

Ethics for the Christian Writer

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I. Ethics Defined: from the Greek word *ethos*, “a set of moral principles that govern behavior.”

II. Why Consider Ethics?

- A. Because God calls us to uphold His standards (Exodus 20:1-17, Mark 12:30-31).
- B. Because of the deceitfulness of sin (Rom. 3:23, Heb. 3:13).
- C. Because we are accountable for both our words and our actions (Jer. 17:10, Luke 12:47-48, Luke 16:10-12, Rom. 14:12).
- D. Examples of situations in the publishing industry where ethics comes into play:
 - 1. Tyndale’s 2015 withdrawal of *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven*.
 - 2. Mark Driscoll’s disgrace in hiring a company that bought book sales to create a best-seller.
 - 3. The bankruptcy of Family Christian Stores and with it, the revelation that the company owes thousands of dollars to various Christian publishers.
 - 4. Book reviews where the reviewer’s personal or professional connection to the author remains hidden.
 - 5. Extramarital affairs and other concerns among believers (add to my list).

II. Like a Stone in Water: Circles of Ethical Concern: Let’s consider some of the areas your ethical decisions as an author can touch. I’m listing a few points of concern, and we can add and discuss more.

A. Personal: *What does the term “Christian writer” mean to me? How authentic is my walk with Christ? How responsible am I to practice what I preach?*

B. Family: *Would my family members say my words line up with my life? How do I portray family relationships in my writing? How will I handle tough topics?*

C. Finances: *How do I make decisions about money received for my services? How do I handle paying taxes as a writer? Do I pay others fairly for services rendered to me?*

D. Relationships: *How do I handle my relationships within the publishing industry? At conferences or industry events, how do I conduct myself with the opposite sex? Do I have a plan for potentially compromising situations?*

E. Language: *What kind of language do I use in my work? Are curse words and vulgarity ever acceptable for use by the Christian writer?*

F. Truth: *Will I use a pen name or pseudonym? Will I use (or become) a ghostwriter? Is it acceptable to embellish the truth in nonfiction or present truth as fiction? Will I credit others for their work?*

F. Other Issues: *Will I write for the secular market? How can my writing change the way people think about issues such as war and peace, homelessness, social justice, or the persecution of believers across the globe? How can I use my words to make a difference?*

III. Let your conscience be your guide? Maybe.

A. Everyone has a conscience, that moral “voice within” (Rom. 2:15).

B. Our conscience, when under the control of the Holy Spirit, can lead us to truth and repentance (Heb. 10:22).

C. But Scripture also says we can damage or sear our conscience with repeated sinful behavior (1 Tim. 4:1-2, Titus 1:15).

D. Since the Bible doesn’t speak to every area of life (or publishing), there are many areas which we must take what we know of God and His desires and apply them to our situation without following a specific rule or commandment. Although we should strive to follow biblical principles, different believers will respond in different ways (Rom. 14:1-23).

E. A better way to say it: Let your conscience *as guided by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God* be your guide for your life and behavior, which of course includes your writing.