Book Review: Honesty, Morality, & Conscience: Making Wise Choices in the Gray Areas of Life

by Carrie Cavanaugh

Jerry White's Honesty, Morality, & Conscience: Making Wise Choices in the Gray Areas of Life is a helpful book to remind one of the importance of morality and also look at of what it is comprised. Published by NavPress, the book starts with the foundation of black and white in the Bible and then explains how we are to address the gray areas. How reassuring it is to know that God has given us all that we need to face the moral questions in our lives.

Jerry White is president emeritus of The Navigators and today spends his time speaking at churches and conferences. His background is diverse, but God's been teaching him about His word and how that is played out in one's life all along the way – he has a B.S. in electrical engineering and a Ph.D. in astronautics, allowing him to serve as mission controller at Cape Canaveral and teach at the U.S. Air Force Academy before serving with The Navigators. This is one of several books that he has written.

The chapters cover everything from "Your Conscience – Friend or Foe?" to "Honesty and Ethics in Business and Work". As White works through different facets of our lives, the same principles apply, but it is helpful and challenging to hear what they will look like in each context.

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Since our audience is full of leaders of Christian organizations, let me tell you a bit more about the chapter focusing on the workplace. White points out, "In business and work, other people's standards tend to become ours." He explains how we begin to use "accepted practices" even though we may have qualms about them at first. Other moral dilemmas at work include: "Can a businessman be really honest and still succeed?", "Must we obey our employer when it is wrong to do what he asks?", and "How can we confront dishonesty in the company and other workers—or should we?" White says there are five commands of business ethics to help us address these gray areas. First is what he calls "a just weight". That is, we are to give the full amount in exchange for fair payment and conversely fair payment for what is given to us. Second, "total honesty" is something the Bible is explicit about. This holds true for employees and employers both. Thirdly, White calls for "the law of serving." Like Christ, we need to have the attitude "What can I give?" rather than "What can I get?" Fourthly, "personal responsibility" is important as organizations develop ethical "soft spots" Christians are not excused in these cases. White explains,

> In opposing practices that are unethical or dishonest we may risk losing a job. But if the company is determined to follow questionable practices, we probably do not want to continue working for them. Our conscience will quickly be dulled if we must constantly try to justify our actions.

As scary as the idea of looking for a new job is, it may be what God is calling us to do for the sake of seeking holiness. Finally, White says Christians in business need to understand the principle of "reasonable profit". There is no hard and fast percentage for what

this reasonable profit is, but White suggests that Christians seriously consider the "Golden Rule" when deciding what is reasonable for their business. Also this idea has implications not only for how you treat your customers, but also your staff. Fair wages are clearly called for in the Bible in such passages as 1 Timothy 5:18, "The laborer is worthy of his wages".

Although business leaders may be tempted to simply focus on the chapter about business, I came to see how integrity is something deeper that can't help but be manifested in every area of your life or not at all. That is, you can't hope to be beyond reproach at work if you are cheating the IRS on your personal taxes.

I appreciated the chapter that dealt with "Honesty with Yourself." In that chapter White includes a list of steps to help in the process of self-evaluation—to realistically look at both our limitations and gifts. The steps include: 1) Pray; Set aside time; Be thinking about it ahead of time; Make a list of both strengths and limitations; write down things you enjoy; ask others for their evaluation; Take a formal evaluation; Draw some conclusions. I appreciated this honest look at oneself because it reflects the biblical perspective that we are both remarkably made in God's image and yet fallen at the same time.

Finally, there were some ideas in the chapter on sexual purity that really struck me. Since this is an area that can ruin one's witness to the world it is one that we need to be especially wary of. White reminds us that "none of us has the luxury of living only for ourselves. Others are always affected by our actions." In an individualistic society such as our own, we often fail to realize the impact our decisions have on others, and we need to be more mindful of it. Also, if we are honest with ourselves, I think we will have to agree with White as he writes, "We fill our minds with good or evil, the pure or the impure, right or wrong. Many believers harbor both in the inner recesses of their thought life." Our outward actions come from deep within, so let us seek purity in our thoughts and hearts.

The final chapter of the book is on how to cultivate biblical convictions. The five steps that White includes are a good reminder: 1) Have a daily devotional time with God; 2) Obey what you know; 3) Have fellowship with other Christians; 4) Make Christ the center of your life; 5) Confess known sin. I often want revolutionary ideas to improve my life, but White's book makes it clear that morality is to be found in the Bible and so it's as simple as knowing what God has revealed to us.