



Kingdom Ethics 2Nd Edition

David P. Gushee , Glen H. Stassen

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Glen Stassen and David Gushee's *Kingdom Ethics*, originally published in 2003, is the leading Christian ethics textbook of the twenty-first century. Solidly rooted in Scripture — especially Jesus's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount — the book has offered many students, pastors, and other readers a comprehensive and challenging framework for Christian ethical thought.

This substantially revised edition of *Kingdom Ethics* features enhanced and updated treatments of all major contemporary ethical issues. David Gushee's revisions include updated data and examples, a more global perspective, more gender-inclusive language, a clearer focus on methodology, discussion questions added to every chapter, and a sizable new glossary.

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Sean says

Brilliant. Excellent research. Well balanced consideration of issues. Wise use of Scripture. Loved it

Robert D. Cornwall says

Ethics has to do with behavior, and Christian ethics speaks to behavior from a Christian point of view. David Gushee and the late Glen Stassen are not only Christian ethicists, but they put forward a "Kingdom Ethics" that are rooted in the teachings of Jesus. This volume is a revised version of a well regarded Christian ethics textbook. Gushee and Stassen had planned to revise the volume, which had been published years earlier, but before that could take place Stassen died. This led Gushee to undertake the revisioning process on his own, this is the product of that work.

I come to this book with a degree of freshness. I never read the first edition, so I'm not making comparisons. I do know that since the publication of the first edition, Gushee underwent a conversion of sorts on the matter of inclusion of LGBT persons. That change of heart is present in this revised version. Gushee writes of the revision that he wanted to keep continuity, but knew that changes had to be made to allow it to connect with a new audience. However, the central focus of the book remains the same. He writes: "I still seek an ethic focused on Jesus Christ, on the reign of God that he proclaimed and inaugurated, and on his authoritative teachings in the Sermon on the Mount" (p. xiii). That commitment is present throughout the book.

"Kingdom Ethics" is offered up as a text book for courses in Christian ethics. While it has that character it is much more than a text book. Having taught ethics in the past I know that some students will be overwhelmed by its length and its depth. But if they're willing to engage it they will come out with a strong sense of what it means to live as a follower of Jesus, and that should be the essence of Christian ethics.

The book falls into two sections. Part one deals with methodology and part two deals with "core moral issues." In Part One he explores Jesus' message of the reign of God, kingdom virtues, the authority of scripture, the moral structure present in the world, the initiatives revealed in the Sermon on the Mount, the centrality of love as the greatest commandment, the call to justice, the valuing the sacredness of life (Gushee has another important book that takes this much deeper), and finally an exploration of what means to be faithful. In the course of this discussion he outlines twelve "Key Method Elements for Kingdom Ethics," which are noted in the second half of the book with the marker KME(number). Being that this is an ethics textbook, the authors introduce the reader to the variety of ethical theories, but move us beyond these various theories to consider the way in which Jesus and his vision of the kingdom should form us.

In Part Two, the authors embark on a journey through a number of important ethical issues. They noted that "because we are trying to allow Jesus' agenda to set our agenda, with special attention to the Sermon on the Mount, in this section we will address such critical issues as violence and vengeance, gender relations, marriage and divorce, sexuality, truth telling, and the handling of money and possessions (and economic life more broadly)" (p. 193). Among these chapters, they include one on prayer, that is because prayer stands at the center of the Sermon on the Mount (consider the Lord's Prayer, which is explored).

It is in this section that Gushee shares his new understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation. This should, I believe, make the book more valuable, for David approaches this subject with compassion and with

deep concern that he is being faithful to scripture. This is, after all, an evangelical ethics. One chapter that I found especially helpful was the chapter on the ethics of war. They address the two primary Christian perspectives -- just war and pacifist. But they recognize that there needs to be another way, a way that can move us beyond the binary. That way is "just peacemaking theory," which was developed by Glen Stassen. What I appreciate about this vision is that it allows a person, like me, who isn't satisfied with the just war theory, but for a variety of reasons can't embrace pacifism, a way to pursue justice and mercy in a way that can make sense in the world we live in. This theory calls on us to pursue, no matter our perspective on war, peace in our world. It is a call to pursue peace in the midst of a world often torn by war and injustice. It is a vision that embraces nonviolence, seeks ways of reducing threats, makes use of "cooperative conflict resolution," acknowledges responsibility for conflict, "promotes democracy, human rights, and religious liberty, seeks just and sustainable economic development, seeks to link with cooperative forces, strengthens the UN, seeks to "reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade," and finally encourages the development of grassroots movements. To me this a realistic vision and one that calls us to action. The point is to work toward ending war!

There are few if any issues left untouched, from sexuality to race to economics to incarceration. Through out the book we're invited to look at things through the lens of Jesus' kingdom vision. That makes this a most worthwhile book. The authors emerge from an evangelical ethos. Both have Baptist connections. Stassen taught at Fuller and Gushee now teaches at McAfee School of Theology. While it is addressed first and foremost to the evangelical community, I believe that those outside the "evangelical community" have much to learn. In fact, due to David's recent commitment to LGBT inclusion, he will likely, at least in the near future, find a ready audience among mainline Protestants.

This is not an easy book to read. It's deep and wide. But it is also an important book, and we're fortunate that David has updated and revised it for a new audience.

Holly says

indexing

Julius McCarter says

Glen Stassen and David Gushee's Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context is hardly a new book -- it was originally released in 2003. But this new, second edition, has a reworking of a good bit of the material, and brings into clearer vision their fundamental conviction: That the kingdom of God motif is the key to understanding Jesus' ethical message.

From start to finish they assert that this message is normative for present-day Christians. Questions concerning the timing of the kingdom are secondary to the characteristics of the kingdom.

The kingdom's central characteristic is holistic salvation -- God's work to deliver humans from oppression, injustice, guilt, death, war, slavery, imprisonment, and exile. The kingdom Jesus established is new, but it is also in direct continuity with the Old Testament prophets, especially Isaiah. Stassen and Gushee do a fine job

of making this continuity clear.

But the most important parts of this book, I think, lay in its fresh treatment of the Sermon on the Mount as the orienting point for Christian ethics. Stassen and Gushee challenge the traditional idealist approaches to the Sermon that have actually led to a diminishing of its importance as a guide for Christian living. They propose a new strategy for reading the Sermon: Finding throughout a series of "transforming initiatives", creative and life-enhancing practices that solve problems, provide deliverance from vicious cycles of anger and insult, and empower Jesus' followers to participate in God's grace mediated through faith communities.

Kingdom Ethics is perhaps the most significant, profound and theologically attractive books to connect the Sermon on the Mount with real-life Christian discipleship and its ethical living that I've seen in a long time. The persuasiveness of their argument is enhanced by being applied to a large variety of present-day issues such as war and peace, criminal justice, abortion, euthanasia, biotechnology, marriage and divorce, sexuality, and gender roles.

Though necessarily brief, those bits of "applied ethics" have a clear narrative focus in this second edition.

Overall, the changes that have been made to the second edition of Kingdom Ethics have made it a much stronger book and will be required reading in my theological ethics classes to come.

I received a free copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for my honest review here.

Spencer says

David Gushee with the late Glen Stassen have offered perhaps the best christian ethics textbook to date.

The book combines methodological soundness with comprehensive exploration. While, for instance, a primer like Stan Hauerwas's *The Peaceable Kingdom* aims at a few conceptual and theological themes or a reader like Sam Wells' *Blackwell Reader* offers a set of readings on different issues, this book offers the unified theme of the kingdom of God then relates its principles to a comprehensive set of issues. Being able to do both well is rare.

Even more rare is that this book is truly multi-disciplinary: It is not just a summary of the biblical passages or positions; it cites exegetical work on Biblical passages, sociological studies, and historical works of a vast array, all to inform a topic with surprising depth for its chapter's size.

This is a second edition with updated chapters, glossary, and bibliography. The accomplishment of this

expansion, adding a significant amount of material, making it easier to understand than the previous addition, and not making it too long is masterful.

The result is a book that offers an introduction to ethical topics that initiates a reader into the issues while giving sound and substantive arguments. I found the authors' overwhelming fair to different positions, whether it be abortion or LGTBQ issues or Just War. Every pastor should own this book, while not neglecting to read some of the classics like Bonhoeffer's Ethics. While the history of ethics is relatively absent, and so, could use the supplement of Grenz's Moral Quest, I think this book has become and will continue to be the gold standard in Christian ethics textbooks.
