



5 Bible studies on

'Christian Ethics'



'getting a handle on Ethics'

Ethics is something we all do—it effects the way we act or think in any given situation, based on what we think is important or good. We mightn't always be able to put it into practice. But it's at least what we think we should do or think.

The bigger question is what we will use as important or good to be help us come up with the decisions or attitude? How do we know what we're using is a good foundation to work from?

For Christians, it's what the God of the Bible tells us to work with, with His Son Jesus helping to make that as clear as possible in this world for us.

These basic studies are a way of exercising our spiritual muscle to see how as Christians we can make ethical decisions. How, when God hasn't specifically laid it out for us on a particular issue, He still has given us important principles to apply our minds and hearts to so we can get on with following Him in this life. This can be liberating, exciting, but also challenging and hard to accept, particularly when an area is touched on where we mightn't have done the thinking yet and inadvertently been using other values to work it out. But it's what we've signed up for as Christians! Let's see how we can see more and more the goodness of our God as we explore some current issues or hot ethical topics...

Hints for these studies – with each question, sometimes there's a follow up question or two included at the same number. This is to just help draw it out a bit more. You may get it with the first one so don't panic if you end up saying the same thing in thinking about the follow up question—just move on.

Also, don't panic if you can't quite see what a question might be driving at. These questions are not the Bible. Feel free to move onto the next one. The questions are just an attempt to help us get into the passage/issue. Let the passage/God's thinking from thje Bible as a whole drive things at the end of the day. The questions are of course still hoped to be helpful in leading in to what God is saying. So at least think about it before moving on—it might then become more obvious.

ABOVE ALL, PRAY FOR GOD TO SPEAK TO US!

1

'Christian ethics—life' (biological)

the issues...

The 'ball game' has changed massively in recent decades with quantum advances in medical technology. Big questions are raised about the beginning of life to its end. We can intervene so much more to enable life to begin. We can enable life to continue significantly longer. But we can also want to end life because of quality of life concerns. What are we to make of IVF, abortion and euthanasia as Christians? Let's see what principles God has given us to think these things through...

beginning of life issues...

Read *Genesis 1:26-27, 2:4-7*. Who gives life?

Read *Psalms 139:13-16*. What does God think of the very early stages of life—embryos?

Read *Genesis 1:28, 2:18-25*. Who's life is it anyway? What is the purpose of life?

How could IVF fit in with God's plans, given we live post Genesis 1 and 2 with sin distorting so much of life, including our biology? When could it be contrary?

Apparently a very tiny percentage of abortions are for life threatening issues. Many women subsequently feel far from OK about it. Do these passages help explain why? What's the way forward?

Each yr around 90 000 abortions occur in our country, and yet barely a hundred or so babies are available for adoption each yr? What do you see as troubling about this? What opportunities are missed to see God work?

Is abortion unforgiveable?

How do these passages help... *James 2:14-17, Philipians 4:10-11, 1 Peter 1:3-9, 1 John 1:9*?

end of life issues... (keeping in mind above)

Read *Psalms 90:12*. How can God "*teach us to number our days aright*"? Compare *Hebrews 9:27*.

Read *1 Samuel 31:1-6*. How does Saul's inglorious end give us a lead into thinking about suicide or euthanasia? Is this different to turning off the life support?

How do these passages help... *1 Corinthians 10:13, Matthew 10:28-31, 1 Peter 5:7, 1 John 4:10-12*?

Pray in response to this, that we would treasure life and see it in the context of God's plans.

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2

'Christian ethics—relationships'

the issues...

Another way the 'ball game' has changed massively in recent decades is the social revolution in relationships. What was once taken as given in terms of what marriage is and how it's meant to work is no longer the case. It's almost like 2000 years of Christian heritage has been deleted from our cultural mindset, even amongst some who still claim the Christian tag. Is it just a case of getting updated with our dating? What does God think about all of this?

beginning of marriage issues...

Read *Genesis 2:18-25*, once more—it's hard to avoid these foundational building blocks for life. What is marriage for? Who can get married? Why is a marriage partner more than your best mate?

Read *Matthew 19:4-6*, *Ephesians 5:22-33*. Did Jesus and Paul think Genesis was out of date?

So, is living together a problem?

Why is adultery such a big deal?

Does homosexual marriage fit with God's plans?

How do these passages help... *1 Corinthians 6:9*, *Leviticus 18:22*, *Romans 1:26-27*, *Hebrews 13:4*?

end of marriage issues... (keeping in mind above)

Read *Matthew 19:1-12*, noting the reason for the question Jesus was answering.

Read *1 Corinthians 7:10-16*. How does Paul uphold the high view of marriage Jesus did, whilst also recognising the reality of this sinful world?

When is divorce sometimes unavoidable? Think about the varied ways "*marital unfaithfulness*" may sadly manifest.

Is divorce the unforgivable sin? Is it one strike and you're out as far as getting married again?

How do these passages help... *Proverbs 5:1-23*, *Malachi 2:13-16*, *John 4:1-42*?

Pray in response to this, that we would honour the way God says marriage works, and see how this fits in with His plans

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the issues...

For many of us, particularly in the western world, our houses have never been bigger, contraptions more sophisticated, travel so extensive and exotic. And yet we don't seem to be very happy, with growing levels of depression (even when taking into account how much depression largely went undiagnosed years ago). Then there's how many still do it tough physically, especially in the developing world. How should we ethically handle wealth, whether a lack of it or in abundance?

provision...

Read *Exodus 16:21-24, Luke 11:3*.

Who provides? Why do Jesus and Moses emphasise the daily aspect to this?

When are we tempted to doubt God's provision?

How do these passages help... *Genesis 1:28-30, 9:1-3, Matthew 5:43-48, Acts 14:17?*

distraction...

Read *1 Timothy 6:3-16*.

What's the problem with money? How can a "love" for it lead us away from God?

What do we reveal about our relationship with God when we think we need more?

How do these passages help... *Proverbs 15:27, 17:1, 16, 22:1-2, Luke 12:13-21, Luke 18:18-30?*

opportunity...

Read *Acts 18:1-5, Deuteronomy 10:18-19, 15:1-11*

How can wealth be used in God's purposes? Just for our friends?

How could our nation take a lead from this in social welfare, refugee and overseas aid policy?

How do these passages help... *2 Corinthians 9:6-11, 8:1-7, Luke 10:25-37, Proverbs 25:21-22?*

Pray in response to this, that we would use the resources God provides to further His plans for this world

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the issues...

Many in our country treat politics like following a football team—even when their party is playing poorly, they still support them. Others are turned off by one too many a politician behaving badly—hence the high informal vote and law requiring us to still participate! And yet, in other countries, politics can lead to revolution. And no matter where we live, government policies will effect us, and not just how much tax we have to pay. How does God help us to handle politics ethically?

knowing the times...

Read *Romans 13:1-7*

Who is ultimately in control of even politics? Even bad ones? Think about the times Paul was writing in.

How does God use even poor governments for at least some good?

What kind of citizens should God's people be?

What do you think Paul is trying to prevent here? (check the context at the end of the preceding chapter, especially v14-21 to see how Paul is not being a puppet of the government)

How would this have been hard at the time for a Jewish Christian to take? A Christian slave? Any Christian who had felt the iron grip of the Roman Empire?

If the main game is to help people know Jesus, is there any point in Christians going into politics, either as a candidate or supporter? How could they be in partnership?

What are some of the dangers of political involvement for the Christian?

Is there a time to disobey the authorities? Can you give an example?

Is there ever a time to be a part of a rebellion, what is called 'liberation theology'?

How do these passages help...

1 Corinthians 7:20-24, Amos 5:21-24, Malachi 3:5, Matthew 22:15-22, 26:47-56, 28:16-20, Luke 12:4?

Pray in response to this, that we would realise the times we live in and take opportunities to show our community the difference Jesus makes

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the issues...

The new 'priest' these days are the scientists. Technological advancement has been nothing but astounding just in the last 10 yrs, let alone the past 2 centuries. Mobile phones are more powerful than the computers that enabled men to land on the moon! We feel the benefits of scientific endeavour every day, even though almost all of it goes over our heads. We tend to therefore just trust the science. But there's obviously got to be more to it than that for us Christians.

no moral free zone...

Read *Genesis 11:1-9*.

What was the breakthrough science or technology here? (v3)

How was it misused? (v4 c.f. Genesis 1:27-28)

How does God's existence actually make science possible in the first place? (think about the so called 'laws of nature' and the goodness of God's creation)

How should this temper scientific endeavour and application? (for example, think back to the first study and IVF and how some scientists love to get their hands on unused embryos for stem cell research—what are the motivations—does the end justify the means? - feel free to explore other examples)

How do these passages help... *Colossians 3:17, Jeremiah 17:9, Ecclesiastes 1:12-18?*

no silver bullet...

Read *Romans 8:18-27*.

What are the limitations of our material world?

Where's the solution got to come from? Does this reveal the great weakness of science? What is truly sustainable?

How can science and faith be friends?

How do these passages help... *John 14:1-6, 27, Philipians 4:4-7, Romans 10:9, Luke 24:36-49?*

Pray in response to this, that we would put our faith in God, not science, using good science to further God's plans for this world

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