

# I. Principles In Christian Morality

This lesson will preview the basic principles that form the framework of a proper attitude toward morality. Many of these points will have a specific bearing upon each moral issue that is later discussed in greater detail and should flavor our approach to the study of each.

## A. Sin

### 1. What Is Sin?

- Missing the target - *James 4:17*
- Going outside God's authority - *1 John 3:4*

Sinful behavior is often condemned on the basis of general principles, not specific prohibitions. Some, attempting to justify their actions, will proclaim that the Bible nowhere states that such-and-such is absolutely sinful. The Bible does not necessarily have to mention a particular behavior by name for us to determine that it is unquestionably sin.

### 2. Sin's Progressive Process

The Bible describes the stepwise process of how sin can enter and affect our life:

*James 1:14, 15*

1. Temptation – the starting point: a testing or proving of our faith.
2. A drawing away – literally, taking the bait.
3. An appealing to our own desires
4. A giving in to our desires
5. Sin – the result of lust conceived
6. Death – the result of sin fully grown

### 3. Sin's Categories

The Bible also puts sin into three categories:

*1 John 2:16*

1. The lust of the flesh
2. The lust of the eyes
3. The pride of life

These are not of the Father but of the world.

### 4. Heaven's Calling

God calls us away from sin to a higher standard:

*Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13*

## B. Standards Of Conduct

### 1. Worldliness And Godliness

The world's standard for proper conduct is not God's standard. Note the contrast from scripture between the world and godliness:

*Romans 12:2*

...not conformed, but transformed

*1 John 2:15, 17*

...not the world's will, but God's will

Our standard of godly behavior is not based on what everyone else may be doing. Your peers may try to pressure you to go along with a certain activity. If the only reason you can give for why you think it should be okay is because a bunch of other people are doing it, perhaps it is not according to God's standard.

## **2. Flesh And Spirit**

A sampling of worldly deeds motivated by the flesh is compared in scripture with godly fruit motivated by the Spirit:

*Galatians 5:19-22; Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*

Note that, in case any evil deed was specifically omitted by name, it is included in the phrase "and the like." We will be examining many of these things in greater detail in lessons to come.

It should be evident from these passages that God's intention is not that we merely refrain from that which is wrong but that we are fully occupied by those things which are good and wholesome. If we are not actively involved in things that are good, the bad will creep right back in.

## **3. Be Different**

When we make alive within us the distinction between flesh and spirit, between worldliness and godliness, people will be able to see that we are different. This peculiarity is not something we should ever be ashamed of or try to conceal but rather welcome and embrace. We are a people of God's own possession; we should therefore act like it.

*Titus 2:14, 15*

*2 Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1*

If the world sees you as no different from anyone else in the world, maybe you're actually one of them.

*Matthew 5:14-16 Let your light so shine...*

*Matthew 7:16-21 ...by their fruits you will know them...*

*1 Peter 4:4 ...they think it strange...*

## **4. Self Control**

God calls upon us to restrain ourselves. We are to be keepers of our own minds and bodies.

*1 John 5:18*

*James 1:27*

God places within each of us by nature certain physical desires, urges, and cravings. He also provides a lawful way of fulfilling each one of them. Nevertheless, He has also given us the free moral choice of fulfilling these desires unlawfully. The significance is this: God does not want a race of robots who do His will mindlessly; He wants a race of people who make a conscious and intelligent choice to serve Him against their natural urge to run recklessly.

The main purpose of this study is to show the dire consequences of immoral behavior; the by-product of this study will be to understand that it is ultimately far more fulfilling for us to satisfy these desires lawfully than unlawfully.

## **C. Making Moral Decisions**

One of the most difficult things for a young person in today's society is to decide what is right and wrong. The world tries to obscure the distinction between good and bad so that many Christians do not know which way to turn.

Consider these five questions before making a decision.

### **1. Is it obviously wrong?**

The point earlier that not every sin is prohibited by a specific command is overshadowed by the fact that many are. If you know an activity will violate a clear command of God, you need to leave it alone.

*1 Corinthians 6:9-10*

*Colossians 3:5-9*

### **2. Is it wholesome?**

If you cannot honestly say it is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, or praiseworthy, reconsider what you're about to do.

*Philippians 4:8*

Ask yourself if you think the activity will strengthen your faith or if it could lead you to forsake the Lord.

### **3. Will it violate my conscience?**

Our conscience should be trained by a knowledge of the Bible, but what if we're not sure? If the thought enters your mind that an activity might be wrong, do not engage in it until you learn more. Chances are, if you think it might be wrong, it probably is. If in doubt, leave it out. Regardless, it is sinful to go against your conscience whether a thing is truly wrong or not.

*Romans 14:23*

*James 4:17*

### **4. Would I want others to know I am doing it?**

Things done in secret never stay that way. Besides, even if no one else sees, God does.

*Ecclesiastes 12:14*

*Hebrews 4:13*

*1 Timothy 5:24, 25*

Ask yourself if you would want to be doing it if your parents saw you.

### **5. Would I want to be doing it when Jesus comes again?**

What would you like to be doing?

- Worshipping God?
- Studying His word?
- Involved in wholesome entertainment?
- Doing chores or schoolwork?
- Committing some act of immorality?

*2 Corinthians 5:10*

*2 Peter 3:10-12*

## **D. Influence**

Influence can work both ways: I can have a good influence on others, or I can allow others to have a bad influence on me. In every situation, we will have to make a judgment about which way those scales will tip. We certainly need to sometimes be in the presence of ungodly people; work, school, or even family occasionally demands it. Also, it is a way we can teach by example. However, when we find ourselves tempted by those around us and we feel like we're losing control, we must find the way of escape the Lord provides.

*1 Corinthians 10:13*

Before we willingly place ourselves in a situation of strong temptation, we should think ahead what can be our possible way out. For some situations, it's more wise to stay out than to have to get out. Moreover, we deceive ourselves if we think ungodly friends will not have a bad effect upon us. Choose your friends carefully.

*1 Corinthians 15:33*

## **E. Avoid Evil**

Some people try to see how close they can get without crossing the line. Do not flirt with sin.

*1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22*

This passage teaches that we are to avoid, stay away from, and shun sin in every shape, form, and fashion in which it appears, not to draw near to it. This is a point that will especially have application as we study each specific moral issue.

Sin is a hidden, deadly danger with eternal consequences. If there was an exposed known danger, for example, a deep, open pit or ledge where you could easily fall to your death, you would probably not see how close you could get without actually falling, and you would certainly not amble carelessly along or make sport of its edge where one unsteady step could bring disaster. You would probably consider what is a reasonable safe distance with a margin for error and stay yet even somewhat further from that point. How much more should sin be avoided with consequences more grave than physical death?

*Proverbs 6:27*

## **F. Thoughts And Questions For Discussion**

1. Try to define sin in your own words.
2. What exactly is lust? Is it limited to only certain kinds of sin?
3. Explain the possible differences between the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.
4. In Romans 12:2, what does it mean to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind?"
5. Do you behave differently around some of your friends than you do with others, for example when you're with Christians and when you're not? If so, why?
6. Why has the world's standard of what is right and wrong changed so much?
7. Is there anything wrong with the philosophy that all young people need to go through a phase of "sowing wild oats?"
8. Will you be able to control every situation in which you find yourself?