



Just Business: Christian Ethics for the Marketplace (3rd Edition)
Available February 20, 2018
 \$26, 384 pages, paperback
 978-0-8308-5198-0

“Alec Hill is a keen thinker, a terrific leader, and a cherished friend. It’s hard to think of a better guide through the challenges and complexities of business ethics. His words will help you to not just make wiser choices, but to become a better person.”

— **John Ortberg**, senior pastor, Menlo Church, author of *All the Places to Go*

Modern Business and Global Ethics

In recent decades, globalization has significantly altered the practice of business. Even small companies are now part of global supply chains. In our integrated world, ethical concerns involving nations halfway around the world are front-page news. And, as the Shell Oil case illustrates, these concerns can be quite complicated.

Global ethical choices are often presented in simple binary terms: either (A) “when in Rome, do as the Romans do,” or (B) “when in Rome, do as you do at home.” However, as we will see, each of these alternatives involves significant ethical traps.

The first option, known as cultural relativism—discussed briefly in chapters five and six—rejects the notion of universal principles of right and wrong. Each culture defines what is acceptable. If, for example, a host nation believes that selling body parts or oppressing women is permissible, then the guest company should follow suit and act accordingly. Given this logic, foreign companies doing business in Alabama sixty years ago ought not have challenged the state’s strict racial segregation.

From a biblical perspective, cultural relativism is highly problematic. God’s universal standards of holiness, justice and love apply to every people group. The prophet Isaiah admonished those who taught otherwise:

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,
 who put darkness for light and light for darkness,
 who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

Shirin Ebadi, an exiled Iranian lawyer and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, notes: “The idea of cultural relativism is nothing but an excuse to violate human rights.” In the same vein, philosopher Roger Scruton observes: “In arguments about moral problems, relativism is the first refuge of the scoundrel.” The former CEO of Medtronic concurs: “Applying Joseph Fletcher’s situational ethics to developing countries is the fastest way to destroy a global organization.”

The second option—“when in Rome, do as you do at home”—is also deficient. Labeled “cultural imperialism” by critics, it presumes that American values are superior to those of other cultures. Smacking of moral paternalism, it infringes upon the sovereignty of other nations. And, frankly, it is difficult to argue that some of our values are superior. In his book *The McDonalldization of Society*, George Ritzer points to our vices of immediate gratification, crass materialism and manipulating children via slick marketing. Significantly, this alternative is also relativistic. It merely substitutes American standards for those of the host nation.

Rejecting both options, Christian ethics follows a third path: “when in Rome, do as God wants you to do.” As discussed throughout this book, what God desires is holy-just-loving conduct. Holiness calls us to zealously make the Lord our highest priority, demanding that

INTERVARSITY PRESS
 Visit ivpress.com/media



FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO SCHEDULE AN INTERVIEW CONTACT THE INTERVARSITY PRESS PUBLICITY TEAM:

Alisse Wissman, print publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or awissman@ivpress.com
 Krista Clayton, broadcast and online publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kclayton@ivpress.com
ivpress.com/academic



When the daily business news breaks away from stories of profit and loss, it often shines a spotlight on ethical failures. But Christians aim to be ethical in all the areas of daily life and work – not just when the spotlight is on them. For those facing the many questions and quandaries of doing business with ethical integrity, Alec Hill offers a place to begin. In this third edition of a popular textbook on business ethics, Hill carefully explores the foundational Christian concepts of holiness, justice, and love. These keys to God’s character, he argues, are also the keys to Christian business ethics. Hill then shows how some common responses to business ethics fall short of a fully Christian mindset. Using penetrating case studies on such pressing topics as employer-employee relations, discrimination and affirmative action, and environmental damage, he clothes principles in concrete business situations.

all other concerns be of lesser importance. It requires ethical purity, including separation from anything unclean such as bribery. Justice prohibits showing favoritism to government officials at the expense of the less powerful (e.g., workers and citizens). Employee rights – such as bodily safety, privacy and prompt payment for work – must be protected. Global firms must also fulfill their contractual obligations and compensate for harm caused. Love compels them to be merciful to employees, be respectful of host nations and seek the good of local communities.

Our Responsibilities

When engaged in the global marketplace, we should first and foremost act in a holy-just-loving manner. This means doing what God would have us do in every context, including being honest, avoiding bribes, ensuring employee safety, paying a living wage, not benefiting from child labor, respecting human rights, ensuring informed consent and protecting the environment.

Second, we should act responsibly as consumers and voters. This begins with educating ourselves about nations we currently may know little about – such as Botswana, Brunei and Bosnia. As we become more aware, our consumption and voting patterns will be redirected.

Third, we should promote social entrepreneurship that simultaneously produces profits and facilitates human flourishing. This includes investing in companies such as D.light Design, which manufactures inexpensive portable solar lamps for those in developing nations who lack access to reliable electricity. Or backing the One Acre Fund that makes low-interest loans to African farmers. Or partnering with VisionSpring, a company that sells discounted reading glasses to thousands of poor Latin Americans who cannot find work simply because of declining eyesight. Or working for Embrace, a business that produces “thermopods” – miniature sleeping bags that keep low-birthweight babies warm even when hospital systems fail. Remarkably, each of these companies were founded by entrepreneurs under the age of thirty-five.

Finally, we should become personally involved in activities that assist the desperately poor. After visiting rural Burma, Seattle pastor Eugene Cho decided to do something radical – commit a year’s salary to launch a foundation he named One Day’s Wages. Hoping that his generosity would inspire others to give the equivalent of one day’s salary – a mere 0.4 percent of an annual wage – funds are used to procure clean water, fight sex trafficking and provide other necessities for the global poor. To meet his pledge, his family sublet their home and slept on friends’ couches for months. “That was the most painful decision I’ve had to make as a father,” he later recalled. To date, the foundation has raised four million dollars.

– Adapted from chapter 16, “International Business”