

Title not just “Ethics” but “Christian Ethics” →

- indicates an awareness that it is entirely possible to have an ethic without using Scripture.
 - Prov 16:25
- Even within explicitly *Christian* Ethics, the trunk of your theology will frame the ethic you follow

Morals – beliefs, rules, or guides about how to live

Ethics – the study of morality

- Many (most?) people have morals without an explicit, consistent ethic
- They operate just fine until they are confronted with a sticky situation, a conflict of values, or with competing moral values

Sidebar: because of this last point, many people instinctively boil down ethics to answering particular situational questions, especially questions that arise out of particularly tricky situations

- “Casuistry” – doesn’t have to have a negative connotation, but it often does
- This is what Jesus’ opponents often confronted him with
 - His notable response: “you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God” (Matt 22:29)

Thus we see the need for a consistently biblical Ethical Theory

Ethical theory

1. Ethics of Duty (*deontological* ethics)
 - a. A person has a duty to do morally good acts based on the features of the acts themselves
 - b. Examples
 - i. Divine Command – if God commands (or forbids), we do what He says

This works well when God gives explicit and broadly applicable commands (“Thou shalt not murder”)

- ii. Universal law (Kant) – if something is universally good, people are bound to do it (i.e., not commit murder)
- 2. Teleological theories – purpose-driven ethics
 - a. Natural law – everything is *designed with a purpose* that can be determined using human reason
 - b. Historical teleology – we set goals in our lives and then work toward achieving them
- 3. Consequentialist theories – fulfillment of certain outcomes
 - a. Not based on design/purpose but on consequences/outcomes
 - b. One example: “Maximum good for maximum number of people”
- 4. Motivational theories
 - a. Attitudes and motivations of the person are addressed, not just the actions
- 5. Ethics of Virtue
 - a. Character of the agent is paramount

A biblical theory is going to incorporate both aspects of duty and of virtue

Biblical Theology plays a relevant role. If God’s will has been revealed progressively (which I argue it has), then we cannot lift Scriptures out of context and apply them to every situation without careful assessment.

“The Law of Moses does not provide a complete and binding guide to Christian morality.” – M. Hill

Biblical aspects of morality:

- 1. Creation order (nature)
 - a. doing good is based on the creator’s design and purpose
 - b. Gal 6:10; Titus 3:1
- 2. Personal Relationships (level of love)

- a. love for God and love for neighbor
 - i. God has no needs, but He demands to be obeyed
 - ii. Others have needs and desires to be met by us
 - 1. Commitment to the good of others stands in contrast to individualistic theories of self-determination/self-fulfillment/self-actualization
 - 2. But there is an individual aspect that cannot be accounted for by “greatest good for the greatest number of people”
 - b. “love” has clearly defined objects
 - c. Biblically speaking, marriage is the essential social unit
 - i. Only social unit instituted by God before the Fall
 - d. Immorality is not only an offense against God’s general order and purposes, but also a personal affront to God
 - i. 2 Sam 12:13; Prov 14:31
3. Community
- a. Individualism - Individual is the basic unit (Western society)
 - b. Collectivism – society is the basic unit (Eastern society; Marx)
 - i. Difference b/t the two – war/soldiers example
 - c. Interrelationism –
 - i. Individuals in relationship
 - ii. Individuals cannot exist without community, and people have responsibility toward mutual love relationships and toward affecting social structures for good, but the structures themselves are not the greatest good.
 - iii. Personal moral dilemmas can be brought on by immoral social structures

Mutual Love Ethic – “An action or trait of character is right if and only if it promotes (creates or maintains) mutual love relationships between (a) God and humans, (b) humans and humans.” M. Hill

Caveat: Because we live in an age of inaugurated eschatology (already/not yet), there are times when we deal with tensions pulling us in different directions. E.g. marriage/divorce 1 Cor 7:15

The consummated kingdom will be filled with rest and peace, and we long for that peace, but because we don’t live yet in that consummated kingdom, sometimes we make decisions seeking the peace we long for when what’s necessary to honor God in the present actually involves conflict.

Next lesson (part 2) will deal with applying this ethic to certain types of moral questions, some that are addressed specifically in the Bible, and some that are only dealt with through general Biblical principles.

Suggested Reading:

Michael Hill. *The How and the Why of Love*

C. Ben Mitchell. *Ethics and Moral Reasoning*

Ken Magnuson. *Invitation to Christian Ethics*