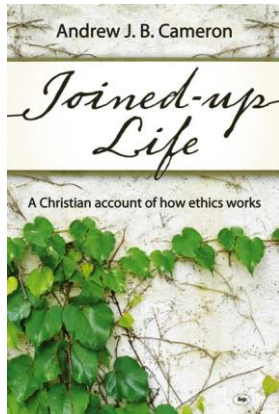


Andrew J. B. Cameron, *Joined-Up Life: A Christian Account of How Ethics Works* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2011). 336 pp. ISBN:978-1-844-74515-9

Ethics aspires to be a practical discipline that helps people live in the real world. Often, however, it risks being drowned in abstruse methodology, arcane philosophy, and forgettable terminology. What should be a stimulating and engaging subject can, in the wrong hands, become boring. In *Joined-Up Life*, Rev. Dr. Andrew Cameron, formerly lecturer in ethics at Moore College and now Director of St. Mark's National Theological Centre in Canberra, has given us a readable, understandable—indeed exciting—introduction to Ethics from a Christian perspective.



Joined-Up Life is written in a unique way that takes into account our (supposed) contemporary inability to concentrate for long. It consists of thirty-five bite-sized chapters grouped into five major parts. The five sections are logically ordered but Cameron has arranged his content so that the reader can start wherever they wish. The chapters are short (usually several pages long) and written in a casual, engaging style. If the argument of a chapter relies on another earlier part of the book, Cameron refers the reader to it. Each chapter is introduced with several sentences that show how it fits into the overall argument of the book. Cameron limits ethical jargon and provides many anecdotes and illustrations that connect well with the average Australian.

In part one, entitled “Awareness”, Cameron orients the reader to the discipline of ethics. In six chapters he considers how our initial awareness of ethics presents itself to us in everyday life. He then examines four foundations that our contemporary culture seeks to build ethics upon: rules, rights, values, and results. Cameron shows that whilst each of these has its place in ethics, they have deep inadequacies on their own.

In part two, entitled “Unawareness”, Cameron then turns to five often unacknowledged “undertows” in human experience that dramatically affect ethics: the tangled desires lodged deeply in each human that pull us personally, our desperate need for social inclusion, the “flesh” (in the biblical sense of our fallen urge to live as if desire and inclusion are all that matter), the profound complexity of ethics that needs to be acknowledged, and the necessity of an objective morality.

With preliminaries out of the way, in part three (“Jesus versus Ethics”) Cameron develops his fundamental thesis: Christian ethics is to be centred on Christ himself. In nine chapters he shows how this is so. Cameron contends that all of creation itself is “Christ-powered” (so Col. 1:15-20) and ultimately can’t be understood without reference to Jesus. In light of the Gospel, he argues that the believer’s life is defined in its relation to the person and work of Christ and must have implications for ethics: Christ is the Lord we follow; our union with Christ in his death and resurrection entails a putting to death of old ways and a putting on of the new; Christ’s giving of the Spirit is critical to empowering the believer’s new life. And as Cameron cogently contends, Christians can only be truly formed in the context of the church community. At the end of this section Cameron attends to how the Bible can be used in ethics. He avers that it is essential to grasp the bible’s entire narrative or “story-arc” for this task, arguing that the OT law has expired as a literal rule now for God’s people since Christ, yet it provides a moral vision that can fire the ethical imagination for the present in the light of Christ.

Having argued for the centrality of Christ to ethics, in part four (“Five Things that Matter”) Cameron shows what this actually looks like. He believes there are five boundaries that regulate Christian ethics.

The first is God’s character. Cameron points out that Scripture urges believers to imitate God and be like God, but this entails not simply doing commands but cultivating a godly character itself, there must be a place for virtue in ethics.

Secondly, Cameron contends that stitched into the fabric of the universe is a moral order. He avers that Christian ethics must respect this order because, contrary to some forms of divine command theory, it reflects God himself. Hence, there is a deontological element in Christian ethics.

The third boundary is the commands of Scripture. Here Cameron is keen to show that the Bible's commands must be analysed to understand where they arise in the Bible's story-arc and what they reveal about God, his character, and creation order. *Commands reveal*. Understanding this, for Cameron, saves them from suffocating ethics with the dangers of their unnecessary multiplication and apparently arbitrary nature.

The fourth boundary Cameron enumerates is the "new future" to which humanity, indeed the entire universe, is heading. Christian ethics is informed by eschatology. Cameron believes that the new future endues believers with a new identity and purpose according to which they should consistently live. As an ethical boundary, the new future allows for both teleological and consequentialist elements in Christian ethics.

The final boundary is the church or what Cameron dubs the "Jesus-shaped community". He is keen to emphasise that believers cannot be formed in their new habits apart from God's people. Having identified the five "poles" integral to Christian ethics, Cameron then shows how Jesus unites them. Christ: reveals God's character, restores God's creation, reframes God's commands, receives God's new future, and reconciles relationships in the Jesus-shaped community. Jesus is, in Cameron's words, the "unified field", that makes sense of and pulls together the five boundaries that matter in ethics. Here indeed is the joined-up life!

Now that Cameron's Christ-centred ethic has been unpacked, he proceeds in part five ("Living Our Lives") to practical life issues. Firstly, he covers classic issues such as drunkenness and rage, forgiveness and reconciliation, freedom and the like. Secondly, he looks at some specific "life-packages" such as singleness, marriage, children, and work. Then, last of all, Cameron turns to more controversial issues, or "hot spots", like the role of women, sex, homosexuality, and bioethics. Cameron shows how his five boundaries united in Christ help Christians approach each of the practical life issues. A particular highlight in this section is Cameron's insightful coverage of singleness. He makes explicit what is often neglected about singleness in Scripture: the single person can be devoted to God in way married couples cannot, and that the presence of single people in the church reminds married believers that human marriage is impermanent and not to be idolised.

Joined-Up Life makes a very important contribution to Christian ethics, and is in one sense a breakthrough. Why? Cameron has formulated a robust moral theology that unashamedly and refreshingly *puts and keeps Jesus at the centre*. Too often Christian ethics loses its moorings in the Gospel due to excessive emphasis on issues like virtue, deontology, or teleology. These are not unimportant and are integral to ethics, but Cameron shows where they should rightly fit, making sure they do not crowd out Christ.

A great strength of *Joined-Up Life* is simply the way it is written—very differently from usual ethics text books. Cameron knows that ethics is too important for some Christian academic elite to own. So, he has crafted a work that will have wide appeal. His writing style is easy to digest because it is personal, simple, anecdotal, and with limited technical terminology. Moreover, the bite-sized chapters enable the reader to get abreast of a topic quickly. This has its downside: there are times when I found myself wanting more detail, especially on the issue of divorce and remarriage, for example. But this is to place an impossible burden on the book. One can't have a summary *and* detail simultaneously. To rectify this somewhat, Cameron provides suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter.

In short, I highly recommend *Joined-Up Life* as a superb introduction for all believers to Christian ethics.

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