

Biblical Principles for Military Ethics Transcript

This lesson focused on "Biblical Principles for Military Ethics," presenting a framework based on Scripture to guide military professionals' conduct and moral decision-making. Jeff outlined five key principles derived from biblical texts involving Roman soldiers: fidelity (displayed through John the Baptist's interaction with soldiers), responsibility (exemplified by a Roman centurion's care for a servant), accountability (demonstrated by a centurion at Jesus' crucifixion), maturity (shown through Cornelius's growth and leadership), and empowerment (illustrated by Julius's leadership onboard a ship during a storm). The lesson emphasized using inductive Bible study methods to explore these principles, applying them to current military contexts, and learning from biblical examples of Roman soldiers who encountered God's purposes in their service.

Summary

Bible Studies for Military Ethics

Jeff introduced a series of Bible studies focused on biblical principles for military ethics, using texts from Luke and Acts. He outlined an inductive Bible study method and presented the first principle of fidelity, derived from the interaction between Roman soldiers and John the Baptist in Luke 3. The principle encompasses three directives: not robbing by violence, not accusing falsely, and being content with wages. Jeff explained how early Christians applied these teachings to military service and emphasized the importance of understanding and applying these principles to modern military contexts.

Biblical Leadership and Responsibility

Jeff discussed the principle of responsibility using the example of a Roman centurion from Luke 7 who amazed Jesus with his faith. The centurion demonstrated care for his servant, understanding of authority, and humility by requesting Jesus's help. Jeff explained how the centurion's actions illustrate concepts like duty of care and chain of command, emphasizing the importance of caring for both subordinates and community members. The discussion concluded with application questions and recommendations for further biblical study, particularly focusing on Luke's texts about Roman soldiers.

Biblical Leadership Principles for Soldiers

Jeff discussed biblical principles of leadership and accountability through the examples of Roman centurions in the New Testament. He outlined five key principles for Christian soldiers: fidelity, responsibility, accountability, maturity, and empowerment. Each principle was illustrated through different biblical characters and scenarios, including the Roman centurion at the cross, Cornelius, and Julius. Jeff emphasized how these principles form a unified ethical framework for military service and faith, encouraging attendees to reflect on how these lessons apply to their own roles and responsibilities.

Key Outcomes

Jeff Zust presented a framework for military ethics drawn from Roman soldiers' encounters with God in Luke and Acts, organized into five principles: fidelity, responsibility, accountability, maturity, and empowerment. These studies use inductive Bible study methodology and are designed for use in military Christian fellowships and unit ethics training.

Course Structure and Resources

Available Materials:

- Lesson plans accessible on Acts website under "Biblical Principles of Military Ethics Bible Studies"
- Also found under Ethics Intern Programs section with video and slides
- All studies use inductive Bible study method: observation → interpretation → correlation → application

Study Methodology:

- Begins with observing text details and asking basic questions
- Moves to interpretation to identify principles and God's actions
- Correlates observations with personal life experiences and current challenges
- Applies findings to vocational calling, particularly military service
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Five Biblical Principles

1. Fidelity (Luke 3)

Core Virtue: Temperance - self-restraint and moderation under duress 4

Context: Roman soldiers encounter John the Baptist and ask "What does God require of us?" - the only instance in Scripture where soldiers ask this question in abstract 5

John's Three Commands: 6

- Rob no one by violence (extends beyond extortion to all forms of violence that rob others of health, life, or property) 7
- Do not accuse others falsely (emphasizes truth-telling about others) 8
- Be content with your wages (applies to duty under trauma, fear, and harsh conditions) 89

Historical Significance: John never told soldiers to resign from the Roman army; he redirected the purpose and conditions under which they served. This passage became the foundation for St. Augustine's just war doctrine. 67

Supporting Texts: Philippians 4, Psalm 62, 1 Samuel 24, Joshua 2, 1 Samuel 17, Deuteronomy 20

2. Responsibility (Luke 7)

Core Values: Duty, care, authority, loyalty, humility 11

Context: A Roman centurion (equivalent to captain or first sergeant) requests Jesus heal his valued servant - possibly a non-commissioned officer *11/12/13*

Key Displays of Responsibility: *13/14/15*

- **Duty of care:** Valued subordinate's life enough to seek foreign help
- **Community care:** Jewish leaders testified he cared for occupied civilians and built their synagogue
- **Chain of command understanding:** Told Jesus "only say the word" based on his understanding of authority structure - believed Jesus' word carried power like a superior officer's command

Significance: This centurion is the only person in the Gospels described as positively amazing Jesus with his faith *11*

Supporting Texts: Psalm 115, Romans 14

3. Accountability (Luke 23)

Core Values: Truth, candor, self-awareness, commitment *17*

Context: Roman centurion commanding Jesus' execution publicly declares Jesus' righteousness while witnessing his death *17/18*

Accountability Displayed: *17/19*

- Publicly proclaimed victim's innocence: "Truly this man was righteous"
- Acknowledged victim did not deserve execution
- Implicitly rebuked the authority (Roman government and accusers) that ordered the crucifixion
- Displayed conscience despite personal and professional cost

Key Principle: "Responsible leadership sometimes means acknowledging our own moral failures in an order, in a system, in oneself, and saying so out loud. That is not insubordination, that is integrity under fire." *19*

Supporting Texts: Psalm 15 ("who swear by their own hurt and do not change"), 2 Samuel 11-12 (David, Uriah, and Nathan), Numbers 19, Psalm 51

4. Maturity (Acts 10)

Core Virtue: Prudence/wisdom - ability to learn and grow; "events of our lives turn to experience when we learn from them" *22*

Context: Roman centurion Cornelius prays on a roof, receives vision from God to find Peter; assembles family, unit members, and neighbors to hear Peter's message *23/24*

Growth Dimensions: *24*

- Personal spiritual growth through prayer
- Growth in others as teacher
- Growth in exercising command

Transformative Impact: God used Cornelius to teach Peter that Gentiles (non-Jews) belong in God's family. This encounter became foundational evidence at the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15) that shaped Christianity's global mission. *24/25/26*

Key Insight: Maturity recognizes "grace is not earned by rank, and the spirit moves beyond the boundaries of command" *25*

Supporting Texts: Acts 15 (Jerusalem Conference), 2 Chronicles, Psalm 128

5. Empowerment (Acts 27)

Core Concept: "Undauntedness" - accepting personal exposure and risk to protect those under your charge; combination of all previous virtues 28

Context: Roman centurion Julius escorts prisoner Paul to Rome by ship; storm threatens vessel and lives 2829

Leadership Displayed: 29

- Soldiers wanted to kill prisoners to prevent escape during shipwreck
- Julius decided not to kill prisoners (refused to "rob by violence unjustly")
- Made decisive command: everyone abandons ship together or no one does
- Controlled soldiers' fear and anxiety at personal risk
- "No one left behind" ethic

Significance: At the crisis moment of choosing to save lives, Julius made the decision - not Paul. God used this Roman soldier to teach believers about divine providence.

Supporting Texts: Acts 23, Acts 7-8 (Stephen), Philemon (slave returning with free authority; first bishop of Ephesus named Onesimus), Galatians 5:22-23 (fruits of the Spirit), Ephesians 6, Psalm 144

Reflection Questions for Military Leaders

Fidelity: Where is self-restraint and contentment most tested in your current role?

Responsibility: Who depends on your care? How are you exercising command in both directions (to seniors and subordinates)?

Accountability: What is your sense of accountability to those who depend on your uses of power and to your own conscience?

Maturity & Empowerment: How are you creating space for others to grow? How do life events turn into experience and wisdom? Are you leading in ways that multiply mission rather than concentrate control?

Key Takeaway

Every Roman soldier in these passages encountered something greater than themselves or their mission. God used them to teach generations about how God operates inside the church. These are the very character of men and women God uses to accomplish His purposes in the world.

Acknowledgment

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