



An Introduction to Biblical Ethics: Walking in the Way of Wisdom

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Updating a Contemporary Classic

In the third edition of An Introduction to Biblical Ethics, philosophy and ethics professor Paul Copan has taken on a significant challenge: expanding and updating pioneer Robertson McQuilkin's comprehensive text on Scripture's ethical teaching and biblical application on a host of issues. Below, some thoughts on the revision and Copan's goals for the revised work.

When did you encounter Robertson McQuilkin's original edition of the book?

Paul Copan: Twenty-eight years ago, I had read this non-published manuscript by McQuilkin as a textbook in his class at what is now Columbia International University. This book made a remarkable impact on me and helped guide my thinking on many ethical questions.

How did the idea for a revision come about?

Copan: In June 2009, "Mr. McQuilkin" (as I still call him), wrote an email to me, requesting my advice. Hoping to extend the life of the book, he asked about a possible coauthor to revise the book with him. In his note, he said that his objective in conceiving and writing this ethics book was not merely that it be true to Scripture; he wanted to actually *start* with Scripture to deal with ethical issues in the Bible itself as well as with contemporary ethical issues in light of Scripture, structuring his work around the Ten Commandments. However, he was skeptical that he could find an ethicist willing to revise the book with him and whom he could fully endorse.

So I wrote back to him, informing him that his book had been a marvelous resource to me over the years. I mentioned that I taught ethics, of which he was unaware. In somewhat parallel fashion, I myself had written a philosophy of religion book, *Loving Wisdom: Christian Philosophy of Religion*, which had the identical goal: to begin with and extensively engage the Scriptures to articulate and defend philosophically the coherence of the Christian metanarrative (God, creation, fall, redemption, recreation). Having the same vision as he, I expressed a willingness to go in with him on this project.

And how did McQuilkin respond?

Copan: He immediately replied, "If you do ethics, too, I can think of no one I'd rather bequeath this project to! I think the book has had a unique niche and, from what you say, still could. Maybe my query to you was a 'God-thing'!"

What kind of revision has been done for the third edition?

Copan: This book has required updating and expansion in places. We have added material on topics ranging from utilitarianism and evolutionary ethics to gay marriage to bioethical



Q & A

Robertson McQuilkin is a speaker and writer, engaging in extensive conference ministry in the United States and overseas. He served as the third president of Columbia International University for twenty-two years, and is now president emeritus.

Paul Copan is the Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics at Palm Beach Atlantic University. He has written several books, including *Creation Out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical and Scientific Exploration*, and has edited several others, including *The Rationality of Theism* and *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* Formerly Copan served with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries and taught at Trinity International University (Deerfield, Illinois).

issues such as plastic surgery, transsexualism and surrogate motherhood. Obviously, this book is an expression of agreement between the authors regarding much material on biblical ethics. A few differences remain, as will be evident, but it has been a joy to engage in discussion. In various portions of the book, you will see “McQuilkin’s Perspective” and “Copan’s Perspective” headings. We consider this feature of the book to be a virtue: it shows a range of acceptable views within evangelicalism and that people who disagree at secondary points can still work together beneficially and amicably.

What keys ideas would you like readers to take away?

Copan: God desires that we be transformed into Christ’s image, that we move beyond carrying out duties or commands – as important as they are – to becoming virtuous persons, for whom obedience becomes “second nature.” This book attempts to begin with Scripture rather than superimposing some secular ethical theory to guide our thinking. We should not be unaware of these theories, but we should see their limits. This book gives a solid biblical foundation to sound guidance for living a godly life and working through many ethical challenges and dilemmas.

What are your hopes for this book?

Copan: It is a high privilege to team up with my former professor and mentor in this book endeavor. Both of us pray that God will use this book to guide Christians in living wisely, helping to give clearer shape to loving God and loving others before a watching world. It is also our hope that, through this book, believers in a relativistic, cynical age will be better able to winsomely and courageously articulate the joy and blessing of the Scriptures’ life-giving demands and of conformity to the image of Christ. We pray too that they will demonstrate through their lives the wisdom, goodness and beauty of “walking in the ways of the Lord.”