

Introduction to Christian Ethics

March 3rd, 2019

Partly adapted from *Christian Ethics* by Wayne Grudem

1. A definition of Christian ethics
 - a. Christian Ethics seeks to explain what the whole Bible teaches us about which acts, attitudes, and personal character traits receive God's **approval**, and which do not. (Modified from Wayne Grudem)
 - i. God-centered and Bible-centered
2. A description of Christian ethics
 - a. Deontological –Based on rules for **right** and **wrong**, what ought to be done and ought not to be done.
 - i. Secular – based only on human reasons and intuition
 - ii. Christian – based on the Bible
 - b. Teleological – Based on seeking the best **results** for an action.
 - i. Utilitarianism – seeking the greatest good for the greatest number of people.
 - ii. Ethical egoism – seeking whatever is best for yourself personally (Ayn Rand)
 1. Hedonism
 - iii. Christian ethics should have a God-centered teleological aspect to it, because the Bible tells us that the result we should seek is the glory of God
 1. 1 Cor 10:31
 2. The glory of God is intertwined with the good of man because God is perfectly good and loving.
 - c. Virtue ethics – Emphasizes not whether specific actions are right or wrong, but the moral **character** of the individual.
 - i. Political example – in elections questions of a candidates character are often important
 - ii. Christian ethics should emphasize virtue ethics because the Bible teaches that we should seek to develop a Christlike character.
 - d. If our ethical system is derived from the Bible it will be deontological (it will define right and wrong based on the rules God give sin Scripture) and also teleological (it will seek a good result, namely, doing all for the glory of God), and it will also include a component of virtue ethics (it will seek to develop Christ-like character in each person).

Quiz

3. Why should Christians study ethics?
 - a. We study ethics to better know God's **will** for us.
 - i. **Matthew 28:19-20** "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
 - ii. **John 14:15** "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

1. In order to keep His commandments we have to know what they are and understand how they apply to us today, including their OT background and how they are explained in the NT.
- iii. NT seems to have a call to study ethics
1. **Romans 12:2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed by the renewing of your mind*, so that you may *prove what the will of God is*, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
 2. **Ephesians 5:10** *trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.*
 3. **Philippians 1:9-10** And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in *real knowledge and all discernment*, ¹⁰ so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;
 4. **2 Peter 1:5** Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply *moral excellence*, and in *your moral excellence, knowledge*,
- b. We study ethics to gain a more **accurate** understanding of ethics.
- i. Everyone has some ethical beliefs about right and wrong – informed by family, culture, conscience, school, reading the Bible, listening to sermons, etc.
 - ii. Move from **instinctive** to **informed** ethical convictions.
 1. May already believe the right things but not have an informed understanding of why. Makes you vulnerable to counter-arguments that you have not prepared to face.
 2. Example: abortion – may instinctively believe its wrong but haven't thought through the issues of cases of rape or incest, life of the mother, forms of birth control, and haven't considered the biblical passages that address abortion.
 - iii. Move from **imprecise** to **precise** ethical convictions.
 1. Euthanasia – may believe that intentionally ending a life is wrong, but is there a point to withhold care? What if the person chooses it themselves? What if they refuse a treatment? What if someone chooses for them to remove an iv hydration?
 - iv. Move from **unbiblical** to **biblical** ethical convictions.
 1. There may be areas that you are holding onto a conviction without realizing that it violates some biblical principle.
- c. We study ethics to prepare to make wise ethical decisions about **new** matters later.
- i. Who knows what the challenges will be in the future?
 - ii. Did we anticipate 20 years ago that the question of transgenderism and gender disphoria would be such a hot button issue today?
- d. We study ethics to prepare us for **evangelism**.
- i. When we share the gospel with people they often bring up ethical questions.
 1. “But don't Christians believe gay people go to hell?”
 - ii. A robust, ethical community is itself a form of evangelism or at least a door-opener to evangelism.

1. **Deuteronomy 4:5** "See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. ⁶ "So keep and do *them*, for that is your wisdom and your *understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'* ⁷ "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? ⁸ "Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?
 - iii. Unless people understand their sin, they won't know they need a savior. Christian ethics can help us wisely and graciously explain God's law so people can see clearly how they have violated it.
4. How should we discuss complex ethical topics?
 - a. Bring **knowledge** to the discussion not just emotion
 - i. **Proverbs 15:7** The lips of the wise spread knowledge, But the hearts of fools are not so.
 1. Antithetic parallelism – contrasting lines to explain each other
 2. "lips" and "hearts" as stand ins for the person
 3. Spreading knowledge vs. . .
 - ii. **Proverbs 17:27** He who restrains his words has knowledge, And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.
 1. Restraining out of fear of man vs. restraining because the words because they are not "good for edification according to the need of the moment" (Eph. 4:29)
 - iii. **Proverbs 12:18** There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.
 - b. Carefully consider **what** to say and **how** to say it
 - i. **Proverbs 15:28** The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.
 1. Ponders vs. pours out
 - ii. **Proverbs 15:1** A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.
 - c. Grow in wisdom by growing in **character** and spiritual **maturity**.
 - i. **James 3:13-17** Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.
 - ii. Too often Christians don't engage complex issues with gentleness, mercy, reasonableness. We want to lob right answers without providing real help, either knowledge or practical assistance.
 1. Prolife posts on Facebook, but judge 16 year old pregnant girls from a (safe) distance
 2. Hold firm against euthanasia but don't provide care for aging parents
 3. Crack jokes about gay people
5. Resources for Christian Ethics
 - a. *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning*, Wayne Grudem

- b. *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues and Options*, Norm Geisler
- c. *Ethics for a Brave New World*, Feinberg and Feinberg
- d. *What Is the Meaning of Sex?*, Denny Burk

Which ethical issues are you most interested to study and discuss? Why?

Which issues are you confronted with most often by friends, family, classmates, or professors?

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Pop Quiz!

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