

Christian Ethics 1

Introduction

Picture five or six men having coffee in a coffee shop...what do they do... they meet regularly, they of course discuss the current issues in the world today... most likely politics... you can imagine the plethora of opinions!

Most likely if the group has been meeting regularly for a long time, they are probably aligned with each other in their politics and world views...one of them has a USMC cap on, another dressed in camo... all of them carry concealed weapons... Groups that last, usually operate with the same mindset.

What is the basis for their opinions?... what validates their ideas and opinions?... what is the authority behind the thoughts, ideas and opinions?... they have a very strong sense of right and wrong.... What is good and what is bad... where does that all come from?

There's another group of men meeting for coffee at a shop around the corner that has the sign "Black Life Matters" and a rainbow on the entrance window.... Their discussion is similar... solving the issues of the world... politics... but their discussion is a complete 180 degrees apart from the other group.... They are as passionate... as sincere...and confident that they are right. They too have strong opinions as to what is right and wrong, good and bad.... Where does all that come from?

So many things influence one's world view... a world view = the lens in which you see the world determining how you live in it... **What are some of those things?**

Environment

Social class

Peers

Education

Religious views and beliefs

Geography

-What is the problem and difficulty of so many world views?

Whose right and wrong?... whose concept of good and bad..... what is a common basis.

- **How much of your decision making is based on "what you think?" or "how you feel"?**
- **What is the problem with that?**
- **The problem is solved by having a basis outside of you!... but the basis must be based on absolute truth..... this leads us to the essence of "Christian Ethics"**

I. The definition of “ethics”.

- A. *Secular ethics*—Moral principles that govern a person’s behavior or the conducting of an activity.

This sounds great, we would probably all agree with this definition... but it has some problems

■ **Can you name some problems?**

1. Where do the moral principles come from?
2. What is the authority that determines what is right and wrong (morality)
3. Lack of consensus, how can it be “enforced”?

mo·ral·i·ty

principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behavior.

- B. *Christian ethics*—any study that answers the question, “what does the whole Bible teach us about the acts, attitudes, and personal character traits which receive God’s approval, and which do not?”

There’s a big difference between these two definitions.

■ **Name some?**

1. Reveals where the moral principles come from—the “whole Bible”
2. It gives us a reason for being “biblically moral” – to please God with our lives
3. It reveals what a godly character looks like.
4. God centered—Bible centered.

II. Systematic theology and Christian ethics.

- A. *Systematic theology*—“Any study that answers the question, ‘What does the whole Bible teach us today?’ about any given topic.”
- B. *Christian ethics*—Any study that answers the question “What does God want us to do and what attitude does He want us to have?”

Systematic theology emphasizes what God wants us to believe and know, while C.E. emphasizes what God wants us to do and what attitude to have. Theology focuses more on ideas while ethics focusses on situations in life... ST tells us how we should think, CE tells us how we should live.

III. Forms of ethics.

Without getting into too much detail in these, for that is not our purpose... but to simply understand that there are different ethic disciplines, some of which will be brought in from time to time in our discussions.... So this is for your awareness.

There are “forms of disciplines” and there are “Ethical Systems”.... The disciplines are different ways of looking at ethics within the Christian point of view, systems of ethical systems are basically ways of viewing ethics outside the Christian view.

- A. *Historical ethics*—How Christians in different periods of history have understood various ethical topics.

In biblical times, we know the value of a woman in society was minimal, lower than most animals... so the requirement of head coverings for instance would have been a biblical ethical topic.... Now?... not so.

- B. *Philosophical ethics*—Using philosophical methods in determining right from wrong.

A philosophical method is an argument that uses reason and logic as the means of persuasion. Rather than using the Bible as the basis, more is based on observing the world and determining what is right or wrong...using reasoning.

Our emphasis will be on a biblical basis for scripture has the final authority to define which actions, attitudes and personal character traits receive God’s approval and which one’s do not...

- C. *Theological ethics*—uses select doctrines as a basis rather than the whole of God’s word.

One might use only the Sermon on the Mount as a basis for all decisions in ethics.

- **Is it better and if so why do you think so, that one should use the entirety of God’s word?**

- D. *Old and New Testament ethics*—Using specifically one or the other to develop ethics.

IV. What we are going to be looking at.

Following the book, there will be seven very broad areas covering seven large ethical questions. Our goal is to be able to learn how to answer ANY question regarding life that we will have to consider or make. We want to move from our opinions and traditions to truly glorifying God in our decisions resulting in glorifying lives.

Some references:

Colossians 1:9-10

9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard about it, have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the [a]knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, [b]to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and [c]increasing in the [d]knowledge of God;

Psalm 119:97

97 How I love Your Law!

It is my meditation all the day.

Romans 12:1-2

12 Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, [a]acceptable to God, which is your [b]spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this [c]world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may [d]prove what the will of God is, that which is good and [e]acceptable and perfect.

The bar is high!

Matthew 5:48

48 Therefore you shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 22:37-40

37 And He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the great and [a]foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 Upon these two commandments [b]hang the whole Law and the Prophets.”

The areas covered in the book are big questions... all are relevant especially today... some of them may rub you wrong... some of them may stir up emotions within you... some of these may be very personal... some of them you might disagree with the conclusions either the book makes or even the majority of this class.

Let's face it... we've all made decisions in life that we were convinced was the right thing to do where later we have been biblically challenged on them

Even though we are attempting to base all of conclusions on scripture.... As we found out in ST, there is room for disagreement in some areas.

A. The system used in this study.

1. The Old Covenant Ten Commandments.

You might be thinking... Ten Commandments?... I thought we are under the New Covenant... the Old has passed away.... We will be specifically talking about that when we get to chapter 8... Our author, and myself.... Both agree we are not morally under the Ten Commandments today... But throughout the Bible, the 10C have been the basis for biblical morality.

Grudem uses the 10C as a structure to build on... this is not a new idea... many other CE books have used the same framework... notably John Calvin himself, Charles Hodges and more currently Paul Copan...

B. Categories.

1. Introduction.

We will be in the introduction for several weeks... don't let the word introduction make you think we won't be getting much "meat"... this introduction is huge and it covers some areas you won't want to miss....

We will getting into detail areas like:

- The ultimate basis for ethics: the moral character of God
- Where did the biblical standards for ethics actually come from?
- How do we know that the bible is the trustworthy source for ethics?
- Why is it vital to develop Christlike character?
- How will this study of ethics related to our personal relationship with God?
- What happens if we as Christians don't adhere to CE?
- How to know God's will.
- **A BIG ONE—Christians will NEVER have to choose the "lesser sin".**
- **Is it right to tell a lie in order to protect a human life?**

And many more... that's just the introduction in the weeks to come.... Then the specific topics:

2. Protecting God's Honor.

Isn't that contrasting to secular ethics!!! What a starting point in decision making! Have you ever stopped before making a decision and ask yourself "*Am I protecting God's honor?*" We might not have to go any further than that to change all of our decision making processes.

- a. Commandment 1—"You shall have no other gods before me."
- b. Commandment 2—"You shall not make for yourself a carved image".

Is it ok to make images of God for artistic purposes?

What about pictures of Jesus and the Holy Spirit?

- c. Commandment 3—"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."

What about oaths in God's name?.... what about jokes?

- d. Commandment 9—"You shall not bear false witness."

Is it EVER right to lie? Is there a difference between a spoken lie and actions that deceive people? What about plagiarism?..... what about "punctuality"... being late when you committed to be somewhere at a specific time OOUUCCH!

- e. Commandment 4—"Remember the Sabbath day."

Is it wrong to work on Sunday's?

3. Protecting human authority.

This is a big one for today... especially ever since two years ago with the Covid mandates by civil government....

a. Commandment 5—“Honor your father and mother.”

There’s some real tough one’s here... what if you have terrible parents... abusive parents... all the way to is spanking wrong... But also:

Equality and leadership in marriage... Complementarian thought.

What about civil government?... Is it ever right to disobey government? If so, when? What is the right relationship between the church and government?

What about other authorities in your life... your boss... the church?

4. Protecting human life.

a. Commandment 6: “You shall not murder”

My goodness this is a big one!... So many current issues around this one... the issue of capital punishment.. which has been in the news lately... In Idaho they are wrestling with legislation over the right of the manufacturers of lethal products to remain anonymous... can you imagine the ramifications if they have to reveal the source of the lethal product used in a lethal injection?

- Is it right for government to put a criminal to death?
- What about war, is war “just”?
- Is it right for a Christian to serve as a soldier?

You may have very strong opinions about all this.... But are they God glorifying?

- What about a Christian using physical force to defend themselves against a physical attack?
- Abortion... always?
- Euthanasia... ever?
- Suicide?... ever ok?... unforgiven sin?
- What about cosmetic surgery to look younger for the Christian?
- What about having a will and estate plan.... Is that really an ethical question?
- Racial discrimination—interracial marriage?
- Health.... Sleep...vaccinations... tattoos... circumcision?
- Alcohol and drugs...

Are you exhausted yet?..... but can you answer these BIBLICALLY?

5. Protecting marriage.

a. Commandment 7—“You shall not commit adultery.”

This doesn’t get any easier!...

- Should the Bible’s definition of marriage be applied to all other cultures and societies?

- Why is sex outside of marriage a problem?
- What about birth control?... artificial insemination?... In vitro?...surrogate motherhood?
- Reproductive technologies....
- What about pornography?... always wrong?... what about within marriage?
- Divorce and remarriage
- Homosexuality and transgenderism.... Well?

Churches all over the nation/world are changing their views on both!

6. Protecting property.

a. Commandment 8—“You shall not steal”

huge section!!!...

- Is owning property a good thing?... can one have too much?
- What about work in general?
- What about increasing prosperity?... can you have too much?
- Is monetary inequality morally wrong?
- What is the biblical solution for poverty?
- How much income should we give to the Lord?... Any?
- What about borrowing and lending money?... wrong to charge interest on a loan to a family member?
- How should the Christian view business operations?... are there morally wrong products?
- What about the earth?... what about green stewardship?

And finally...

7. Protecting purity of heart.

a. “You shall not covet.”

- What about contentment?

V. Our approach.

A. **The book**—*Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Reasoning* by Wayne Grudem

W. Grudem is best known for his earlier book on Systematic Theology

Wayne Grudem is Research Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies at Phoenix Seminary in Arizona. He is a graduate of Harvard (BA), Westminster Seminary-Philadelphia (MDiv, DD), and the University of Cambridge (PhD). He has served as the president of the Evangelical Theological Society (1999), as a member of the Translation Oversight Committee for the English Standard Version of the Bible, and was the General Editor for the ESV Study Bible (2008). He has written more than 20 books, including Systematic Theology, The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today, Business for the Glory of God, Politics According to the Bible, and (with

Barry Asmus) The Poverty of Nations: A Sustainable Solution. He also co-edited (with John Piper) Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

You do not have to have the book to take this class! Each week you will be given an outline similar to tonight's. The book is for those who want to go deeper and in more detail. We will be following the book pretty closely.

But I will be bringing in other sources to enhance the study and give some other views and for clarification.

B. Structure of class—lecture/discussion

I will present the material and I pray and hope for good discussion. Something a little different from ST, I will ask to refrain on questions and comments until I ask for them. This is not to be a tyrant but rather I think a more efficient way to get through the material.

I will deliver complete sections then open it up for questions and discussion.

C. Time and projected course length—Class will meet weekly unless otherwise announced. Each session will be approximately one hour long. I am anticipating the duration of the course will be over a 2 ½ to 3 year period. Should you miss a class or classes, you should be able to join right in on the next one and not be lost!