

## **Ethics beyond Rules: How Christ's Call to Love Informs Our Moral Choices**

*A Study and Discussion Guide for Digging Deeper*

by Keith Stanglin

For a fuller-length treatment of the topics covered in these videos, see Keith Stanglin's book by the same title, available at [zondervanacademic.com](http://zondervanacademic.com) or wherever you buy books.

In this guide, each lesson is summarized in a couple of sentences. Discussion and reflection questions are also provided.

### **Episode 1. Is there Such a Thing as Right and Wrong?**

#### *Summary*

Christian ethics seeks to answer, what is the good, how do we know it, and how do we do it? But is there really such a thing as the good? Moral relativism, a currently popular sentiment, denies objective good. If moral relativism is true, then there may be some unpleasant consequences.

#### *Discussion Questions:*

1. Have you ever changed your mind about a moral practice? What made you change your mind?
2. Have you heard someone say, "That's good for you, but not for me," or "That may be right for their culture, but not for ours"? What topic were they discussing?
3. If the majority opinion is the final arbiter of right and wrong, what are the implications?
4. How have you been influenced in a negative way by "the crowd"? How do you think secular culture has influenced Christians or the church in non-Christian directions? What will you do to resist these influences?

### **Episode 2. Why Be Good?**

#### *Summary*

There may be many motivations for being and doing the good, but, primarily, it is to attain to the purpose for which God created us—to be holy, conformed to the image and likeness of Christ. To this end, ethics attends to one's conduct and character.

#### *Discussion Questions:*

1. If invisible, would you act morally? Are you more prone to do the things you know are wrong when no one is looking? Are you more likely to do *good* things when someone *is* looking?
2. Is there any way that suffering and happiness could go hand in hand?
3. Do you think that downplaying perfection leads to settling for mediocrity?
4. In what concrete ways could you become more like God?

### **Episode 3. Ethics beyond Rules**

#### *Summary*

Christian morality is often associated with rules. But Christians are made to be free from rules. Rules are for the immature. To the extent that we are immature, we need rules, but they are meant to teach us what is good, eventually to move beyond the need for rules alone.

#### *Discussion Questions:*

1. Are Christians really free to do anything that they want? How can this be understood in a biblical way?
2. Can you think of something good that you used to do only when told to do it, but now you do it freely without being told? Why do you do that thing on your own now?
3. Are there any areas of life where you feel like you don't need rules to do what is good? Are there any areas where you acknowledge you do need rules to do what is good?
4. What used to tempt you that no longer does? What still tempts you?

### **Episode 4. What Does Love Require?**

#### *Summary*

Jesus said that love toward God and love toward neighbor are the greatest commands. As such, the primary question for Christian action is, what does love require? What real love requires is sometimes quite different from the common cultural understanding.

#### *Discussion Questions:*

1. What is "tough love"? Have you ever been the recipient of "tough love"? How did you respond?
2. Does love look different toward someone who repents than it looks toward someone who does not repent?

3. What do you think about the saying, “Love the sinner; hate the sin”? Does the church have a harder time with the first half or with the second half of the saying? How can we strike the balance effectively?

## **Episode 5. The Use of the Bible in Ethics**

### *Summary*

For Christians, the primary source of ethical instruction is Scripture. It instructs sometimes directly through commands but also more broadly through principles, paradigms, and worldview. In applying Scripture, Christians would also do well to bring received tradition and reason into the conversation. These criteria provide a way to approach a variety of ethical issues from a Christian perspective.

### *Discussion Questions:*

1. What modern ethical questions do you wish Scripture addressed more clearly? Why is Scripture silent on these issues?

2. Discuss biblical passages and principles that are relevant to various ethical issues that are not specifically mentioned in Scripture, for example:

gun control

using marijuana

euthanasia (physician-assisted suicide)

sex with a fiancé

speeding

others?

3. Can you think of any biblical characters whose moral actions are ambiguous? How can you know whether they serve as a good example to be followed or a bad example to be avoided?

## **Episode 6. Sexual Ethics**

### *Summary*

Now we begin looking at some specific issues, as a model for how to engage the many issues not addressed in these videos. In this episode we discuss what Christians believe and practice with

regard to sexual morality. Jesus and Paul point back to the creation accounts of Genesis 1-2 as a model for sexual ethics, clear guidelines for glorifying God with our bodies.

*Discussion Questions:*

1. When you were growing up, were you warned against premarital sex? What reasons were offered in favor of sexual purity?
2. What reasons would you give to encourage people to preserve sexual relations for marriage?
3. The topic of sex is frequently avoided in churches. What do you think is the most important but neglected thing that churches should be teaching about sexuality?
4. What are the consequences of making pleasure the sole or primary motivation for sexual relations?
5. How can churches do a better job of welcoming and incorporating single people?

## **Episode 7. Homosexual Practice**

*Summary*

In light of Scripture's teaching on the proper context and purposes of sexual relations, this episode discusses the morality of homosexual practice. It also addresses transgender identity and distinguishes between the psychiatric disorder and the cultural fad.

*Discussion Questions:*

1. For those who support homosexuality, where do you think they would draw the line on acceptable sexual activity? On what ground?
2. Why do you think parents so often encourage the children in their gender dysphoria?
3. How can Christians and churches balance showing love without endorsing homosexual practice?

## **Episode 8. Abortion**

*Summary*

The right to elective abortion is a hotly contested political issue in Western society. This episode describes the procedure of elective abortion and the implications of affirming the personhood of the preborn baby.

*Discussion Questions:*

1. The Bible does not specifically address abortion, but what passages provide some principles for thinking about this issue?
2. Besides those mentioned in the chapter, what other reasons would you give to affirm that an unborn baby qualifies as a person?
3. Why do you think a woman would choose or be pressured by someone else to have an abortion?
4. Have you ever witnessed or seen a recording of an abortion (perhaps through video of ultrasound)? Did it change or reinforce what you thought about abortion?

## **Episode 9. Wealth and Consumerism**

### *Summary*

Unlike some other ethical issues, wealth is something that cannot be entirely prohibited or easily avoided. Money is necessary to life. Christians must seek a balance with regard to the accumulation and use of wealth.

### *Discussion Questions:*

1. How does our society think about and use money?
2. Are Christians less materialistic than non-Christians? How would we know or be able to tell?
3. In what ways do we Christians use money well? In what ways do we use it poorly?
4. How is the act of giving a “grace”?
5. Do we give out of a feeling of guilt or of joy?

## **Episode 10. The Use of Technology**

### *Summary*

We live in a technophilic society in which technologies—especially the more benign ones—are rarely perceived as ethical issues. But every technology has a downside, a negative consequence, and often an ethical implication that should be assessed.

### *Discussion Questions:*

1. In the last five years, what is the longest you have ever gone without your smartphone? Was it voluntary? How did you feel about it?

2. If you have a social media account, have you ever thought about deleting it? Why? If you don't have an account, why don't you?

3. What are the ways you use the technology around you for good and noble purposes? What percentage of the time would you say that's what you use it for?

## **Episode 11. Politics**

### *Summary*

If properly ordered, our allegiance to the city of God and the earthly city need not be mutually exclusive. It is morally permissible for Christians, whose citizenship is in heaven, to be involved in earthly politics.

### *Discussion Questions:*

1. What are some important similarities between managing a family or homeowners' association and a state or federal government? What are some important differences?

2. How have people in general or Christians in particular been unnecessarily disrespectful of and insubordinate to the government?

3. In addition to voting, how have you attempted to persuade politicians or the public to your opinion?

4. Has Christian political involvement ever made the church look bad? What lesson should we learn?

## **Episode 12. Identity and Race**

### *Summary*

In a culture that promotes a wide array of group and intersectional identities based on characteristics such as race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and the like, Christian believers seek their primary identity in Christ alone. This episode highlights the issue of race.

### *Discussion Questions:*

1. Is racism a difficult topic for you to discuss with others? If so, what makes it so difficult? If not, why do you find it easy?

2. How do you imagine the color of your skin has affected your experience of the world? Has it created indisputable privilege and/or hardship for you in various circumstances?

3. What nuances do you think are missing in most discussions of race?

4. In what ways have you seen identity politics infiltrate the church?
5. Has it changed or broadened your perspective to have friends from backgrounds different than your own?

### **Episode 13. In the World but Not of It**

#### *Summary*

Jesus called his followers to be in the world but not of it, and his people have often struggled to find the balance between avoiding secular culture and being radically determined by it. In this desired balance, we are to be ambassadors of reconciliation of the world to God.

#### *Discussion Questions:*

1. Give a concrete example of successfully striking the balance of being in the world but not of it.
2. Give a concrete example of losing the balance on one side or the other.
3. How do you think outsiders view the church's relationship to the world?

### **Episode 14. Engaging the Battle**

#### *Summary*

The church militant—not yet triumphant—is on a journey that can be challenging and even dangerous. As such, to fall asleep or ignore the danger will lead to defeat. In a world hostile to God's kingdom, we are called to be loving resistance fighters.

#### *Discussion Questions:*

1. Besides a journey, can you think of another metaphor that describes the Christian life?
2. What are the “flaming arrows” (Eph. 6:16) that threaten to kill us spiritually?
3. How can the different pieces of the armor of God (Eph. 6:10-20) defend us against these arrows? Give concrete examples.
4. If you regarded the Christian life primarily as a battle, would it change the way you live your life?
5. What would spiritual boot camp look like? In what ways should our experience of church life be more like boot camp?

### For Further Reading

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