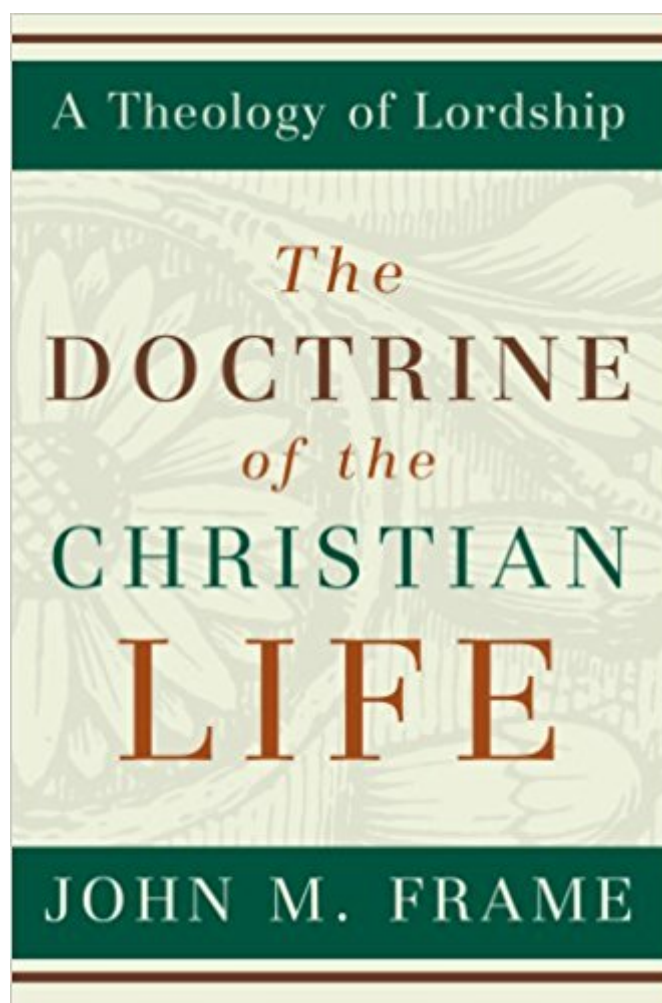


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The Doctrine Of The Christian Life (A Theology Of Lordship)



Synopsis

The third volume of Frame's Theology of Lordship series, this book focuses on biblical ethics, presenting a method for ethical decision-making, an analysis of biblical ethical teaching focusing on the Ten Commandments, and a discussion of the relation of Christ to human culture.

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Customer Reviews

"This book is a landmark in its field because of its soundness and thoroughness. It is noteworthy for its careful attention to the biblical basis for ethical instruction, its use of the Bible in its details, its attention to non-Christian ethical systems, its discussion of a wide range of issues, and its sensitivity to the multidimensional demands of the Christian life." --Vern S. Poythress

"Frame sets forth God's commandments as broad and deep, as sweetly adaptable to the varieties of human experience. He shows how the person, promises, and actions of our redeemer God are always intrinsic to our wisdom, faith, and love. He sets forth a vision for the Christian life that, in fact, glorifies the God of glory." --David Powlison

"Classic Frame' at his best: profound in analysis and clear in articulation, rigorously biblical while engaging issues in the contemporary church and culture, irenic and occasionally controversial, philosophical and pastoral, deeply grounded in Reformation and post-Reformation Calvinism. . . . a rich resource for pastors, elders, counselors, and others who offer guidance in ethical decision making." --Dennis E. Johnson

John M. Frame (A.B., Princeton University; B.D., Westminster Theological Seminary; M.A. and M.Phil., Yale University; D.D., Belhaven College) is the J. D. Trimble Professor of Systematic

Theology and Philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando and the author of many books, including the four-volume Theology of Lordship series.

What strikes me when I studied this text under Prof. John Frame himself where students were required to go through 850 out of its 999 pages is its emphasis and high view on the centrality of God and Scripture, and its charitable, balanced and comprehensive treatments on various important ethical issues under the heading of the Ten Commandments. After going through some terminology, Frame expounds on the concepts of transcendence and immanence to highlight the key Christian concept of the Lordship of God as the basis of formulating Christian responses to ethical issues that distinguishes it from the non-Christian ethical principles brought under his famous Triperspectivalism. The last section of the book is an in-depth exposition of each one of the Ten Commandments. Existential ethics focuses on a good inner character as the principle behind a good act. While this is biblical considering that true Christians as regenerate sons and daughters of God do good work out of a genuine love to God and their neighbor in their hearts, the non-Christian version of this principle distorts the biblical view by absolutizing human mind, will and feeling as the ultimate ethical standard. What is good ultimately depends on what one thinks is good which is often different from one individual to another. The teleological principle defines a good act as one that maximizes the happiness of living creatures and minimizes suffering. There is some biblical truth in this principle as Scripture teaches the glory of God as the highest good that incorporates man's happiness as consisting of "glorifying God and enjoying him forever." The deontological tradition teaches that a good act is done out of a response to duty, even at the price of self-sacrifice. Scripture affirms the call to self-sacrifice in obedience to Christ (Matthew 16:24-26) according to his Word, but it also teaches that duty and happiness in the long run reinforce instead of opposing one another. So in the Christian system, a good act comes from the right motive of faith in God and love of God (Romans 14:23, 1 Corinthians 13) based on the right standard, namely Scripture as the Word of God (Deuteronomy 6:6-9, 1 John 3:4) aiming to accomplish the right goal, namely the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). As in the case of the existential tradition, the non-Christian versions of teleological and deontological ethics replace God and Scripture with human autonomy to determine what the norm and the goal are. Parallel to the three ethical principles discussed above, John Frame's Triperspectivalism is a Christian framework used to analyze an ethical issue from the normative, situational and existential point of view. We may begin with the situational perspective, corresponding to the teleological principle, that first defines what the problem is. It then asks what the means are in this particular circumstance to accomplish God's purpose. The answer to

these questions should be guided by the normative perspective, corresponding to the deontological principle that asks what God's Word says. The existential perspective, corresponding to the existential principle asks how we must change when confronted by a holy God and his will in his Word in light of the situation we are facing. To give you an idea how comprehensive Frame is, he covers not only the "usual" subjects that we read on the news often such as abortion and homosexuality, but also those that don't show up on the media as frequently yet nevertheless are important. A sampling of other subjects that Frame analyzes in this book include moral heroism, tragic moral choice, and organs of ethical knowledge: the heart, conscience, experience, reason, will, imagination and emotions. Under his exposition on the Ten Commandments he includes the discussions of:- false religions, secret societies, false doctrines in the church and secularism (1st commandment),- whether or not images are always bad, the regulative principle (2nd commandment),- oaths and sin, profanity, humor, language in literature and drama (3rd commandment),- Sabbath, worship and rest, works of mercy and necessity (4th commandment),- reverence, submission and financial support to parents, views on the state, civil disobedience and revolution, the role of man and woman and slavery (5th commandment),- prison system, capital punishment, love, vengeance and self defense, protection of life, euthanasia, death, caring for the sick and injured, health and safety including tobacco, drugs, food, drink and exercise (6th commandment),- marriage, polygamy, prostitution, incest, homosexuality, fornication and lust, birth control, cloning and stem cells (7th commandment),- tithing, taxation, gambling and financial responsibility (8th commandment),- protecting others' reputation, whether we must always tell the truth (9th commandment),- coveting versus desires (10th commandments). Studying all these things is like drinking from a fire hose, especially when you are given limited amount of time. However, from my classroom experience, studying under John Frame has been immensely edifying due to the profundity of his thoughts, the vast extent of his knowledge, his charitable spirit, and commitment to and high-view of Scripture as the inerrant, inspired and infallible Word of God. My only complaint about this book is with the publisher that apparently didn't take the time to put page numbers on the table of contents.

I did not read the entirety of this thick tome, but I read significant chunks of it that were of interest to me as I listened to Frame's ethics course from Reformed Seminary, which is available free at iTunes U and which covers the same material in necessarily less detail. The book will be a first point of entry -- and in many cases, all that is needed -- for researching most ethical topics from a thoroughly Christian perspective. Overall, Frame's book is quite good, even though I differ with him

on a few lesser points and wish he had expanded on other points more (two volumes?). He approaches his subject with characteristic humility and wisdom. The sheer number of topics that he covers from meta-ethics down to practical applications of principles is astounding, and he writes clearly and for the layman, not the professional philosopher (though a mild background in philosophy and theology is expected, of course). He applies his "multiple perspectives" approach here (developed with respect to epistemology in his *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*), and it is useful and informative. I appreciated his not skirting the tough topics and his teasing out gray areas, particularly sticky problems that have arisen since the Bible was written. The book is not a list of "do"s and "don't"s, but rather it teaches the reader how to think about ethical problems biblically. That is, Frame seeks to impart a wisdom to our decision making through his exploration of ethical problems and related biblical material. Since new ethical problems are constantly arising, this seems like the right approach. As for the content, Frame's rejection of Natural Law (apart from biblical interpretation thereof) as a basis for common morality will bother some Christians, but it fits with his commitment to the Bible as the ultimate authority. His discussions of sexual ethics are straightforward but more direct than some might expect, and while his opposition to in vitro fertilization as it is commonly practiced and the Pill -- but not all forms of artificial birth control, or more accurately conception control -- may surprise some Christians, his reasoning is solid. On the other hand, his discussion of the fundamental personality of the universe as it relates to ethics will be a useful apologetic tool (indeed, elsewhere Frame says that all arguments for the existence of God ultimately reduce to the moral argument). Taking one part out of his treatment of biblical ethics as a case study, his coverage of the Sabbath is excellent and thorough, both biblically and historically. He examines six different views, thinks about each one, and concentrates on the one he himself holds, a relaxed version of the view of the Westminster Standards' view. His view is based on that of Meredith G. Kline (though Kline later changed his view), with Frame arguing somewhat controversially that the Sabbath command is still in effect and is primarily concerned with physical rest. It is not abrogated entirely or relevant only for worship, spiritual rest, etc. as some take it. (He does say it is a convenient day for corporate worship, but that is an ancillary benefit for its primary purpose.) When it comes to the thorny questions of ordinary commerce on the Sabbath, he's against it because it makes others work on our behalf, though there are obvious and extraordinary exceptions to this (nurses, firemen, innkeepers, etc.). When it comes to food on the Sabbath, he allows a little wiggle room because some restaurants should be open for travelers, the infirm, etc., and since someone must always work to prepare food anyway (indeed, the Sabbath was often a feast day in the OT), there is not a significant difference between eating out and doing it yourself. He

himself does not eat out much on Sundays because he doesn't want to encourage the cultural attitude of disrespect for the Sabbath, but he doesn't object to it in principle. His view thus puts food in a special category because it is ordinarily acceptable in a way that it is not ordinarily acceptable to obtain other services and products on the Sabbath. I was left unsatisfied and a bit perplexed by this account. First, as far as I can tell, restaurants didn't really exist, except for travelers as part of an Inn, until the 1800s or so, and hence it is tricky to apply the Sabbath commandment to restaurants today. Back then, they had servants or did it themselves, and the servants are explicitly to be given the day off. Is there an exception for food preparation? If so, it is not explicit, but I do feel the tension of *someone* having to do it. What then do we do with feasting? Is it only "hard labor" that is forbidden? I wish there were more discussion of this. Second, the biblical injunctions on Sabbath-keeping as it relates to food (especially Manna gathering in Ex. 16) seems to put the burden of proof on the one who would require another to work on the Sabbath. Gordon Hugenberger, pastor and OT scholar, gives the example of his work at a summer camp. At one point, he had more work than he could squeeze into six days but that was supposed to be done. His boss said something to the effect of, "You can't do this work now because it's the Sabbath, but as an act of service to you, I can." I wonder how that sort of approach would fit in. Again, Frame's treatment of the Sabbath is detailed and excellent, and while I personally wish there were even more fleshing out of a few aspects of the topic, I also recognize that even a lengthy and quite comprehensive book like this can't be utterly and totally exhaustive. Part of his purpose here is to teach us to reason biblically on our own because it's impossible for anyone to answer every little question in a single book, though his coverage will certainly answer many of them. In brief, I recommend this book for all pastors, elders, and industrious laymen. It will help you navigate the thorny problems that come up in your church and your own life.

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