics and wisdom. Wise and unwise decisions can be in the domain of those decisions that are neither ethical nor unethical. An example would be in how we use a pad of paper. A wise use will avoid waste. How we use our paper would not normally be considered an ethical set of decisions. The foolish virgins in the Bible were considered to be unwise but not unethical. The conflict between Cain and Abel involved an ethical choice as well as being unwise.

In this article we will look at the intersection of these two types of decisions. Optimally, all decisions would be both ethical and wise. Consider the following diagram:

| | | |
|--------|-------------------------------|---|
| Wise | Being organized | Biblically informed thinking Ethical choices |
| Unwise | Poor choices Criminal acts | Ethical but nonsensical |
| | Unethical | Ethical |

Ethical choice is about behavior. In behavior we make many choices. Christians will want to ensure that their decisions are both ethical (in accordance with Bible teachings) and wise (see the book of Proverbs and other sources).

To make wise and ethical choices, we must be of sound mind and have a body sufficiently healthy to allow us to make rational choices. The more we have learned (informal and formal education), the greater our opportunity to make such choices. Ethical choice, for example, is enhanced when we know what the ethical standard is.

God created us with a freedom of choice. As a result, our decisions can be anywhere on the above chart. Most of us mix our choices with some wise and ethical decisions (upper, right corner of the illustration) with other decisions falling elsewhere on the illustration. Our challenge is to think through our various decisions to move toward that which is both wise and ethical on a constant basis.

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