

What's Inside

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There's more to writing a good test than you think. Let an experienced educator share some helpful hints.

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A personal and encouraging letter from Dad.



A Basis for Christian Ethics

How can a Christian keep a good testimony amidst the popularity of situation ethics? Are traditional ethics even relevant in today's society?

The Sunday school teacher was in a voluble, good humor. He chatted with the class before beginning his lesson. "We're really enjoying the new bedroom we built on last month." He chuckled a bit and continued. "Now, when the building inspector dropped by, of course, we called it a storage room. Do you know what we would have had to pay in taxes for a new *bedroom*?"

Marla had trouble concentrating on the lesson that day. A nagging little voice inside suggested that something was radically wrong with the anecdote the teacher related. Yet, the class members

had appeared to sympathize—they laughed with him.

It seemed like, well, lying, to Marla. But this was a spiritual leader, and these were Christian people. She tried not to think about it.

Marla recognized a problem that is widespread among Christians today—poor ethics. The seemingly insignificant dishonesty she saw was only a symptom of a larger, very significant problem.

Ethics can be complicated and confusing, or it can be as simple as "Thou shalt," and "Thou shalt not." Briefly stated, ethics is the study

of what is right and wrong. The carnal mind prefers to decide ethical questions on the basis of reason, or, more commonly, expediency—“it all depends on the situation.” Christians, however, employ the Bible as their ethics manual and the Holy Spirit as their indwelling Guide. Their problem should be not so

idea that some things are inherently right and others wrong. He believes that God is love. Therefore, he reasons that love is the highest goal a human being can attain. In a moral dilemma, then, he will determine how love may best be served and act accordingly.

is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:7–8).

Probably most of us can feel rather self-satisfied when discussing “large” issues like adultery or stealing from an employer, but perhaps our view of

Ethics should be removed from the realm of theory and placed in the concrete world of practice.



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much how to decide what is right, but how to do it.

Certainly there are many times when the good and the bad do not bear clear labels. In fact, labeling is the very practice that carnal thinkers would have us eliminate, and, to our shame, they have succeeded to a disturbing degree.

When men began to question the authority of the Bible—its authorship and integrity—they repudiated the fixed point of reference that the Bible provides for matters of right and wrong. Situation ethics was a natural outgrowth of skepticism and outright unbelief. The situation ethicist, while retaining a sort of “natural” moral code, is repulsed by the

He errs first by not recognizing other attributes of God, such as His holiness, when determining his goals; second, by failing to define love in terms consistent with God’s revelation of Himself; and third, by assuming that man is in a position to decide how love is best served. It is absolutely necessary for the situation ethicist to affirm the basic goodness of man because his code of ethics hinges on man’s ability to reason properly.

The Christian, on the other hand, recognizes that his own rational powers are blighted by sin. He knows that apart from God he cannot know truth at all: “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it

the “smaller” matters of personal integrity is not much different from the situation ethicist’s. Ethics is too broad a topic for our examination here, but it may be readily narrowed down to include those matters that most conspicuously affect our testimonies before the public.

The following are examples that illustrate poor ethics among God’s people (obviously the same practices are commonplace among the unregenerate):

- Cheating on income tax—“I don’t believe in income tax anyway. What I earn should be mine.”
- Keeping the extra change the store clerk inadvertently gave you.

- Using company phone or photocopier for personal business.
- Habitual failure to be prompt with payment on bills, even when you have the money.

The list could continue until every Christian would say “ouch” at least once. It is incredible how seared some Christians’ consciences have become. Recently I heard of a Christian renter who owed his landlord \$2000. When he received settlement of a relative’s estate last year, rather than pay off his outrageous debt, he deposited his inheritance in a high-yield money market account and remained in arrears to his landlord.

Many questions of personal ethics may be settled by the application of general New Testament principles of separation from the world, separation unto Christ, and our responsibility to be lights in a dark world.

Separation from the world involves our purity from carnality, whether that be the influence of radio or television, our associations, our habits, our pastimes, our appearance, etc. We are not to touch the unclean thing or to set it before our eyes. But not only are we to

keep sin from us, we are to engage in good works—the positive aspect of ethics. We are to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, and faith.

Good works serve to point men to Christ. Matthew 5:16 says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

In any instance when we wonder about the right thing to do, we might try applying questions like this: Will God be glorified by my action? Will I cause a brother to offend his

conscience by my action? Would I sacrifice my light-bearing quality before the unsaved by my action?

The situation ethicist has to rely on his own feeble reason because he rejects the help that is available to anyone who truly desires it. Because the Word of God is our handbook, we need to learn to appropriate its instructions. Sometimes these are not immediately clear. In such cases, we have the best possible aid—the Holy Spirit, who, according to John 16:13, will guide us into all truth.

We also have the assistance of a new, changed nature

(continued on p. 7)

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PASSPORT
LEARNING

The Test of a Good Test

Tests—you never liked them as a student, and you may like them less as a teacher. But before you throw your teacher's edition across the room, let us help by giving YOU a test! Not off to a good start? We think we'll change your mind. Before you type up that test for next week, try taking this quiz:

1. What should influence the way I construct the test?

- A. Time limits
- B. Difficulty of material
- C. Types of questions
- D. Number of questions
- E. Reading level of students
- F. All of the above

2. What is the purpose of the test?

- A. Review
- B. Mastery
- C. Grading
- D. Inform future instruction
- E. Test the knowledge of the material that has been taught
- F. All of the above

3. What are some good rules for making any test?

- A. Keep questions short and to the point.
- B. Be sure that the directions are clear, complete, and concise.
- C. Avoid using words such as *always* and *never*.
- D. Go over directions with students before the test begins.
- E. Use a variety of questions on each test.
- F. All of the above

(Answers: 1—F. All of the above; 2—F. All of the above; 3—F. All of the above)

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Test-Writing Tips by Grade Level

Whether you are a new or experienced home school parent, these test-writing tips can be useful:

In general

- Write items that have only one correct answer.
- Do not provide clues to the correct answer.
- Keep the same kind of questions on the same page.
- Place easier questions at the beginning of the test to ease anxiety.
- Write tests soon after the material has been taught so that the information and the way you presented it are clear in your mind.

In elementary grades

- Give your child guidelines for writing his answers to short-answer questions.
- Give a sample item to avoid confusion.

In upper levels

- Be sure to allow adequate space for working math problems if the work is to be shown.
- Be careful that questions do not show bias. For example, if a question is based on having prior knowledge of a sporting event, it could be biased against a child who does not follow sports.
- Test for more than factual knowledge. Test for comprehension and application, and, when appropriate, test for inference and evaluation.

Test-Writing Tips by Question Type

True or False

- Statements should be written so that the answer is not blatantly true or blatantly false.
- There should be only one concept per statement.
- Do not take a true statement and add “not” to make it a false statement.
- Avoid long, complex, and involved statements.

Multiple-choice

- Questions should assess ability to reason, discriminate, interpret, analyze, infer, and solve problems.
- Questions should be simple, not tricky and ambiguous.
- Each test item should be independent: the answer to one question should not be given in another question.

Matching

- The matching section must have two parallel lists of words or phrases (premises and responses) that require the student to find the correct match.
- There may be more responses than premises.
- Both sections should be placed on the same page. For example, putting part of the matching section on page 2 and the rest on page 3 can confuse your child.

Short Answer

- Questions must require the child to supply the answer and not just recognize it.
- Short answers are best for assessing factual knowledge and comprehension.
- The blanks should all be the same length so as not to give a clue to the answer.
- Make allowances for unexpected but reasonable answers.

Essay

- Essays are most useful in assessing higher-level thinking skills.
- Ask your child to recall, add, apply, explain, or analyze information about a stated idea.
- Be sure that essay test questions are explicit, concise, and clear.
- Make sure that your child has a clear understanding of the ground rules and the criteria that will be used for grading.
- Plan and organize each essay question and decide what points you are looking for in the question.
- Prepare the evaluation-scoring key in advance. Some of the elements might be organization, communication, clarity, word choice, and mechanics.
- Set guidelines, such as how many words and how much space may be used and what the time limit is.

Joan Hill is a former elementary teacher and principal and currently teaches education courses and observes student teachers for BJU.

Dear kids,

I hope you'll forgive me for writing you a letter rather than talking to you. It seems that it's hard to find time to talk and that when we talk there are always interruptions and distractions. Sometimes we sit down to talk meaningfully and later on I realize I never got to the point.

First, let me tell you how much I love you. (You already know that, but you might wonder, sometimes, when I lose my temper or when I have to say no to you regarding something you want to do.) I remember the moment when each of you became a part of our family—the wonderful feeling of holding you as an infant and realizing that God had given your mom and me an awesome responsibility—one we could in no way fulfill without His help.

So that's the first point. I love you and I always will and nothing can change that.

Secondly, I want to be very straightforward with you about something. I know you see my flaws time and again. I feel very bad about that. I want you to know that the Lord is helping me work on them.

You know, I used to think that adults entered a long period of, well, near perfection where they didn't really change over the years. As a kid I looked forward to that, even if it did sound a little boring. I thought, "When I'm grown and out of college, I'll have it all together!" It hasn't worked that way. That was hard for me to accept for a long time.

Actually, I recognize now that it's a wonderful thing to realize that you never stop growing spiritually, even when physical growth stops. God continues to grow His children all their lives. Through His Word and through preaching and through life experiences themselves, God patiently teaches and teaches and teaches.

Philippians 3:13–14 is a continual encouragement to me: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

If I spend too much time thinking about the failures of the past, I get discouraged. I have to ask His forgiveness for them and then "press toward the mark," the "prize," the end of the race.

That's the point of this letter. I hope that in spite of my failings, which you probably see on a daily basis, you will see that I am endeavoring to imitate Christ—and I hope, with His help, that I'm imitating Him a little better each year. I hope this is true for all of us in this family—that together we'll "[reach] forth unto those things" that lie ahead of us, loving and forgiving one another all the way.

Love, Dad

(continued from p. 3)

and conscience to monitor our behavior. We enjoy the special privilege of prayer, and, finally, we can benefit from the experience and discernment of other Christians.

How can a discussion of ethics affect our daily walk? The answer is that by becoming aware that our dealings with fellow Christians, the unsaved community, and the government are matters of ethics, we will be more careful to measure them against God's biblical standard. For instance, before my children I will refuse to criticize my brothers and sisters in Christ; in restaurants I will be careful to pay the expected tip, considering it part of the expense of eating out; on the highway I will obey the speed limit—whether or not I spot an unmarked car—because my testimony depends on it. In short, how we win the major ethical conflicts will largely be determined by how we've been combating the “little foxes” all along.

Ethics does not need to be theory shrouded by mystery. Ethics should be removed from the realm of theory and placed in the concrete world of practice. To the situation ethicist who would have us debate “Yes, but what if . . . ?” we can reply that the situation never determines the ethics. With the Holy Spirit within us, we have the best possible resource for decision-making. Our ethics are vital as part of our testimony. Paul encouraged the Philippians to “work out [their] . . . salvation [that is, to let the inward change be outwardly visible] . . . That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:12, 15). ☺

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Adapted from an article published in Faith for the Family in March 1986.

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