

ANCIENT CHOICES
FOR
MODERN DILEMMAS

by
John Baughn

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Spiritual "equipment" for the contest of life.

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Ancient Choices for Modern Dilemmas

Introduction

—LESSON 1—

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Purpose

This class is for the mature Christian, and it will explore how the modern dilemmas of four major social categories impact our lives: FAMILY, CULTURE, and POLITICS. The class will include frank discussion about marriage, divorce, family structure, alternative life-styles, abortion, gender roles, cultural tolerance and inclusiveness, racism, religious conflict, our responsibilities to government and politics, social engineering through company and government policies, the impact of the Darwin debate, and much more.

The class will study the following questions:

1. Are responses to modern dilemmas simply a matter of opinion, or are they matters of faith?
2. Does the Bible specifically address these modern challenges, or are the scriptures silent?
3. Are there ways to reason with the Scriptures in order to help us address these dilemmas?
4. As God's people, what obligations, choices, and/or responsibilities do we have when confronted by these modern day dilemmas?
5. And finally, in what ways must we handle these dilemmas when it comes to teaching others about the Scriptures in general and these dilemmas specifically.

Opinions vs. Standards

Our intent is not to simply open up this class to manmade opinions, but to explore what the Bible may or may not reveal about these issues. Like all other Bible-based issues, as Christians our desire should be to mold our thinking to the revealed will of God. It is necessary to understand what God's preferred pattern is for mankind. It is also necessary to understand that when events and circumstances prevent mankind from living out God's preferred pattern one must seek out Bible-based alternatives.

Also, it is important to understand that there is a place for opinion, but we must be sure to use opinion at only the proper times; and opinion must never replace God's clearly stated will.

Caution

All who use this material must understand that it is not for the new "babe in Christ," nor is it for the person who is not already a member of Christ's body. Some of the discussion around these topics must be done carefully and with strong Bible knowledge behind the reasoning. Opinions must be understood as opinion and truth as unchanging. But when the Bible is not completely clear on certain issues Christians must come together with proper attitudes of love and respect for one another — even in disagreement. However, when

disagreement is over truth, we must use the truth in a frank and honest manner in order to look out for one another's souls.

Definitions

It is also important to clearly understand the words that we are using in our class discussions. While this may sound trite, the context in which the world discusses some of these concepts may or may not be understood in the same way that we in the church or the scriptures themselves intend them. Sociologists understand that one of the most recognized ways to change a culture is to capture the language and change the meanings of its words. A prime example of this is when we hear the term “politically correct,” or “PC,” and we find certain terminology that was once accepted and common is now considered unacceptable and insulting. We not only live in a world of changing values, but a culture of changing words.

There is nothing new about any of this. The ancient prophet Isaiah said:

***“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil;
Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness;
Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”***

(Isaiah 5:20)

And finally, in regard to the use of words, as the study unfolds students should be aware of the following guidelines:

1. In each lesson, as needs dictate, we will make sure to come to a “common” understanding of the use of words that are central to the respective lesson.
2. We will caution students as to how the world may use certain words and terms in order to solicit agreement, avoid the truth, or to convince us of an incorrect view of Scripture.
3. We will look at how the original Scriptures used certain words in order to clarify the Bible’s view of – the issues being discussed.

Three Categories of Modern Dilemmas

FAMILY is the most fundamental social structure given to mankind by God. From the opening pages of Genesis we see the family structure unfold in God's plan. When working according to the original pattern, it is the ultimate support group and the foundation for a fulfilled and righteous life. While there is a basic family design that God intends for mankind, all types of sin are enemies to the family structure, and they attack it daily in order to break it down.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” **Genesis 2:24**

Dilemma #1: When the family pattern is broken down, how do we — or can we reconcile the options dictated by the world with the choices we have according to God's Word?

CULTURE, according to the *Encarta North American English Dictionary*, the term “culture” includes:

1. The arts (“art, music, literature, and related intellectual activities, considered collectively”);
2. Knowledge and sophistication (“enlightenment, sophistication acquired through education and exposure to the arts”);
3. Shared beliefs and values (“the beliefs, customs, practices, and social behavior of a particular nation of people”);
4. Shared beliefs and practices (“a group of people whose beliefs and practices identify the particular race, class, or time to which they belong”); and,
5. Shared attitudes (“a particular set of attitudes that characterizes a group of people”).

It seems that our belief systems are under full frontal attack by popular amoral elitists who are in every medium of art, communication, education, and entertainment in our culture. But is that really the case? Is it worse than ever before? How deeply has our cultural structures been shaken? Has it all been for the worst, or is there any good coming out of our culture?

“I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some.” **1 Corinthians 9:22**

Dilemma #2: When we find ourselves uncomfortable with a changing or different culture, how do we know if that discomfort is actually cultural in nature, if our own prejudices are at play, or if it is because there is real conflict with scriptural values?

POLITICS and government are at the forefront of our society and part of our daily conversation. Many political issues today are polarizing the public and are often expressed as deeply emotional issues. Special interest groups are using the political process as a venue to create sweeping changes in our culture and to advance their own causes through the legislative process. The tax system and government financing are used to change societal structures. Government and corporate policies have been used as tools to modify behaviors and attitudes.

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.” **Romans 13:1**

Dilemma #3: In what ways do the Scriptures address our participation in and our responsibility to our nation, its people, and its leaders? How are we to act when we perceive conflicts between our responsibility to government and our accountability to our God?

Questions

1. Name the three social categories this class will explore.
2. Why are the definitions of words important in this study?
3. Describe what you consider to be the difference between “matters of opinion” and “matters of faith.” Are “opinions” and “faith” necessarily conflicting? When are they? When are they not?
4. In regard to God’s Word, what should be our desire?
5. Is there a place for opinions when it comes to the truth? If so, what caution are we to take regarding manmade opinions?

6. Is it always possible to live according to God's preferred plan for the family? Give some examples of what may interfere with doing so?

7. In your own words, briefly describe "American Culture."

8. Why do you think today's politics are so emotional for many people? Should they be for Christians?

Ancient Choices for Modern Dilemmas

Section 1 | Family

Dilemma #1: When the family pattern is broken down, how do we reconcile the choices we have according to the world with the choices we have according to God's Word?