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WHAT do you think God had in mind when He called believers to “be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16)? When you hear the word “holy,” you might picture a shaft of light coming from Heaven and shining down on a man with a halo who is kneeling to pray. While an artist might render holiness in this way, it doesn’t convey the extent to which God defines holiness. In 1 Peter 1:14–16 Peter framed the concept of holiness in terms of a believer’s everyday behavior: “As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

God cares about your conduct—all of your conduct. He wants you to respond in every situation in a way that is totally consistent with how He would respond. To act in that holy manner requires that you know God’s behavioral standards. Acquiring that knowledge requires a careful consideration of the subject of this study, A Man and His Ethics.

The intent of this book is to help you begin a quest to be the man God intended when He made you and saved you. By your every action He wants you to show that your life is controlled and empowered by the holy God of the Bible. May God’s grace enable you to live a holy life.
WHO WRITES THE RULES?

God, the Ultimate Authority, has established rules we must obey.

URING a creative moment, my son and I set out to see if we could invent a table game. It was a challenging project. First we had to come up with a concept. Then we needed to establish rules for the game. If we didn’t have a set of rules, we couldn’t play the game, and we wouldn’t have any sense of how to play or how to declare a winner. The game play would go nowhere and make no sense.

1. Give an example from each of the following settings in which a clearly defined set of rules is required. In contrast, describe what might occur in each of the examples if rules were ignored.
# Living by the Rules

The sports field, the highways, the hallways, and the office would be utter chaos without rules. For any cooperative activity to take place with a semblance of order, it must have rules.

2. What statement in Judges 21:25 describes a society that refused to function by a governing set of rules?

Judges 21:25 implies that if a king had been appointed, the anarchy might have been avoided. As the designated leader, a king would have established and enforced a set of rules. A synonym for “king” is “ruler.” To rule is to exercise authority, to govern, and to authoritatively lay down a legal rule.

3. For any given day, list your activities that are governed by rules.

Whether or not you like rules, they are an essential part of your life. Rules are designed to provide behavioral param-
eters within which you function. They enable people to live, work, drive, and play together. Rules regulate acceptable and unacceptable conduct. Their existence implies that right and wrong behavior can be and should be defined.

What rules govern your conduct? The collective answer to that question could be described as a man and his ethics. Ethics is a system of moral principles that governs an individual’s or a group’s behavior. As with rules, ethics assumes the existence of an authority who determines right and wrong.

4. What authorities establish a person’s code of conduct?

The existence of ethics implies that a person decides either to live by set standards or to refuse to accept them. As you think about ethics, consider three questions: Who establishes your ethics? What are those ethics? Do you and will you live by those ethics?

**Ethical Authority**

The starting point for a study of ethics is to determine their origin. Who sets the rules? Perhaps you remember when you were growing up and your parents made a rule such as, “You can’t go out with your friends unless your homework is finished and your room is clean.” How would your parents have responded if you had snapped back, “What right do you have to make that rule for me?” Probably the response would have been, “Because I’m the parent and you are the child. I’m in charge, not you. You will do what you are told, young man.” Chances are that you would not have been able to go out with friends after responding in that smart-aleck manner.

What response would you expect if you were a member of
an athletic team and the coach said, “I want you to run wind sprints before you leave practice,” but you refused his instructions? You would have been running more than the required wind sprints or possibly would have been dismissed from the team. It is assumed that you, as a team member, would do what you were told because the coach was in charge.

The Bible contains ethical guidelines for conduct. They are intended to govern your behavior in areas such as marriage and family, friendships, finances, worship, and speech. You may or may not like those guidelines. The question is, who is in charge and has the right to impose those rules? The answer is found in the opening chapters of the Bible.

Read Genesis 1.

5. What laws of nature apply to the natural creation (Genesis 1:1–25)?

6. What laws of nature apply to man (Genesis 1:26–30)?

7. Who established those laws of nature? What authority does He have that entitles Him to make those laws?

Read Genesis 2.

8. What rule applied to the natural creation, as recorded in Genesis 2:4–6?
9. What guidelines for right and wrong behavior existed in the Garden (Genesis 2:7–25)?

10. Who established those guidelines? What authority does He have that entitles Him to set those guidelines?

The opening chapters of the Bible are essential to understanding the origin of the universe and the origin of ethics. The Creator God made everything that exists. By right of His creative act, His authority also extends over man, who likewise finds his origin in God. If God made everything that exists, including man, then He is entitled to set the rules by which it all functions.

11. Do you agree with that reasoning? Why or why not?

When God made the first man, Adam, He gave him specific duties. He established a rule about what Adam should and should not eat. When God made Eve and brought her to Adam, immediately Adam realized a sense of divinely arranged compatibility and responsibility. God not only made Adam and Eve, but He also established a basic order by which they were to live. God had every right to do that because He had created them.

Think back to the time when you were a child at home with your parents. Your parents had authority to set the rules in your family because they had produced you and you were living in their house. You belonged to them. Even more so, the human race finds its origin in God. The universe is His
A MAN AND HIS ETHICS

house. Everything belongs to Him. He made it and He made you. As long as you are living in His house, you are responsible to live by His rules.

Overthrowing Ethical Authority

A coup d'état is the coordinated overthrow of an existing governing power and the institution of a new authority. Occasionally the news will report that a coup d'état has taken place in a nation; a new regime forcefully replaces the reigning leader. A similar type of coup takes place when you replace God as the ethical authority of your life.

12. How would a man’s ethics be affected if he decided that the God of Genesis 1 and 2 did not make the universe?

Read Romans 1:18–32.

13. What decision did men make regarding God's authority (Romans 1:18–23)?

14. Who was appointed as the new ethical authority (Romans 1:24, 25)?

15. What behavioral standards did man accept (Romans 1:28–32)?
16. How did these behavioral standards disregard the rules of nature that God instituted in the original creation order (Romans 1:26, 27)?

17. What impact would the new behavioral standards have on families, businesses, neighborhoods, and nations (Romans 1:29–31)?

18. What summary statement defines the attitude of sinful man toward God’s ethical authority (Romans 1:32)?

19. Does this description of man’s ethical choices sound familiar to you? From current events, provide illustrations of these behavioral choices.

20. Have you acknowledged God’s authority over your life? What personal evidence can you give of God’s authority in your life?

When man initiated a new set of ethical principles (Romans 1), he rewrote God’s ethics. Man appointed himself as the authority, seizing the right to devise his own rules in defiant protest to God’s ethics.
Inward look

During your life you periodically receive personal assessments: doctors assess your health; teachers assess your academic success; employers assess your job performance. Ideally the intent of these assessments is to reveal strengths and weaknesses. If God assessed your response to His moral authority, how would you score?

21. Conduct a personal assessment by placing an X on the continuum after each of the following assessments.

I accept God as my ultimate ethical authority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reject</th>
<th>Accept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have a thorough knowledge of God’s ethical absolutes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaware</td>
<td>Aware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My conduct evidences a consistent compliance to God’s ethical expectations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defiant</td>
<td>Compliant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. How did you rank in response to God’s standard of ethics? List specific areas in which you could improve in your awareness of and compliance to God’s ethical absolutes.

Ask the Lord to use this study as an ethical assessment of your life. Ask God to show you areas of moral strength and weakness and to help you take the necessary steps to live consistently by His ethical guidelines.