

Book Review

Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing The Church Today

By John Jefferson Davis

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This book is a model for evangelical ethics. It deals substantially with current issues from a solid biblical position and a thorough review of relevant literature. Many more such books with these characteristics are needed. Dr. Davis is Professor of Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, a position from which he is able to approach the wide variety of subjects in his book. I will focus on the medical issues, since they are our primary interest.

The first chapter describes a method for evangelical ethics, as the Bible fails to speak explicitly to many modern moral dilemmas. He takes the position of "contextual absolutism," that is, "in each and every ethical situation, no matter how extreme, there is a course of action that is morally right and free of sin." Also, he holds that "a higher (ethical) obligation suspends a lower one" in some situations. Both these positions may be correct, but Christians must be very careful in their application. He concludes with a discussion of the Christian's responsibility in a pluralistic society.

The chapter on contraception is a bright light on the evangelical landscape that has virtually ignored an issue that affects almost all Christians. He gives a brief historical overview and then covers some methods of contraception. Next, he looks at the biblical perspective and concludes, "It may be argued, then, that contraception can be justified in terms of the general teachings of Scripture concerning the nature of man and Christian marriage. It does not follow, however, that the use of contraception would be right in all circumstances." He concludes the chapter with the related issues of premarital sex, sex education and the "population bomb."

His conclusions under "Reproductive Technologies" are sound. "Although artificial insemination by husband can be consistent with the divine outlook on marriage, it must be concluded that artificial insemination by donor is not." Surrogate mothers are "an illegitimate solution to one's infertility." Sex selection before or after conception has "compelling arguments" against it. In vitro fertilization in humans should be stopped until further research can "establish definitely" its safety.

The chapter on homosexuality is compassionate to offer the "power of divine grace to transform sinful attitudes," but uncompromising on the biblical prohibition against homosexuality, including the exclusion of homosexuals from membership and leadership in the church until they have repented of that sinful lifestyle.

In the next chapter he states that abortion is only permissible when the life of the mother is in danger.

"Infanticide and Euthanasia" could have been more detailed because the latter subject is so complex. Dr. Davis is, however, careful to point out the potential errors of ordinary vs. extraordinary means of life support, active vs. passive euthanasia, killing vs. letting die, and prolonging dying vs. sustaining life. Euthanasia, as actively ending another's life, is forbidden by the Sixth Commandment. He chooses the "durable power of attorney" over living wills, pointing out the problem with the latter. Here, however, he bypasses active involvement of the local church's leadership.

Other chapters include the topics of divorce and remarriage, capital punishment, civil disobedience and revolution, and war and peace.

This book is a work of excellent scholarship. It is more than an introduction

to these issues, as it provides sound biblical direction. Concerning medical issues with which I am more familiar, further detailed work is necessary with many of his subjects. More importantly, such biblical analysis and direction needs to be extended into every area of medical practice. Finally, the agreement that I find in this book underscores the validity of biblical ethics, even beyond the explicit statements of Scripture. As evangelicals follow the thorough and systematic approach described elsewhere in this issue, the agreement can be substantial and demonstrates the Holy Spirit's unifying work.